
THE INTEGRITY COMMISSION OF TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO

25TH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION AND DINNER

HYATT REGENCY

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 13, 2012

Your Excellencies the President George Maxwell Richards and Dr. Jean Ramjohn Richards

The Honourable Chief Justice Ivor Archie and Mrs. Archie

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

Former President of the Caribbean Court of Justice, the Honourable Justice Michael de Labastide and Mrs. de Labastide

The Director of Public Prosecutions Mr. Roger Gaspard and Mrs. Gaspard

All other protocols observed.

We are very pleased to welcome you this evening and thank you for joining us on the occasion of our CELEBRATORY DINNER. December, is our Anniversary month and we mark the beginning of the 25th Anniversary Year of the Integrity Commission, even as we say a proud farewell to the 50th Anniversary of our Nation...now fading...but not into oblivion. Then, with a stretch, which I hope you will find pleasurable, we warmly welcome the Holy and inescapably festive season of Christmas.

If this suggests a multi-faceted event, then so is the role of our Commission, which in addition to its remit to be the Guardian of the Integrity in Public Life Act, must deepen the fight against corruption, a scourge which threatens the rule of Law, undermines good governance and fairness and poses a serious threat to the very foundations of our Society. The link between these roles is in-exTricable and the imperative of reinforcing their strengths cannot be over-emphasized, for Integrity cannot exist where there is corruption, and corrupt societies self-destruct.

Fortunately, Trinidad and Tobago had a head start of 25 years in preparing to deal with the difficulties which have arisen from an independently appointed Integrity Commission – coming a generation later – a body charged with operating above the hurly burly of partisan politics, committed to the pursuit of truth and an Integrity that must be un-compromising.

It was a little more than one year ago when I accepted the invitation of President Richards to become the Chairman of the Integrity Commission...against the advice of some who wish me well. For as I suspect you are aware the Commission has had its share of controversy. It's very Terms of Reference make clear that it is neither constituted to win popularity contests nor win friends and influence people. Its primary role is to promote Integrity and reduce corrupt behaviour. In discharging such responsibility conflict is unavoidable...with those about whom the complaint is laid, frequently with the complainant and always with the media, whose business it is to report conflict. So the Public spotlight is harsh and demanding and it could hardly be otherwise.

I recall, Mr. President, that it was some ten months ago in your address at the prize giving ceremony of the inaugural “Do Right Champions” at Queen’s Hall that you philosophically raised the question of right and wrong emphasizing that it has engaged the attention of humankind from the beginning of time. You also said on that occasion and I quote: *“...there is no gain-saying over the years that many guiding principles have been assailed as self-gratification overwhelms our society and right and wrong are seen more and more in relative terms....What is wrong for you, is right for me, even when the circumstances are the same thus leading to utter confusion as far as moral standards are concerned...”*.

Your impeccably diplomatic language was of course most admirable and correct. But today’s reality leaves little room for mature and philosophical reflection about right and wrong. Standards have continued to fall, confusion surrounds us, civility is threatened, good manners and courtesy are disappearing and taking the principled and high ground on any issue is hardly understood. Divisiveness coupled with racial undertones and a vigorous and sometimes even irreverent democracy now set a troubled agenda for our Society. And that I fear is the environment in which our Commission must do its job.

Our great good fortune is that there is an underlying sense of justice and fair play in this country which I am convinced can turn this situation around. But first, we must build the Institutional strength that is the ultimate answer to mature nationhood. This requires consistency and where Institutions like our own falter, and this is an inevitability of the human condition, it must un-hesitantly address the issues decisively and in principled terms. You may also have noticed that sometimes even when we have not faltered it is publicly suggested that we have. But now unlike what has obtained in the past, we shall, in the future, ensure that the facts are clearly understood.

Then the Press, which is another institution upon which national development must ultimately depend, has a particularly important role to play in that regard for its accuracy, professionalism and how it uses the freedom to which our Constitution is committed, will play a critical part in shaping our society. Fortunately, it observes its attendant obligations for the most part with responsibility. But that can never take it above the Law.

