

**MESSAGE FROM HER EXCELLENCY PAULA-MAE WEEKES
PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO
ON THE OCCASION OF INDEPENDENCE DAY 2018**

August 31, 2018

Fellow citizens, on 31st August 1962, Trinidad and Tobago shook off the reins of colonialism and dared to go it alone. To the tolling of bells, the Union Jack was lowered for the final time and the Red, White and Black hoisted to signal the birth of our nation.

In his Independence address, Dr Eric Williams, our nation's first Prime Minister, charged the citizens of this land always to place first the national interest and cause. He further proclaimed amidst great country-wide expectations You are on your own in a big world. You are nobody's boss, and nobody is your boss. No longer were we attached by the umbilical cord to the metropole; we had secured the right to determine our own future – an exhilarating, if somewhat daunting prospect.

Since then, Trinidad and Tobago has enjoyed a relatively stable democracy, significant economic transformation and general improvement in the quality of life of its citizens. Recently though, challenging circumstances have arisen, brought on by rising levels of criminal activity and economic uncertainty. In that context and considering the continued role of the Privy Council in determining our affairs, our vulnerability as a Small Island Developing State to the vagaries of the world economy and the effects of climate change on our tiny island, among other concerns, the question need be posed:

How independent are we?

It is a significant sign of maturity when a nation embarks on this most solemn of endeavours, charting the course to self-determination and taking full responsibility for the future of its citizenry but political separation from the United Kingdom was only the first step of our long journey of self-discovery.

Independence has never been a static notion; it implies the constant working out of identity and purpose, sovereignty over one's decisions and taking responsibility for one's actions. When those decisions bear good fruit, we are entitled to pat ourselves on the back, but when they go wrong, as they often do, we must not lay blame at the feet of others. Our attitudes and the lens through which we view our roles as citizens must be firmly aligned to the needs of our country, which at this time in our history, appear more demanding than ever.

Every individual has an important role to play in nation-building as institutions merely facilitate the democratic process. The active participation of every citizen in the social, economic and political life of our nation is required to ensure that our children inherit a stable and prosperous country.

Our journey to maturity can only be accomplished if we are united, not only by a common goal, but with agreement on how this can be achieved. Let us aspire together and achieve together as we press forward into the future, working to ensure that our carefully selected watchwords: Discipline, Production and Tolerance are incorporated into our daily lives.

We cannot afford to sit and wait for development to happen – we must shoulder the daily responsibility of being disciplined, caring and industrious in order to build Trinidad and Tobago into the great nation we know it can be. The privilege of having control over our affairs must be matched by determination to fulfil the vision of the many Trinbagonians who longed for and finally achieved our independence.

I am confident in the strength of our diversity, the oneness of our common ideals and the sufficiency and resolve of our people, to harness their considerable talents in the service of making Trinidad and Tobago a nation in which we can all take pride.

I wish the national community a safe, happy and enjoyable Independence Day.