



Remarks to Returning Scholars of Trinidad and Tobago

BY THE MINISTER OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION
AND MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT FOR SAN FERNANDO WEST

The Honourable
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[ALL SALUTATIONS AND PROTOCOLS OBSERVED]

A warm welcome to you all!

I am pleased to see so many of you attending today's Symposium. You represent a very special group of people in our nation. You are the first fruits of a new kind of citizen – one who has been educated in a new world full of possibilities and opportunities, many of which are wrought by technological developments.

I don't want you to be confused for a moment by my statement. There is a long and well-beloved tradition of sending our best and brightest into the wider world to obtain new knowledge and learn critical skills in that world, lessons which should redound to the benefit of our country. You also represent the continuation of that tradition. But you are poised to be the avant-garde for the next evolutionary stage

in our country's development – the move to a knowledge-based economy, where the core resource is the HUMAN RESOURCE.

If our country is to advance to this next level, we need people like you who have been taught and will be trained in new disciplines and areas of expertise desperately needed by an evolving nation such as ours. Indeed, because of the unique place in which you find yourself in Trinidad and Tobago's history, and that of the wider international community, you will be called upon to exercise creativity and innovation in ways never before conceived, all the with the intention of helping us that quantum leap forward.

Such a quantum leap is imperative. Allow me to explain.

As you know, we face a few challenges here at home: balancing the governance equation; increasing the quality of output and productivity levels in general; and knowing what our priorities are, and ensuring that we have them in the right order, and attack them in the proper sequence. One of the priorities we have got right is putting our

people's development front and centre with our increasing investment in tertiary level education opportunities, professional training, and continuous improvement throughout one's career – even facilitating career switching at any stage of life.

We have looked at the projections, comparative data, indicators and trends in the educational development needs of countries like ours, and we have a clear sense of what must be done now and in the future to be fully prepared for the challenges of sustainable development in a post-hydrocarbon economy. We are aware that we have to be ready for that time, which inevitably will come, when we will have to do without the hydrocarbons – the non-renewable energy resources that are now the mainstays of our present economic wealth and financial prosperity.

You returning scholars are the ones who will guide us out of that hydrocarbon dependence, and into an era where new areas of economic activity, as well as businesses and enterprises, will comprise a bigger chunk of the economic pie. The energy sector has been the dominant

engine of growth for at least one hundred years. With you, we are laying the foundation for new engines to power us that would not require hydrocarbon power – but that of intelligence, creativity, innovation and knowledge.

Like DPS Maharaj, I feel a sense of optimism about the future of our country, notwithstanding the challenges I outlined earlier. I am heartened and inspired to see your enthusiasm for the tasks that lie ahead. But my optimism has been given a tremendous boost because within and among you all lies incredible potential to bring about national transformation. Each of you has the potential to make a truly significant difference to our country's prospects for survival, sustainability and future success. Each of you is pivotal to a safe and secure future for Trinidad and Tobago. Each of you has the power and potential to be “a tipping point”.

In his international bestseller, *THE TIPPING POINT*, Malcolm Gladwell explains that “the tipping point” is that magic moment when **an**

idea, trend, or social behavior crosses a threshold, tips, and spreads like wildfire. Just as one very ill person can start a health epidemic, so too can a small but precisely targeted push cause an international fashion trend, ensure the popularity of a new product, or bring about a drop in the national crime rate.

For those of you who decide to become public officers and be public service professionals, each of you, simply by choosing to embark on a lifetime commitment to enhancing your professional qualifications and profiles, and ensuring integrity and professionalism guide your work ethic, have begun a powerful trend that could transform social behavior and interactions in the Service overall, and thereby positively impact the country at large.

Even those of you who choose to enter the private sector must be mindful that similar expectations will be placed upon you. Yes, there continues to be a focus on the bottom line – after all, without profits, how could companies grow and reach their full potential, which can

have positive impacts on national and international economies? But in today's world, there is a growing emphasis on earning those profits ethically; working with communities in which these companies reside to ensure they grow along with the companies in question. Corporate responsibility to shareholders has been expanded to include a responsibility to society at large. In private corporations, the demands that are made of public servants towards national development, are being translated in innovative ways to ensure that the private sector also plays its part in a meaningful way in sustainable national development.

Here at the Ministry of Public Administration, we have embarked on our very own quiet revolution to ensure we live up to our responsibilities where sustainable national development is concerned. On many different occasions, I have taken the opportunity in several national and international fora to share a vision as to how the public service should be contributing in this area. We like to call it **G2D**, the **Journey from Gold To Diamond**. We eagerly anticipate the first

milestone in our journey of transformation – the year 2022, the Year of the Diamond Standard of Excellence – eight short years from now. At that time, we shall celebrate two Diamond Jubilees: the 60th Anniversary of Independence for Trinidad and Tobago; and the 60th Anniversary of the establishment of the Public Service. These are two significant milestones in and of themselves and they provide the perfect backdrop for the completion of the Gold to Diamond Journey here at MPA.

