



**Feature Address in Celebration of the Charitable works of the
Saint Joseph Sisters of Cluny and the
HaiT&T Foundation in HAITI**

**The Honourable Bridgid Mary Anniestte-George,
Speaker of the House**

**Hilton Trinidad Ballroom
Saturday October 2016**

Salutation

- **The Honourable Chief Justice of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, Mr. Justice Ivor Archie O.R.T.T, and Mrs. Denise Rodriguez Archie;**
- **The Honourable Brigadier General Ancil Antoine, Minister of Public Utilities and Mrs. Antoine;**
- **The Honourable Paula Gopee-Scoon, Minister of Trade and Industry;**
- **The Honourable Andre Des Vignes, Justice of the High Court and Mrs. Des Vignes;**
- **The Honourable Mr. Justice Rolston Nelson, Judge of the Caribbean Court of Justice and Mrs. Gloria née Burke;**
- **The Honourable Dr. Fuad Khan, Member of Parliament for Barataria/San Juan and Dr Carol Bhagan-Khan;**

- **Deputy Chief Secretary of Tobago House of Assembly, Tracy Davidson-Celestine and Mr. Wesley Celestine;**
- **The Chair of HaiT&T Foundation Dr. Paula Henry and Dr. Ronald Henry;**
- **Sisters of St Joseph of Cluny;**
- **Committee members of HaiT&T Foundation;**
- **Corporate Sponsors,**
- **Donors, Specially invited guests;**
- **Members of the Media,**
- **Other Ladies and Gentlemen;**

Good evening! Good evening!

**WE HAVE TO STAY THE COURSE WITH HAITI!!
is the clarion call of HAIT&T FOUNDATION.**

This call to stay the course may cause some of us a bit of discomfort as our once active commitment to the cause of Haiti may have waned, but, I suspect that the Hait&t Foundation is possessed with too much compassion and mercy to ever contemplate embarrassment as a strategy. Instead they prefer to nudge us into renewed action with a ready-made vehicle equipped with the mechanics to transform our stated but passive commitment.

To borrow from the Lyrics of one of our local philosophers the Sniper in his 1964 calypso:-

“It is by calypso our stories are told.”

So true.

In the Carnival season which immediately followed that horrific earthquake of 12th January 2010 Calypsonian Kizzy Ruiz captured the Calypso Queen title with her emotional rendition of Aide Haiti. Miss Ruiz recounted the devastation:

*Over 200,000 lost or dead
 The figures keep growing day by day
 Many roam where angels fear to tread
 Through the streets of hell Cite Soleil
 There is poverty so dire
 But that is the norm
 They huddle around any fire
 At nights
 just to keep warm
 S'il vous plaît Yele Haiti*

In those days and months immediately following the earthquake the topic of Haiti captured not only the Calypso Queen Crown but captured the attention of the International Community. Ruiz's urgent plea resonated throughout the world:

*Yele Haiti
 Rescue Haiti*

As the faults from deep within the Earth separated, buildings genuflected to the ground, infrastructure crumbled and communities were decimated but in the midst of the horrendous destruction there laid an even more heart wrenching reality- that of over 500,000 homeless dazed survivors facing palpable despair and amongst them many orphaned children.

**Ruiz in a haunting plea,
 Our neighbours are truly paining
 So open your treasure chest**

Indeed the World opened its treasure chest. Hait&t Foundation was and remains an example of Aide Haiti and it may be described dependent on the context as both the chest which holds the treasure and the treasure itself.

More than 4 ½ years have elapsed since that fateful day and the cause of Haiti has disappeared from headlines and breaking news and may have gone dull in the minds of many of us as we forge on with all of the drama comedy tragedy and strategy of this life stage.

Hait&t however over that time span has been at work staying the course with Haiti.

At the time of the Earthquake “La Madeleine” a boarding school established in 1893 by the Sisters of St. Joseph of Cluny in Port au Prince and which had been closed for four years prior was proudly expectant of receiving 120 students in September 2010 in its newly completed premises. Those hopes were dashed on 12th January 2010 as the new premises succumbed to the force of that 7.0 magnitude earthquake.

