

INTERNATIONAL ANTI-CORRUPTION DAY

Message to the Nation

December 9, 2018

On October 31, 2003 the General Assembly of the United Nations adopted the United Nations Convention against Corruption (UNCAC). On that very day the General Assembly designated December 9, as International Anti-Corruption Day.

Trinidad and Tobago signed UNCAC on December 11, 2003 and ratified it on May 31, 2006.

One of the aims of the decision to designate December 9, as International Anti-Corruption Day was to raise awareness throughout the international community of the deleterious nature of corruption and the urgent need for its elimination.

Today, Trinidad and Tobago joins the international community in the observance of International Anti-Corruption Day.

Corruption is ecumenical in its devastation; it causes grief to all countries, developed and undeveloped. No country is inoculated against this malignancy and its scale can swing from petty on one end of the spectrum to grand, on the other. Further, not unlike the mythological Hydra, its aspects are multifarious and its eradication, difficult. Corruption can materialize in several forms: bribery, nepotism, abuse of power or trust for dishonest gain, a challenge to the rule of law- the list is definitely not exhaustive.

The World Bank Institute tells us that throughout the world, every year one trillion dollars are paid in bribes, a sum equivalent to more than 5% of the global GDP; although that statement might appear to defy credence, it is abidingly true. Corruption is a formidable foe and should not be underestimated. The people of Trinidad and Tobago must therefore be sensitized to the dangers to which our nation is exposed by the galloping corruption that is besetting it. They must be made aware of the grievous harm that the economy of the country is being occasioned by corruption and the infallible manner in which corruption is pulverizing the underpinnings of our moral integrity.

I exhort the adult population of Trinidad and Tobago to consider our young people with their impressionable minds and set the proper example by avoiding corruption. There is nothing so easy to follow as a bad example.

I exhort Trinidadians and Tobagonians to cultivate a deeper sense of civic consciousness and avoid committing petty infractions of the law; this practice could open up the possibility of the commission of greater infractions lower down the road and could engender in the process a disposition to rebellion and laissez faire – fertile grounds for corruption.

I exhort persons in public life and persons exercising public functions to be guided by the motto of the Integrity Commission ‘Do the Right Thing Always’ and file their annual declarations of income, assets and liabilities and statements of registrable interests.

In the month of September the Integrity Commission applied to the High Court under section 11 (7) of the Integrity in Public Life Act (IPLA) for an order directing twenty nine (29) persons who had failed to file their annual declarations to do so under pain of criminal prosecution. The orders were all made and the twenty-nine persons complied. I took no pleasure in doing this, but if legal action is the only way in which compliance with the IPLA could be assured, then I will take legal action.

Corruption has insinuated itself with such trenchancy in our society, and the process of its eradication so glacial, that society stands in great peril of consigning it to the quiet backwaters of life, becoming calloused to it and accepting it with unresisting acquiescence, as an inevitable incident of our nation’s evolution. Such a mind-set could predicate the existence of a pernicious grip hold of the national conscience by this scourge. This cannot be our legacy to posterity.

Today, International Anti-Corruption Day, I issue a call for the closing of ranks and for citizens, NGO’s, members of the religious faiths, the media, to partner with the Integrity Commission - we are collective victims of this malaise - and decide on the methodology we could employ to attack this problem and the fronts on which this attack could be mounted. This would buttress efforts that are being made at the present time.

Corruption will suffer the same fate as apartheid - it will be conquered; and we must exhale the belief that this cannot be achieved. It must be confronted, the attack must be uncompromisingly direct, the struggle relentless. Silence, resignation and inaction cannot be options; the children and young people of the nation, future generation, deserve better.