

**OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT
TRINIDAD
REPUBLIC OF TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO**

Address to the Nation by His Excellency Timothy Hamel-Smith, Acting President of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, on the occasion of Republic Day 2012.

TRINIDAD & TOBAGO...A Nation at the crossroads

As we celebrate Republic Day it is a time to take stock. At this juncture we must ask ourselves where we are and what we have achieved after 50 years of Independence.

We have much to be thankful for. We have been blessed in so many ways. No matter what the naysayers claim, I believe, over the last 50 years, we have started on the journey to forging our unique national identity. We have a long way to go yet and there is much to be done. Let us focus on the future that we want to create for our beloved Trinidad and Tobago.

There is no one coming to the rescue of Trinidad and Tobago. That is the job which we must do. We must chart our own destiny into the future - that is the real significance of our becoming a Republic in which the supreme power lies with the People. I believe as Trinbagonians we have the potential - we have the inner resourcefulness - to achieve great things. The size of our Nation is no impediment to fulfilling our dream for Trinidad and Tobago. Smaller countries with less resources have left us behind and charted their own course towards fulfilling their dreams as a people.

It is our turn now. We must give up the notion that some fairy godmother is going to emerge to transform our land and fulfil our dreams. It is we the people, each of us individually and collectively working together, who will gain for us the prosperity which we desire. Yes it will involve hard work and sacrifice but I am convinced we can do it and even experience the joy and fulfilment which comes from a job well done.

So what must we do to achieve our dream for Trinidad and Tobago? We must look to the only thing over which we have control - the man in the mirror. How we as a people lead our lives will determine our ultimate destiny. We cannot and must not permit the small ring of criminals and misfits in our land, to determine who we are as a people. As a nation we must demonstrate that we are far greater and much too talented to let our history be defined by the criminal minority in our land.

It means that as a people we have to adopt values and attitudes which will serve to transform our nation. Yes this will demand of us hard work and discipline and even passionate devotion to our work. Regrettably, we as a Nation have adopted bad habits and

have allowed ourselves to become undisciplined and lawless. We will have to reverse that trend. We will have to undertake a National Commitment to integrate into the fabric our lives new values, virtues and attitudes, so all that we do is underpinned by these character building principles.

So what are the values, virtues and attitudes that we must develop as part of our national character to enable us to achieve our dreams for Trinidad and Tobago? I believe these must include Patriotism, Family Life, Peace, Thanksgiving, Discipline, Forgiveness, Productivity, Justice, Co-operation, Love of the Environment, Honesty and Kindness.

I believe that our starting point must be to develop a sense of patriotism and love of Country. And what better way to achieve that goal than through music? For me, our musical talent is what typifies the native genius of our people. Imagine if over the next 12 months of our Jubilee Year, commencing with our 50th Anniversary of Independence we offer rewards to our best composers, performers, artistes and students of all ages to encourage them to use their artistic talents to compose music to touch the hearts and minds of all our people with love for Country. Would that not be a rich tapestry on which to weave all of the other virtues we must pursue as a Nation? Imagine bringing such musical talent to a crescendo in a joyful celebration of unity, love and respect as we honour Republic Day next year.

And while we develop a sense of patriotism and love of Country over the coming year, let us focus exclusively on building one virtue each month so that we can emerge as a Nation which fulfils its dreams for Peace and Prosperity. Research tells us that we can integrate a new habit into our life if, over a period of at least 21 days, we repeat that habit on a daily basis so that it becomes a permanent part of our character. Over a period of 12 months it would therefore be possible to transform our national character by adopting one new habit or virtue each month. If we do this, we will dramatically change the path of our Nation towards fulfilling our dreams and aspirations for Peace and Prosperity for all.

So let us start with the month of October by focusing our energies on Family Life. As we look around we wonder how will we ever emerge from the darkness of crime, indiscipline and lawlessness which threatens to overrun our Country. What better way to start to reverse that trend than to focus on family life and parenting skills. Is not the breakdown of family life at the very heart of the tragedy of crime in our Country? Children are the most precious of God's gifts to us. It is vital that we place significant resources and energies into developing parenting skills. This is the starting point if we hope to reverse the drift towards gang membership by our young people. We must allow them to dream of a far greater life than gang membership. Each of us has a duty to create a loving and caring environment for all children and, in particular, those who do not have a supportive family life. In this coming month of October, let each of us adopt as our motto "I will cherish my Family and hug and kiss my children each day".

In the month of November let us all focus on the ways in which each of us can be Ambassadors of Peace by adopting the daily motto: "I will walk the Path of Peace at all times". This will require each of us to promote harmony and goodwill among all and to act with dignity. While, in some situations, Justice demands that I confront an unjust situation,

I will not allow myself to become judge, jury and executioner. In humility there is strength. There is so much anger in our society - No matter the provocation I will not contribute to its increase.

In December let's make Thanksgiving our focus. This virtue means that I understand that God is the source of our creativity and giftedness. Let us, therefore, develop a sense of thankfulness for all the blessings we receive. In developing the virtue of Thanksgiving, I undertake as my motto for this month: "I will nurture, love and care for others as I seek out their best interests in every situation".

