

# Independence Day Message 1962

By Prime Minister

**Dr. the Hon. Eric Williams**

31 August 1962

Fellow Citizens,

It is a great honour to me to address this morning the citizens of the Independent Nation of Trinidad and Tobago as their first Prime Minister. Your National Flag has been hoisted to the strains of your National Anthem, against the background of your National Coat of Arms, and amidst the beauty of your National Flower.

Your Parliament has been inaugurated by Her Royal Highness the Princess Royal, the representative of Her Majesty the Queen. You have your own Governor General and your own Chief Justice, both appointed on the advice of your own Prime Minister. You have your own National Guard, however small.

You are now a member of the Commonwealth Family in your own right, equal in status to any other of its members. You hope soon to be a member of the World Family of Nations, playing your part, however insignificant, in world affairs. You are on your own in a big world, in which you are one of many nations, some small, some medium size, some large. You are nobody's boss and nobody is your boss.

What use will you make of your independence? What will you transmit to your children five years from today? Other countries ceased to exist in that period. Some, in much less time, have become totally disorganised, a prey to anarchy and civil war.

The first responsibility that devolves upon you is the protection and promotion of your democracy. Democracy means more, much more, than the right to vote and one vote for every man and every woman of the prescribed age. Democracy means recognition of the rights of others.

Democracy means the equality of all in the eyes of the law. Democracy means opportunity for all in education, in the public service, and in private employment—I repeat, and in private employment. Democracy means the protection of the weak against the strong. Democracy means the obligation of the minority to recognise the right of the majority. Democracy means

responsibility of the Government to its citizens, the protection of the citizens from the exercise of arbitrary power and the violation of human freedoms and individual rights. Democracy means freedom of worship for all and the subordination of the rights of any one race to the overriding right of the human race. Democracy means freedom of expression and assembly and organization.

All that is Democracy. All that is our Democracy, to which I call upon all citizens to dedicate themselves on this our Independence Day. This is what I meant when I gave the Nation as its slogan for all time: Discipline, Production, Tolerance. Indiscipline, whether individual or sectional, is a threat to democracy. Slacking on the job jeopardizes the national income, inflates costs, and merely sets a bad example. The medieval churchmen had a saying that to work is to pray. It is also to strengthen our democracy by improving our economic foundations.

That democracy is but a hollow mockery and a gigantic fraud which is based on a ruling group's domination [of] slaves or helots or fellaheen or second class citizens or showing intolerance to others because of considerations of race, colour, creed, national origin, previous conditions of servitude or other irrationality.

Our National Flag belongs to all our citizens. Our National Coat of Arms, with our National Birds inscribed therein, is the sacred trust of our citizens. So it is today, please, I urge you, let it always be so. Let us always be able to say, with the Psalmist, behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity.

United at home in the common effort to build a democratic Nation and ostracize outmoded privileges, let us present to the outside world the united front of a Nation thinking for itself, knowing its own mind and speaking its own point of view.

Let us take our stand in the international family on the basic principles of international rectitude. When our time comes to vote, let it always be a vote for freedom and against slavery, for self-determination and against external control, for integration and against division.

Democracy at home and abroad, the symbol of it is our Parliament. Remember fellow citizens, we now have a Parliament, we no longer have the colonial assemblies which did not have the full rights of a Parliament of a sovereign country. The very name "Parliament" testifies to our new Independent status. By the same token, however, we at once become the object of comparison with other Parliamentary countries, inside and outside the Commonwealth.

This is a consideration which involves not only the Members of Parliament but also the individual citizen. The Members of Parliament have the traditional Parliamentary privileges guaranteed in the Constitution. The Speaker, the symbol of the power of Parliament, has his status guaranteed in the Order of Precedence. We shall soon have a Privileges Bill protecting

and prescribing the powers of Parliament itself. Measures are being taken to establish the responsibility of Parliament in the field of external relations.

The Constitution recognises the position of the Leader of the Opposition and the normal parliamentary convention of consultation between Government and Opposition are being steadily developed and expanded. The Constitution itself, Independence itself, represent the agreement of the two political parties on the fundamental question of national unity. The ordinary citizen must recognise the role of the Parliament in our democracy and must learn to differentiate between a Member of Parliament, whom he may like or dislike, and the respect that must be accorded to that same Member of Parliament ex-officio.

I call on all citizens from now on to accord the highest respect our Parliamentary system and institutions and to our Parliament itself.

Democracy, finally, rests on a higher power than Parliament. It rests on an informed and cultivated and alert public opinion. The Members of Parliament are only representatives of the citizens. They cannot represent apathy and indifference. They can play the part allotted to them only if they represent intelligence and public spiritness.

Nothing has so demonstrated in the past six years the capacity of the People of Trinidad and Tobago than their remarkable interest in the public affairs. The development and expansion of that interest is the joint responsibility of the Government, the Parliament, the political parties and relevant civic organisations.

Those, fellow citizens, are the thoughts which, on my first day as Prime Minister, I wish to express to you on Independence Day. Your success in organising the Independence which you achieved will exercise a powerful influence on your neighbours with all of whom we are likely to have close associations in the next few years, the smallest and nearest, as part of our Independent Unitary State, the larger and more distant as part of the wider and integrated Caribbean community. Problems of difficulties there will be. These are always a challenge to a superior intelligence and to strength of character.

Whatever the challenge that faces you, from whatever quarter, place always first that national interest and the national cause. The strength of the Nation depends on the strength of its citizens. Our National Anthem invokes God's blessings on our Nation, in response to those thousands of citizens of all faiths who demanded God's protection in our Constitution. Let us then as a Nation so conduct ourselves as to be able always to say in those noblest and most inspiring words of St. Paul, 'By the Grace of God we as people are what we are, and His Grace in us hath not been void.'