THE

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

OFFICIAL REPORT

IN THE FIRST SESSION OF THE ELEVENTH PARLIAMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO WHICH OPENED ON SEPTEMBER 23, 2015

SESSION 2015—2016 **VOLUME 1**

SENATE

Wednesday, September 23, 2015

1.30 p.m.

The Senate having assembled, and it being the first meeting of the First Session of the Eleventh Parliament of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, the Clerk of the Senate read the following Proclamation:

REPUBLIC OF TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO

No. 13 of 2015.
[L.S] By His Excellency ANTHONY THOMAS AQUINAS CARMONA, O.R.T.T., S.C., President and Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago

ANTHONY T. A. CARMONA
President

A PROCLAMATION

WHEREAS it is provided by subsection (1) of section 67 of the Constitution of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, that each session of Parliament shall be held at such place within Trinidad and Tobago and shall commence at such time as the President may by Proclamation appoint:

Now, therefore, I, ANTHONY THOMAS AQUINAS CARMONA, President as aforesaid, do hereby appoint Tower D, Port-of-Spain International Waterfront Centre, 1A Wrightson Road, Port-of-Spain, Trinidad, as the place at which the First Session of the Eleventh Parliament of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago shall be held at 1.30 p.m. on Wednesday the 23rd day of September, 2015, as the time at which the said Session shall commence.

Given under my Hand and the Seal of the President of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, at the Office of the President, St. Ann's, this 14th day of September, 2015.

ELECTION OF PRESIDENT

The Clerk: Hon. Senators, in accordance with Standing Order No. 4(1) of the Senate, I will now invite nominations for President of the Senate.

The Minister of Rural Development and Local Government (Sen. The Hon. Franklin Khan): Madam Clerk, I move that Ms. Christine Kangaloo do take the Chair of the Senate as President.

Seconded by Sen. The Hon. Paula Gopee-Scoon.

There being no other nominations, the Clerk of the Senate declared Ms. Christine Kangaloo duly elected President of the Senate.

The Clerk: Members, we will just have a short lull in the proceedings while Madam President gets properly robed to return.

1.37 p.m.: *Sitting suspended.*

1.42 p.m.: *Sitting resumed.*

OATH OF ALLEGIANCE

Sen. Christine Kangaloo took and subscribed the Oath of Allegiance as required by law.

[MADAM PRESIDENT *in the Chair*]

ELECTION OF VICE-PRESIDENT

Madam President: Hon. Senators, in accordance with Standing Order No. 5 of the Senate, I now invite proposals for the Office of Vice-President of the Senate of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago.

The Minister of Rural Development and Local Government (Sen. The Hon. Franklin Khan): Madam President, I nominate Mr. Nigel De Freitas as Vice-President of the Senate of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago.

Seconded by Sen. Wade Mark.

There being no other nominations, the Clerk of the Senate declared Mr. Nigel De Freitas duly elected Vice-President of the Senate.

OATH OF ALLEGIANCE

Sen. Nigel De Freitas took and subscribed the Oath of Allegiance as required by law.

Madam President: Senators are now invited to take the Oath.

OATH/AFFIRMATION OF ALLEGIANCE

The following Senators took and subscribed the Oath of Allegiance as required by law:

Sen. Franklin Khan

Sen. Paula Gopee-Scoon

Sen. Jennifer Baptiste-Primus

Sen. Clarence Rambharat

Sen. Dennis Moses

Sen. Avinash Singh

Sen. Hafeez Ali

Sen. Sarah Budhu

Sen. Walede Michael Coppin

Sen. Foster Cummings

Sen. Allyson Baksh

Sen. Daniel Dookie

Sen. Nadine Stewart

Sen. Wade Stephen Mark

Sen. Vasant Bharath

Sen. Wayne Daniel Sturge

Sen. Khadija Ameen

Sen. Dr. Dhanayshar Mahabir

Sen. Hugh Russell Ian Roach

Sen. David Small

Sen. Taurel Shrikissoon

Sen. Melissa Ramkissoon

Sen. Sophia Karen Chote SC

Sen. Jennifer Raffoul

Sen. Paul Gerard Richards

Senators Dr. Lester Henry, Daniel P. Solomon, Rodger Dominic Samuel and Stephen Creese took and subscribed the Affirmation of Allegiance as required by law.