As we emerge into the New Year, in January, let us place our focus on the virtue of Discipline. A starting point for making the greatest impact on discipline would be to change our behaviour on the roadways. This virtue will require that I do not drive on the shoulder or break traffic lights or drive recklessly. I will ensure that, in any car in which I drive, seatbelts are worn at all times. I will not drive if I have been drinking. I will practise defensive driving and obey all traffic regulations. I understand that my actions on the road have a significant impact on others and may either promote harmony and discipline or be the cause of disintegration and ill-will.

I am convinced that if we truly adopt this virtue of Discipline as a Nation as a part of our everyday life, as a Nation, we will have developed the foundation for realising our dreams for Trinidad and Tobago. I, therefore, undertake as my motto for each day during the month of January that "I will exercise Discipline in all of my actions and, in particular, I will drive carefully and be courteous to other users of the roadway".

In February let us focus our energies on the virtue of Forgiveness knowing I too am in need of Mercy. I understand that forgiveness is at the heart of love and that my behaviour has often fallen short of the ideal. How then can I be less than forgiving when others do me wrong? So many conflicts smoulder into resentment and the desire for revenge and yet, such resentment grows like a cancer in me and does more harm to me than my foe. Each day in February I will adopt as my motto, "I promise to seek the Path of Forgiveness and Reconciliation".

In March it is a time for us to focus on the virtue of Productivity, without which we can never aspire to greatness. I understand this will require me to perform every single task to the best of my ability. I will play my part in producing the highest quality products and performing extraordinary services. I understand that if I perform my work poorly all of us suffer, including my self-worth, particularly when this impacts on the general public. I recognise that getting it right sometimes means trying more than once and that giving up is not an option for strong people and strong nations. As my motto for March, I undertake that "I will strive for excellence by seeking to get it right the first time".

In April, as a Nation, let us focus on the virtue of Justice. I understand this to require me to avoid discriminatory practices and to guarantee equal treatment and opportunity for all in areas such as gender, age, race, religion and nationality. I therefore commit to support any endeavour that promotes equality of treatment, justice and fairness among fellow citizens.

In May, it is time for us to focus on the virtue of Co-operation. By fostering the full potential of all those within my circle of influence, I am helping to build my Nation. I will seek out opportunities to contribute my time, talent and treasure in the service of others and for the benefit of the common good. As my motto for each day of the month of May, “I will put people at the centre of all that I do”.

In June, it is time for us to focus on our Environment and to treat it with care and respect. I will ensure that my Family and friends dispose of waste in an environmentally friendly manner. In support of this, I will demand that business activities promote sustainable development and prevent environmental degradation and waste of resources. I, and my Family, will play a lead role in preserving and enhancing the physical beauty of our environment. My commitment for this month must be: “I will not litter”.

In July, let's make Honesty the virtue on which we focus our energies. I understand honesty to include transparency, truthfulness and honouring of my obligations. I understand this will require that in all my activities I will show a special concern for the less powerful and the disadvantaged. This can be done through charitable donations, participating in the activities of civic organisations and advocating the cause of justice and fair play. I understand that this commitment demands that the wage level of the lowest ranking workers be such as to permit them and their families to enjoy an acceptable quality of life. Each day in the month of July, I adopt as my motto, “I will be honest and fair, treating all persons with dignity and respect”.

In August let us focus our energies on the virtue of Kindness. I understand that the ripple effect of any act of kindness promotes harmony and touches the lives of others in ways that I cannot imagine. Such actions on my part will play a significant part in changing the habits of our citizens. Each day in the month of August, I undertake that “I will perform one random act of kindness each day”.

And so as we integrate these virtues each month into the fabric of our daily lives, together we will transform our Nation. We the People, without waiting for any government or fairy godmother, will have sown the seeds of greatness for Trinidad and Tobago. We would have set the foundation for the Peace and Prosperity of our Nation.

Today, as we approach the crossroads of our destiny after 50 years of Independence, I urge all citizens of goodwill to join in this Commitment to Nation Building by integrating these virtues which are all vital to the people of Trinidad and Tobago achieving their dreams.

I understand that this “Power of One”, which underlies this character building movement, will involve my having the courage to take such steps, within my circle of influence, as will bring about change and I will not shirk this responsibility. This can be done by participating in community and civic affairs and through educational and cultural contributions.

To embark on this program of Nation Building, it will require time, money and energy. The daily Commitments which I have outlined above will have to be reinforced each day through marketing efforts. Many of us will remember the campaign to “Chase Charlie away”. A similar marketing campaign will have to be developed to promote the virtues and character building which Trinbagonians must adopt if we are to transform our dreams of peace and prosperity into reality. The question is: “Will we take up the challenge so that, at the end of the day, we can each say with conviction "I am proud of my T&T, a wonderful place to live, work, and retire".

May Almighty God richly bless each one of you and, on this our Republic day, may God bless our Nation.

Thank you Ladies and Gentlemen.