This fundamental freedom is intended to serve the public interest, not challenge it. Events, of still recent vintage suggest that it may also be helpful to emphasize that it is neither violation of, nor threat to, Press Freedom, if acting within the Law one seeks to uncover the facts surrounding any report or story for it is only when facts are known that truth can inform decision making. How they are unearthed, and how they are dealt with is, of course, another matter.

This has been a very demanding year for our Commission and I take this opportunity to publicly thank my fellow Commissioners for their invaluable contributions in spite of the difficulties which have resulted from the on-going Court matter now being addressed by the Commission - a handicap which might otherwise have proven a serious distraction.

It has also been a very productive year. We have had to operate with four rather than the Statutory five Commissioners since February. Thanks to the extraordinary commitment of our Commissioners we have never once failed to raise a quorum of three for these more than 40 meetings in ten months.

The Commissions' principal activities over these 25 years have been the processing of Declarations of people in Public life and the investigation of complaints against people in Public life. In the past twelve months the number of Declarations certified has risen from 1,602 to 1,923 and the number of Investigations completed was 41 in both years. To emphasize the on-going demands made on the Commission I point out that in 2003, ten years ago, we conducted investigations into five complaints. In the current year that number has risen from 5 to 73.

Now, a Strategic Plan has been developed to take the Commission forward and those initiatives, which have already been completed, are:

- Simplifying of the Declaration Forms and sharpening of focus on relevant information.
- Undertaking the examination of State Agencies. The recommendations of the first report on the Arima Regional Corporation are in the process of implementation. This on-going programme with selected State Enterprises is designed to improve Governance and Accountability.

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- Expansion of our Public Education programme by communicating more fully with the public when issues arise for Public support for the Commission can only be forthcoming when its work and role are better understood. This will in no way reduce the absolute confidentiality with which matters before the Commission are treated.
 - We have produced a Handbook entitled “**Frequently Asked Questions**” which provides answers to many of the questions likely to arise about the Integrity Commission and its operations. These will be widely distributed to schools and interested parties.
 - Making the “Do Right” Schools Programme a fixed part of the Commission’s annual calendar.

But most significantly was the launching of our Public Consultations to consider steps by which the Integrity in Public Life Act can be improved. Strengthening this investigative arm of the Integrity Commission has long been considered a necessary “next step”. Our consultations with stakeholders were therefore invaluable in preparing the proposals which have been drafted. They now await further public comment by the end

of the year. Some of the recommendations which will be presented in our final document to the Attorney General for submission to Parliament are:

- Widening the Commission's Investigative process to include search and seizure as well as arrest;
- Establishing a regime to facilitate the exchange of information between institutions involved in the fight against corruption;
- Spelling out enforcement powers of investigation, summoning of witnesses and subpoena by the Commission;
- Verification of information on Declarations and speeding up processing;
- Widening the net of those required to submit Declarations including the Chairman and Commissioners of the Integrity Commission.

So this has been a good year for the Commission and this would not have been possible without our other good fortune...our staff. I welcome this opportunity to publicly thank the Registrar and his

competent team for the excellent contributions they continue to make to the work of the Commission. They are hardworking, devoted to their jobs and professional. I warmly thank those who went before us for having put so special a team in place.

May I end with an appeal, ladies and gentlemen, for the task of the Integrity Commission is one which also poses a serious challenge to you and every other well-meaning citizen of this country. The bottom line is that we cannot legislate for integrity. It must be kept constantly before us as a way of life and we must make it into a culture that will guide how we live. Help us to promote the message to DO THE RIGHT THING. Let's make it a National Mission, one which will resonate throughout the length and breadth of our country. There is always a choice about the decisions we take. Join us in the call to this beautiful country of ours with all its transient controversy, its varied and talented people and its excitement and charm – let's DO THE RIGHT THING.

We thank you for joining us this evening and a Happy and Holy Christmas to you all!

Kenneth Gordon
Chairman

December 13, 2012