However, the fruits of this transformation already are being felt. We are aware that the productivity and efficiency of the public service are critical to our competitiveness as a nation, to the ease of doing business, as well as many of the other global indicators of progress, preparedness, performance and even potential.

Our standing in the global measurement for *Ease Of Doing Business* would have improved significantly, as well as our position in the *Index For Competitiveness*. This year we were ranked 47th out of 132 countries in the *Social Progress Index* or *SPI*. The SPI focuses on

measuring the well-being of a society by observing social and environmental outcomes directly, apart from the economic factors. In this index, the emphasis is put on the citizen's social and environmental well-being, and not only on the economic output of the society. SPI criteria include personal safety, ecosystem sustainability, health and wellness, shelter, sanitation, equity and inclusion, and personal freedom and choice. By 2022 or well before that, we intend to be much higher up in the ranking in all of the core SPI indicators, namely *Satisfying Basic Human Needs, Foundations of Wellbeing*, and *Access to Opportunity*.

Another area where we have begun to bear fruit as a result of the G2D initiative is in reducing the cost of government goods and services. I include in this what we call *Opportunity Costs*, or the time that it takes to acquire or access these goods and services, and the level of difficulty in getting what should be very simple and easy services to manage. Specifically, I refer to the length of time it takes to be served in our

public institutions or to receive responses. We are working as well to improve the time it takes for services to be delivered – from the time a citizen starts the process, to when it ends with a passport, driver's license, or even a prescription or hospital bed. This is what I call ***Turnaround Time***, that is, the time it takes from something arriving on your desk or computer, to when you add value to it and send it out. Our philosophy under G2D is that we will do better because we see the importance of doing it efficiently, because we value our citizens who are depending on us, and because we now use all the technologies available to us – including smart-phones and home computers – that are able to provide 24/7 service.

I must commend my public officers for the improvements we have seen in these areas, which are a direct result of our Ministry's work in conjunction with several other Ministries and Departments. We can boast that change is taking place already, but we cannot afford to rest on our laurels now. We still have a long way to go as a Public Service.

Some of you are returning officers who will be part of the avant-garde who will help us get there, together with those of you who soon will join the ranks of the Public Service.

Indeed, it is with you in mind that we have moved to change the very way the Public Service is being structured. We have collaborated with national and international HR specialists, and have come up with an organizational structure in which you all will be accommodated. In our vision, we move away from the traditional pyramid paradigm to an optimal structure which is diamond-shaped – it will have all the new professionals representing so many different skill sets at its core. That means professionals like you will have greater scope for innovation and invention and more room for improvisation; and for what is called “hot-desking”, flexi time, or a combination of working from home and in the office. It would require greater accountability, more responsibility and genuine excellence in service delivery.

Gone are the days when we would call on public officers to merely carry out instructions or follow commands. In the G2D paradigm, we have developed work structures for public officers that facilitate their taking a results-oriented approach to their tasks. Thus, they are allowed more independence and creativity in their methods of delivering to the public. In other words, you take full control of your responsibilities.

In addition, we have established the *Trinidad and Tobago Diamond Standard*: a cluster of standards which must be achieved and maintained by any organization desirous of certification in those areas. There are twenty-two different services participating in our pilot project, and many more wanting to be part of it. You learn more about it later, but suffice it to say: the Diamond Standard will be the yardstick that measures performance. It will be the benchmark you aim for, and the target you achieve, regardless of where you might be based or placed – whether in the Public Service or in the Private Sector. Tomorrow's government will

be managed by networking, forging partnerships with the Private Sector, NGOs and Civil Society in general.

You returning scholars here today are the new wave: technology-savvy, educated and ready to reach higher heights than those you succeed and will later replace. As DPS Maharaj said, we have put together a set of tools that will help you make the transition to the world of work and to thrive and mature in an environment in which you will be Change Agents.

Create your own Butterfly Effect... Be an agent for change. It is said that the flaps of a butterfly's wings in Brazil can set off a series of reverberations which, over time, have a tremendous effect on weather patterns thousands of miles away. Now imagine the impact of millions of butterflies. You can be a butterfly whose small actions can change the world... You have the power to make history! Just think... the reverberations from your small actions along with others around the

world will have tremendous positive effects on our planet, beyond which any of us can see...

I want to challenge you to help us in creating a society in which every citizen, regardless of race, religion or region, receives an equitable service characterized by excellence, professionalism and integrity. Our new Public Service philosophy speaks to that. By your decision to return home and share the knowledge and experience you have attained abroad with us, you have shown that you are willing to play your part in the processes that will help our country evolve as a democracy, and achieve the Mandate stated so succinctly in our National Anthem: "Here every creed and race find an equal place..."

I believe you are equal to the challenge, and are ready to take up the baton from my generation, and continue this long distance relay race that is sustainable national development.

I wish you well... I hope that we get the opportunity to meet one-on-one to discuss what you can do to help our country become a better place in which to live, work and belong.

May God continue to bless each of you in all your future endeavours.

I thank you.

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