PRAYERS

Madam President: Hon. Senators, His Excellency the President of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago desires to address all Members of Parliament. This sitting is now suspended.

2.06 p.m.: *Sitting suspended.*

PRESIDENT'S ADDRESS

His Excellency the President of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, Mr. Anthony Thomas Aquinas Carmona, O.R.T.T, S.C., addressed both Houses of Parliament as follows:

Members of the Parliament, my fellow citizens of Trinidad and Tobago.

After 29 years of republicanism, how do we, as a people, view our democracy? Democracy is not only a government of, for and by the people but a government for all of the people all of the time. This is what must be etched in your minds as Members of this hallowed Chamber as you begin the work of the people. This, I suggest, must be your mantra as servants of the people.

As we formally convene the Eleventh Parliament of our beloved Republic, I entreat you all who have taken the Oath of Office as parliamentarians, not to squander the opportunity bestowed on you by the people through the exercise of their votes. I implore you to represent them not only as legislators, but also as representatives who would not adopt the posture of the absentee landlords from our colonial past and only return to your constituents when you once more seek their suffrage at another election. You must not adopt the stance of being an absentee Member of Parliament in your constituency. You must remember always that you have assumed your privileged positions as trustees on behalf of the people, not as proprietors of estates in fee simple.

Successive Parliaments, in their stewardship, have passed laws for the order, good governance and the economic development of this land, and despite its imperfections and challenges, we are proud to call this Trinidad and Tobago our home. Such affirmative pride is echoed by every citizen everywhere, from the man in Sangre Grande to the woman in Speyside and the young people in Brasso Seco.

Today Members and citizens, I am going to talk to your hearts, a much needed conversation with the soul of the nation. This is the essence of my intended dialogue. In each of our lives, we have different philosophies we live by but I wish to promote in real terms the philosophy of genuine service, the benefits of national pride, service to people, community, the nation and the world. What therefore is your philosophy as a parliamentarian? And this you must determine now at the start of your stewardship.

What new body of laws therefore would you, the Members of the Eleventh Parliament, bequeath to our future citizens? Would you use your lawmaking powers to enact legislation for the sustainable development of Trinidad and Tobago solely based on myopic or parochial considerations? Or would you ensure that you introduce Bills which ultimately become Acts of Parliament by seeking to situate the development of Trinidad and Tobago in the context of global norms and mores, which can be implemented directly or customized to suit our national situation?

Last May, when I had the honour and privilege to address the African Union Summit in Johannesburg, South Africa, I listened attentively to Heads of State and Government of that great continent, embracing the vision for Africa's development based on the African Union's Agenda 2063. I was inspired by the focus that was being placed on the development of the continent for the benefit of the peoples of that continent. The vision for the development of Africa calls for harnessing of its natural and human resources, but is also mindful of the synergies which exist in the world at large.

We in Trinidad and Tobago must also have a vision for our sustainable development in a world which continues to change ever so rapidly before our very eyes at every opportunity. Are we going to ensure that the laws passed by this Parliament take into consideration the 17 sustainable development goals, the SDGs, agreed to by the United Nations for a new development agenda for the next 15 years? These goals will replace the millennium development goals which expire at the end of this year.

It is my sincere hope that post 2015 development agenda which will be adopted by world leaders at a summit which begins at the United Nations Headquarters in New York this very Friday, September 25th, would influence our

own development agenda for the next 15 years. We may very well need to revise and update our manifestos. These SDGs emphasize the importance of the social, economic and environmental aspects of development to the national development of States.

I have examined the SDGs and find them to be a useful and instructive benchmark on which we could centre our developmental agenda. They seek to cater for the total development of the peoples of the globe and are as follows:

1) *End poverty in all its forms everywhere;*
2) *End hunger, achieve food security and improve nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture;*
3) *Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages;*
4) *Ensure inclusive and equitable quality of education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all;*
5) *Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls;*
6) *Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all;*
7) *Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all;*
8) *Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment, and decent work for all;*
9) *Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization, and foster innovation;*
10) *Reduce inequality within and among countries;*
11) *Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable;*
12) *Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns;*
13) *Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts;*
14) *Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development;*
15) *Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification and halt and reverse land degradation and biodiversity loss;*

16) *Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels; and finally, number 17 and I emphasize*

17) *Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalise the global partnership for sustainable development.*

As your President, I humbly suggest that all parliamentarians familiarize themselves with all 17 of these goals and the numerous targets and indicators which have been agreed to by all United Nations Member States, including Trinidad and Tobago.

