

**Address by His Excellency Professor George Maxwell Richards TC, CMTT, Ph. D, President of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, at a Dinner Hosted by the Integrity Commission, in celebration of its 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary, on Thursday 13<sup>th</sup> December, 2012 at the Hyatt Regency Hotel, at 7.00 p.m.**

Thank you, Master of Ceremonies, Mr. Paul Keens Douglas

The Honourable Mr. Justice Ivor Archie, Chief Justice and Mrs. Archie

Sir Charles Byron, President of the Caribbean Court of Justice and Mrs. Byron

Mr. Roger Gaspard, Director of Public Prosecutions

Mrs. Sharman Ottley, Auditor General and Mr. Ottley

Mr. Kenneth Gordon, Chairman and other Commissioners of the Integrity Commission and your spouses

Former Chairmen of the Integrity Commission and your spouses

Professor Ramesh Deosaran, Chairman of the Police Service Commission and Mrs. Deosaran

Representative of the Trinidad and Tobago Transparency Institute

Members of the Media

Other Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen:

Jean and I deeply appreciate your kind gesture in having us share this important milestone with you and particularly, in this festive season. You have asked me to do a feature address, but I will spare you the consequence of your rashness. That is because I believe that I should pay obeisance to the festive mood of this occasion, rather than grasp the opportunity for a long discourse for which, I suspect, you really have no appetite, this evening.

31<sup>st</sup> December will mark the twenty-fifth anniversary of the appointment of the first Commissioners. Twenty-five years, in our history, is a relatively long time, bearing in mind that our Nation is only fifty years old. Over the years, the Commission would have learned many lessons which can be put to good use, as our country continues to develop the features of nationhood. It has been

interesting for me to observe how issues have played out, over a number of years, in the life of the Commission, which has demonstrated a resilience that has enabled it to fulfil its duty to the people of this country, even as it has overcome challenges that caught the attention of the public, not in a gentle manner.

There is no gainsaying that those who offer themselves for public duty are held up to close scrutiny and, in the process, their private lives are almost, if not entirely, non-existent. You, the members of the Integrity Commission, are in this category and the public scrutiny should come as no surprise, given the nature of the entity on which you serve. You live the sacrifice of your private lives which comes with the public gaze.

This is one of the circumstances that contribute to the reluctance of capable persons to accept offers to serve on the several Independent Commissions established in accordance with our Constitution. This is all the more reason why the country should appreciate your service. Icertainly do and I am sure that there are many others who do, as well.

An Integrity Commission does not, of itself, create men and women of honour. It can only follow the rules set out in its mandate, in order to try to ensure that those who come under its purview comply with the requirements of the Act which guides its operations. Other relevant institutional arrangements must work in tandem with the Commission, while the latter retains its independence.

When we read that "Trinidad and Tobago is ranked 80 out of 176 countries in Transparency International's annual Corruption Perception Index (CPI) for 2012" and "on a scale of zero to 100 (with 100 being a corruption-free society) this country scored only 39", we need to sit up and take notice. We did not even score a passing grade, whereas five countries in our region, ranging from Barbados at 76 to Dominica at 58, out-performed us. We cannot afford to have arrogance cause us to set aside this finding, which sends the wrong signals and perceptions to the outside world as to the kind of people that we are.

I posit, therefore, that those who say that the Integrity Commission has outlived its usefulness and should be abandoned are missing the point. Indeed, there have been difficulties that needed to be addressed and some matters are yet unresolved. However, if the Integrity in Public Life Act does not now provide that which is necessary for the Commission to assist in making Trinidad and Tobago a corruption free society, then steps should be taken to review and strengthen the Act.

The Commission stands as the guardian of the social contract between persons in public life, in all our institutions and the various publics which they undertake

to serve. In this context, behaviour in the public sector has a strong influence on what transpires in the private sector. When one considers that corruption impoverishes a nation and retards orderly and sustainable social, economic and political growth, the public sector should be the standard bearer, protecting the interests of the people of Trinidad and Tobago. Dictatorships can proceed out of corrupt practices, while a country continues to carry a fig leaf of democracy.

I was particularly pleased to note that you had embarked on a "Do Right Champions" outreach, in our primary and secondary schools. This has far reaching possibilities for our country and deserves the support of the general public, but especially, parents, guardians and teachers. I know that I am speaking to the converted when I say that we must start with the children, to nurture in them ethical values which will determine who they become. They must be encouraged to be single-minded about doing what is right and not in a comparative way. They must be prepared to stand alone, even taking radical positions contrary to persons who are failing to be the mentors for good that they ought to be. They must be taught that there is ultimately a heavy price to pay for making convenient, self-serving decisions.

I believe that this outreach has the potential to shape a different mindset among our future generations, not only at leadership levels. While it is important to shape future leaders, we must be mindful of the obvious truth that we are not all leaders. But our society must comprise people of a certain calibre who will be in a position to constrain our leaders and call them to order. You are giving to our school children an excellent opportunity to set the right standards for integrity as a basic foundation for their lives and for their contribution to a successful state. They must have a clear understanding of integrity in all its facets.

In conclusion, I thank you all, Commissioners, past and present and support staff, for your dedication in service to our country and I envisage your growing from strength to strength as you keep focus.

May I also, in the spirit of the season and on behalf of my entire family, wish you all and your loved ones, a happy and holy Christmas and countless blessings in 2013 and the years ahead.

Thank you, Ladies and Gentlemen, for the courtesy of your attention.