

**GLOBAL SUMMIT OF WOMEN SPEAKERS IN  
PARLIAMENT**

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**GOVERNING TOLERANCE**

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In making my contribution to this session's topic I have decided to look at the Trinidad and Tobago experience.

In my own view there is no issue with whether tolerance can be governed, but there is an imperative that tolerance must be governed.

In highly diverse societies like Trinidad and Tobago- with differences along political ethnic religious ideological and economic lines- there is a great potential for intolerance with the result threats to social harmony and cohesion.

On the face of it, Trinidad and Tobago may be considered a tolerant society. In fact several years in an official visit to the twin island Republic Archbishop Desmond Tutu described us as "a rainbow people" referring to both our diversity and our harmony.

Our Founding Father the late Dr. Eric Eustace Williams it would appear in recognition of the potential for intolerance ensured

1. In both our Independence Constitution 1962 and our Republican Constitution 1976 that there were enshrined rights granted to every citizen for example

2. In our watchwords *Discipline Production and Tolerance* our citizens are reminded expressly of the importance of tolerance

3. In our national anthem is contained the phrase:

*here every creed and race find an equal place*

We have as a country also resorted to legislation to promote tolerance and have passed laws such as:

*Status of Children Act* to remove discrimination in the rights of persons born out of wedlock

*The Equal Opportunity Act:* an act to prohibit certain kinds of discrimination such as in the employment of persons and in the provision of services, prohibits any act that is reasonably likely to humiliate insult intimidate or offend, to promote equality of opportunity between persons of different status,

*The Domestic Violence Act:* to provide protection to victims of domestic violence which included physical sexual emotional psychological or financial violence committed by a person against a spouse child or any person of the household or a dependent

*The Freedom of Information Act:* to give members of the public a general right of access to official documents of public authorities

*The Industrial Relations Act:* regulates the balance of power between employers and employees

*Abolition of the Criminal Offence of Malicious and Defamatory Libel Act- Libel and Defamation (Amendment) Act* which abolished Libel and Defamation as criminal offences in support of the constitutional right of freedom of expression, freedom of the press and freedom of political expression

*The Environmental Management Act:* to ensure that development is in harmony with the environment.

*CyberCrime Act* which outlaws the use of a computer system to coerce intimidate or harass another person with intent to cause emotional distress, cyberbullying, using a computer system to disseminate any information statement or image which damages the reputation of another or subject the other to public ridicule contempt hatred or embarrassment

We have established *regulatory and quasi-judicial institutions* by acts of Parliament to promote tolerance that is to say by balancing competing/conflicting interests

- The Equal Opportunities Commission and The Equal Opportunities Tribunal
- The Environmental Commission and the Environmental Court
- The Industrial Court
- A dedicated Domestic Violence Court

#### OTHER MECHANISMS TO RESOLVE CONFLICT RESULTING FROM INTOLERANCE

- *The Mediation Act* which provides for mediation services and which has established a Mediation Board to provide certification of mediators for the incorporation of voluntary collaborative and self-determined conflict resolution.
- Parliament in its exercise of its oversight function has a Joint Select Committee-*The Committee on Human Rights, Equality and Diversity* comprising members of both the Upper and Lower Chambers. This Committee in the First Session of the 11<sup>th</sup> Parliament which was prorogued on 19<sup>th</sup> September 2016 investigated and has reported on the challenges faced by persons with Disabilities with specific focus on access to services and employment treatment of persons with Disabilities and has made recommendations to the Parliament for the improvements.

Our imperative to govern tolerance cannot be exclusive to strict sense of the passing of legislation and the establishment of Commissions and Tribunals. The megatrends of today's world require a definition of govern in a wider context

which includes providing education and access to information, which means for us as legislators that we must ensure that our budgets are designed to finance education and providing access to information for the promotion of tolerance.

Helen Keller opined

“The highest result of education is tolerance”

We must in our political discourse and representation promote tolerance and refrain from engendering divisiveness- as simple factor which may easily escape in our Parliaments under the guise of Parliamentary privilege is the use of language invectives and innuendos. We as Speakers must be ever watchful and jealously safeguard our chambers from such rhetoric.

In the discussions over the past two days we have referred repeatedly to the recent presidential campaign in the United States of America. There are so many lessons to be learnt from that but as pertains to this discussion we witnessed where the call as innocent as it may have appeared on the surface was an insidious reference to intolerance *“Make America Great Again”*

In our oversight function we must also govern tolerance by ensuring that systemic occurrences of intolerance be identified, examined and investigated leading to recommendations for the elimination.

I thank you