At the same time, I further humbly request that you pay greater attention to the passage of implementing legislation to give domestic legal effect to legally binding international obligations which flow from treaties and other international agreements to which Trinidad and Tobago is a State Party. As a country, ratifying or acceding to treaties is not enough. This Eleventh Parliament of the people of Trinidad and Tobago should not allow five years to lapse without the enactment of legislation to give effect domestically to, for example, the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities which the country ratified on June 25th of this year. Any failure to domesticate the provisions of this landmark convention would impair in a fundamental way the rights of some of our citizens who are differently-abled but who continue to make an invaluable contribution to national development.

Ladies and gentlemen, every successful businessperson has plans for the long term. And in our modern global economy of massive international trade, capital flows and rapid technological change, long-term vision is critical, crucial and prudent to adept sustainability. This is true for Government as it is for business. Too often, our indigenous entrepreneurs are let down by the short-term views of Government. I remain positive that those trends will be reversed so that they match the long-term aspirations of our citizens. Citizens expect, nay demand, that those in leadership demonstrate a clear and unwavering commitment to the long-term sustainable development of our nation.

This Republic does not exist in a vacuum. We are influenced by factors and forces over which we sometimes have no control. As the economists and business people seated among us here will confirm, if you fail to participate in shaping the global economic system, you will be shaped by it, and it is up to us to be proactive in managing this exercise.

We must get past the blame game and set the required course of action to transform our economy as necessitated by world economics. What we do have control over is our reaction and ability to adapt and transform accordingly.

This is the framework within which the Eleventh Parliament will be operating and their work, your work, will be instrumental and determinative in developing strategies to deal with these global and local challenges. But it is not all doom and gloom. We are a nation of innovation, strength and resilience but sometimes in governance, we can be myopic. The benefits of collaboration and cooperation among political parties with a view to solving national issues are often lost upon us.

Circumstances sometimes dictate that we break from the norm as demonstrated by the Commonwealth of Dominica. Recovering from the effects of tropical storm Erika, both the Honourable Prime Minister Roosevelt Skerrit and the Honourable Leader of the Opposition, Lennox Linton have undertaken to combine their efforts via the National Reconstruction Advisory Committee which consists of all parliamentarians dictated to overseeing the rehabilitation efforts to ensure equity and transparency in the Commonwealth of Dominica. I dare say we can learn much from the collaborative governance displayed by this very small, inspiring country.

I suggest, in this regard, that the parliamentarians constructively engage institutions, officeholders, individuals, offering and obtaining advice rather than engaging in public posturing, brinksmanship and footworks when dealing with national issues.

Constructive engagement is also about 21st Century international benchmark practices of political civility and comity where for example, congratulating two leaders, one conceding and one victorious of the respective political parties for the maturity displayed in the easy and fluid transfer of political power, cannot in law or fact amount to appointing either.

Constitutional reform must therefore be transformational; 1962, ladies and gentlemen, is not 2015. Constitutional reform is therefore mandatory. There are issues that have become quite prominent in our society. Procurement legislation and campaign finance legislation must be prioritised in this Eleventh Parliament. As a side note, it is my intention to soon advertise locally, regionally and internationally, for a Procurement Regulator under the present procurement legislation.

We must remember, however, that as we move forward in this multi-ethnic and multicultural society we call home, we must pledge our unstinting allegiance to this nation of ours. We have to appreciate the many advantages that our

diverse and unique society has afforded us, living side by side in peace and harmony, ever mindful that our national blessings, constitutional freedoms and rights, are privileges we must never take for granted.

This is not a time for recrimination and negative wrangling but a time for rallying all our troops to a common positive goal where service to country carries both pride and joy, where the vulnerable and the marginalized are not left behind, where there is enough to feed all and where hard work and industry are rewarded and encouraged. We need to give ourselves a chance to succeed and we can only do so if we share and commit ourselves to this single aspiration of a better T&T, one nation for all.