Fired by compassion and confident in the indomitable Spirit of human generosity Hait&t Foundation galvanised the cause of the Sisters of St Joseph of Cluny to relocate and rebuild not only a new school building but an orphanage.

Through coordinated efforts of marshaling local and international donors and other modest grass roots fundraising events such as walk-a-thons and the sale of art work produced by orphaned children, in 2013, 2.6 hectares of land at Morne à Cabris was purchased and in 2015 a new La Madeleine now Intranet Ste. Madeleine had been constructed commissioned and opened with an enrollment of 600 students from kindergarten to age 16 years and additionally there is an orphanage housing 100 girls providing them with shelter and education. Its compound is also equipped with modern facilities of a library and an IT room.

This is concrete realization of Ms. Ruiz's assurance as she sang in her wining bard:

*From the ashes she must rise
Though she fall she standing still
Block by block help her rebuild.*

On the face of the ticket for tonight's event you may have noticed the words *"First of its kind formal Fund raiser."*

While indeed the description is factual, I humbly suggest that the use of the word *first* in this context is of this cause is of much wider significance.

Historically Haiti has claimed the place of many firsts:

- **It is the site of the first European settlement in the**

Americas;

- **It is the first independent nation of not only the Caribbean but also of the wider Latin America/ Caribbean Region;**
- **It is the first and indeed the only nation in the western hemisphere to have defeated three European superpowers (Britain, France and Spain);**
- **It is the only nation in the world which was established as a result of a successful slave revolt.**

I would even venture to postulate that the real genesis of the emancipation movement in the British West Indies was conceived in Haiti and consequently modern free Caribbean societies owe a debt of gratitude to Haiti for having laid the foundation for the dismantling of one of history's most cruel institutional atrocities against mankind which was cultivated nurtured and flourished on our rich soils and which had stained our societies for over 2 centuries in blood sweat and tears.

And as we shift our focus to Haiti's partner in its achievement, there is yet another *first* associated with this event. A Noted local historian has recorded in one of his works that the first female secondary school in Port-

of-Spain was founded by the Sisters of St. Joseph of Cluny in 1836, that school being what we call today St. Joseph's Convent Port-of-Spain and of which both Dr. Paula Henry and I are graduates.

In his book *First in Trinidad* (1985), Michael Anthony documents the following about St. Joseph's Convent, Port-of-Spain:

“the Convent saw its beginning in Madame D’Heureux’s house in St. James Street, which today is part of Frederick Street ... the Convent stayed in Madame D’Heureux’s house until 1840, by which year it appeared that so many girls were attending it that the Sisters of St. Joseph de Cluny decided they would have to build a Convent ... in 1840 the Convent went to its present site on Pembroke Street – that part of which was then known as Kent Street”.

Significantly, Anthony ends his narrative by highlighting how the establishment of St. Joseph's Convent, Port-of-Spain, impacted the education landscape at the time. In his words,

“It could be said that when St. Joseph’s Convent was founded in March, 1836, it stood out like a beacon in Education, lighting up not only its own surroundings, but the future of higher learning in Trinidad” .

I think it is safe to state in this gathering that we in Trinidad and Tobago

are no strangers to the commitment dedication and contributions of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Cluny in the advancement of education. It is undisputed that their name is synonymous with excellence in education and in the positive molding of character.

As we are aware the Sisters of Cluny are celebrating the 180th anniversary of their presence in Trinidad and Tobago this year and they were recently awarded the highest award of the City of Port of Spain - *the Key to the City*. In the words of His Worship the Mayor of Port of Spain uttered just a few days ago, this award was conferred on the Sisters:

“in recognition of the sterling, meritorious and invaluable contribution in the sphere of education.”

The establishment of a functioning school and orphanage must in the minds of many represent the end of the road for the partnership of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Cluny and Haiti . So why is Haiti seeking to engage us still? In short why are we here tonight? Admittedly such are reasonable queries for an active mind.

