

Speech by the Honourable Speaker of the House
Bridgid Mary Annisette-George at the Prize
Giving Ceremony for the Essay Competition
“Saving Energy Saving Our Planet” in
commemoration of Commonwealth Day 2016.



Hon. Bridgid Mary Annisette-George, MP, Speaker of the House
at the Prize Giving Ceremony for the
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Salutation

- The Vice President of the Senate, Mr. Nigel De Freitas;
- Deputy Speaker of the House, Mr. Esmond Forde, MP
- Senator Wade Mark, Leader of Opposition Business in the Senate,
- Members of the Executive Committee
- Other Members of Parliament
- Teachers;
- Our most important Students;
- Specially invited Guests;
- Members of the Media; and
- Staff of the Office of the Parliament.

Good Morning!

I do hope you had a peaceful and blessed Eid holiday yesterday.

The Essay Competition titled “Saving Energy, Saving the Planet” was launched on March 14 2016, the day that 53 nations of the world- all former colonies of Great Britain- commemorated Commonwealth Day.

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As you may recall the theme for this year’s celebration was “An Inclusive Commonwealth” which harkened members of the Commonwealth to be receptive of the views and ideas of others.

To quote Her Majesty the Queen in her Commonwealth Day speech:

“Each of us can also make a positive difference in the lives of others by being willing to contribute and offer support. This is an essential ingredient of belonging to the Commonwealth: the willingness to share, to exchange and to act for the common good. By including others, drawing on collective insights, knowledge and resources, and thinking and working together, we lay the foundations of a harmonious and progressive society.”

This year’s theme “An Inclusive Commonwealth” was not confined in its application to nation states but incorporated inclusiveness within communities and across sectors of communities and was particularly aimed at encouraging the views of Youth, whom the Commonwealth Secretary General in his speech described as **“Our Nations Builders.”**

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At the Parliament we decided to demonstrate our belief in inclusiveness and our acceptance of our own youth as nation builders by engaging our young students in the issues of international concern, that is to say, climate change, energy efficiency and energy conservation.

We are heartened by the response to the competition in that there were 18 entries from 12 schools. Your response confirmed our belief that our youth are interested, informed, thinking and possessed of views which they are willing to share.

You! Our participants, should be proud of yourselves, should see yourselves as somewhat like pioneers, as you are likely to come from the age group 13- 15 years and certainly from age groups under 18 years.

One may wonder why I should suggest that you consider yourselves pioneers. I think that such a suggestion is justified as I read that as recently as July 5th, that is 2 days ago, the Secretary General of the Commonwealth the Rt. Hon. Patricia

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Scotland, QC, launched a programme in Jamaica called 33Sixty which catered for youth to tackle some of the world's most pressing challenges by providing solutions. The qualifying age group which was considered youth for that programme was 18-30 years, so that the challenge presented to you by this Essay Competition is analogous to the challenge being presented to Youth many years your senior. You should be applauded!

AND I invite you to applaud each other!

At present, these are the facts and according to the National Aeronautics and Space Administration Agency (NASA)¹:

- 1) The current **global warming** trends are of particular significance because most of it **is very likely human-induced** and proceeding at a rate that is unprecedented in the past 1300 years;
- 2) **Global sea levels rose** about 17 centimetres (6.7 inches) in the last century. This rate **in the last decade, is nearly double that of the last century;**
- 3) All three major **global surface temperature** reconstructions show that Earth has warmed since the 1880. Most of this warming has occurred since the 1970s, with the **20 warmest years having occurred since 1981 and with all 10 of the warmest years occurring in the past 12 years;**

¹ National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) 2016. <http://climate.nasa.gov/evidence/>

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- 4) **Both the extent and thickness of Arctic sea ice has declined rapidly** over the last several decades and **Glaciers are retreating almost everywhere** around the world including in the Alps, Himalayas, Andes, Rockies, Alaska and Africa;
- 5) **The number of record high temperature events** in the United States and other territories like the Philippines and India **has increased dramatically**, while **the number of record low temperature events has been decreasing, since 1950;** and
- 6) Since the beginning of the Industrial Revolution, the acidity of surface ocean waters has increased by about 30 percent. This increase is the result of humans emitting more carbon dioxide into the atmosphere and hence more being absorbed into the oceans. **The amount of carbon dioxide absorbed by the upper layer of the oceans is increasing by about 2 billion tons per year.**

In December 2015, 195 World leaders and delegates came together and settled the Paris Agreement, with the major objective of restricting global warming to well below 2 degrees Celsius above preindustrial levels, but with a lower flooring goal of 1.5 degrees Celsius.

YES SUCH CHANGE SHALL MAKE A DIFFERENCE

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The 2016 Report of the European Geosciences Union, notes that without this decrease, it would take heat waves three times longer to decapitate, rain storms would be about a third more intense, the sea level would increase with several small island states suffering real threat of total submersion and the percentage of tropical coral reefs at risk of severe degradation would increase. Thus impacting food security, ecosystems, tourism, increasing refugee issues as rising sea levels will diminish nations, thus creating statelessness for many persons, and of course the harmony and world peace could potentially be jeopardised.

CAN WE ACHIEVE IT?

I Say Yes We Can! and **We Must** achieve the goals and we in our Parliament are of the belief that the sooner we engage our youth in confronting the problem the greater the assurance of success.

You may have read an article published in a newspaper this week which provided some good news on the ozone layer. One source reported in celebratory tone as follows:

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“Sometimes the world really can get together and avert a major ecological catastrophe before it is too late. A new study in Science finds evidence that the Earth’s protective ozone layer is finally healing- all thanks to global efforts in the 1980s to phase out CFCS (chlorofluorocarbons) and other destructive chemicals”

The source further hailed *“this as one of the great environmental success stories of all time.”* The first steps in averting the apocalyptic disaster of the increasing hole in the ozone layer began when world leaders agreed on the Montreal Protocol in 1987. In confronting the challenge of climate change and global warming, the first step was the negotiation and finalisation of the text of the Paris Agreement in December 2015, which was signed by 155 countries on Earth Day 2016, that is to say 22nd April 2016. While the signing was significant in itself, (as it surpassed the previous record of 119 signatories for an opening day signing of any international agreement), it is only when a country deposits its Action Plan with the Secretary General of the United Nations would the country have ratified the Agreement.

Trinidad and Tobago was one of the 155 countries to sign but it is yet to ratify. In reality and hopefully you realised that your contributions in effect placed you in the position of the country’s leaders or a regional leader to design aspects of what an

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action plan should consider. **Yes!** Asking you to assume such a role is in recognition of Youth becoming and being our “Nations Builders”

In the meantime until Trinidad and Tobago completes its action plan, each individual has a part to play and can contribute in his/her small measure to the attainment of the goal of ensuring that global warming is contained to below 2 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels, which really requires the entire world to get off fossil fuels.

Hence our theme:

“Saving Energy, Saving the Planet.”

As with any competition there must be declared a winner but by your collective and individual participation, today, there is one winner- that winner is Trinidad and Tobago, as we now have 18 ambassadors of energy conservation, energy efficiency and for the promotion of non-fossil sources of energy. In keeping with one of the common principles of the Commonwealth the common good has been promoted.

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I therefore congratulate you all for answering to one of the principal responsibilities of being a good citizen- the promotion of the common good.

In closing, permit me to remind us all of our national pledge and in particular the last stanza which states as follows:

*I will strive, in everything I do
To work together with my fellowmen
Of every creed and race
For the greater happiness of all
And the honour and glory
Of my country.*

I thank you for being such a patient audience.