But Ladies and Gentlemen, unapologetically I take the liberty to respond on your behalf by saying that

We are here tonight in this gala fundraiser because we believe in the future. We believe, as Edwidge Danticat expresses in the text entitled *The Birth of Caribbean Civilisation: A Century of Ideas about Culture and*

Identity, Nation and Society (2004), that we are “*part of an endless circle*” requiring us not only to be our brother’s keeper as in the specific case of contributing to and assisting with Paula’s initiative for Haiti, but also to be the guardians of a noble and enduring legacy as established by the Sisters of St. Joseph of Cluny in this country, in Haiti and the Caribbean region as a whole. Yes, Haiti may still be regarded as one of the poorest country in the world and St. Joseph’s Convent Port-of-Spain may still be regarded as one of the most esteemed Girls’ school in Trinidad and Tobago but their unique historical standing should never diminish our desire to propel them into the future for the existential benefit of the next generation. That is why the journey ain’t done!

The current focus of Haiti is to make “La Madeleine” sustainable via the following projects.

- **The Sustainable Water Project will result in self sufficiency in its supply of water. Underground water is to be tapped from wells which are to be drilled along with provision for the catching and storage of rain water. There shall also be facilities for the purification of water and it is intended that water will be sold to the surrounding community generating revenue to offset expenditure. Gray water shall be used for a multitude of purposes such as irrigation and flushing of**

toilers and the maintenance of the physical infrastructure of the compound.

- **Sustainable Electricity via Solar Energy.** This project will generate and supply electricity for all its internal power needs.

Kizzy Ruiz chastised us in song:
So people stop complaining
By comparison we are blessed

Ladies and Gentlemen, the reality is that water and electricity are not enjoyed by the majority of Haitians as these basic resources can only be afforded by a privileged few.

- Along with these initiatives are the agricultural and aquacultural projects which will cultivate vegetables tilapia chickens and eggs for both commercial and communal benefit.

“La Madeleine” which had its genesis almost 200 years ago with the primary objective of the advancement of education for children specifically those who were disadvantaged is as relevant today as it was then. Its significance is not limited to Haiti although Haiti maybe the target beneficiary. It is in alignment with the Sustainable Development Goals as reflected in Agenda

2030.

Just one year ago on September 25th 2015, countries of the world adopted a set of goals to end poverty, protect the planet, and ensure prosperity for all as part of a new sustainable development agenda. In the expressed views of the Secretary General of the United Nations for the 17 goals to be reached, everyone needs to do their part: governments, the private sector, civil society and others; the others being people like you and me as sustainable development calls for concerted efforts towards building an inclusive, sustainable and resilient future for people and planet.

The United Nations website on the SDGs explains and I quote:

For sustainable development to be achieved, it is crucial to harmonize three core elements: economic growth, social inclusion and environmental protection. These elements are interconnected and all are crucial for the well-being of individuals and societies.

Further the eradication

of poverty in all its forms and dimensions is an indispensable requirement for sustainable development. To this end, there must be promotion of sustainable, inclusive and equitable

economic growth, creating greater opportunities for all, reducing inequalities, raising basic standards of living, fostering equitable social development and inclusion, and promoting integrated and sustainable management of natural resources and ecosystems.

Ladies and Gentlemen our support of the efforts of Hait&t gives us all a readymade opportunity to play our part in the advancement of Agenda 2030. Let us grab this opportunity and as urged by Pope Francis in his tweet on September 25th. 2016

“Let us walk together taking care of each other and creation of our common home.”

We must act in solidarity and put end to Rudder’s remorseful confession *Haiti I’m sorry.*

Our support of the work and efforts of Hait&t Foundation affords the opportunity to retort:

“The day has come that we have turned our heads to restore your glory”

Stay the course with Hait&t Foundation!

Ladies and Gentlemen I thank you for your patient ear.

Do enjoy the remainder of the evening