Why can we not all just get along? We can all get along because we must all get along if we are to salvage and confirm the human legacy with which we have been bestowed and I say burdened by Pope John Paul II and Bishop Desmond Tutu, who referred to Trinidad and Tobago as the "rainbow nation of the world".

It is not by chance that a few days ago, the world celebrated World Peace Day and the timing could not be more perfect as we engage the transition from one Government to the next. In the aftermath of election 2015, the comments on social media were disappointing in the extreme. The currency of hate and divisiveness has no place in our society. We should know better than that. Perhaps, as a Parliament, you could have been more proactive in implementing cyber legislation that could well have pre-empted those unsavoury comments in social and traditional media.

But it is not too late and luckily you have a good head start. In April of this year, Form 4 students from Naparima Girls' High School, San Fernando, so disenchanted with the failure of the adult Parliament to address cybercrime, cyberbullying and general cyber misfeasance, garnered some 4,000 signatures in support of their petition to address these issues in the Parliament, and presented those signatures to the Office of the President. Hon. Members, I wish to publicly salute the youth activism for this progressive initiative and project by acknowledging: Rebecca Ann Jattan, Chelsea Morrison, Emily Ramsubir, Melanie Baboolal, Alviya Mir, Syama Jivana Ramnarine, Sharvaani Rampersad-Mahara, Shivani Persad-Maharaj, Sarah Hayatoola and Priyanka Ramsubhag of Naparima Girls' High School. I hope that their cybercrime initiative will come to life through the enactment of the relevant legislation in this Parliament.

Business as usual has to be a thing of the past. We, as a people, cannot in good conscience, sit idly by while entire communities are under siege. You have only to open the newspapers and some of us our doors, to see and feel the

debilitating effects of crime in our society. It is easy to lay blame on the doorstep of the incumbent Government or the past Government, but we are all responsible in more ways than one. There is a spirit of inhumanity that is sweeping through our nation, marked by a callous disregard for the sanctity of human life.

So ladies and gentlemen, parliamentarians, citizens of Trinidad and Tobago, what are we going to do about this quagmire we find ourselves in?

Well, we can start by reigniting the good old, trustworthy trait known as "respect". Respect in our society is becoming an increasingly scarce commodity. There seems to be a general breakdown in basic good manners and respect across many spheres, even in this honourable Parliament. The home, therefore, should be a catalyst for change, a place where members show respect for parental authority, civil authority, and the law of God. Respect for authority should begin in the home, carry over into the school, the workplace, the society and even in this Parliament.

Trinidad and Tobago has had and continues to be faced with its fair share of tough decisions to make, as regards crime, corruption and the threat of low oil prices. I have been advised that we ought not to panic unduly by these fluctuating oil prices. We have been in this business for over 100 years and we know the industry has frequent cyclical swings and also, ever so often, there is a market re-alignment that tends to have more to do with international politics than pure supply and demand mechanics. The signs sometimes point to the latter activity and with the application of appropriate and prudent measures, our country will weather the storm and ready itself to take advantage of the next up-cycle.

Notwithstanding, this Eleventh Parliament is coming into being at a time when resources are constrained and yet still has to find a way to navigate these challenging waters. I have faith, I have deep faith, I have profound faith, that the men and women of this Parliament, if they truly work together, can overcome any and all adversity and lead the way in maintaining and improving life in this blessed Republic.

In this spirit, I hope business leaders will get more involved in public policy issues. I think it is time for more of Trinidad and Tobago's business leaders to step up to the plate and make their voices heard in areas that have a direct impact on the future of this country, particularly, the longer-term issues that we face as a country, not just the issues you believe are important for your personal business or for your particular sector. Governments at every level cannot undertake such discussions alone and they cannot identify problems and propose solutions in a

vacuum. The creation of a good public policy needs business leaders' perspectives and insight as well as those from other segments of society as part of engaged and fully informed public dialogue.

In our quest to repair Trinidad and Tobago, we must decry this growing philosophy of mediocrity. Mediocrity of any form is unacceptable. Unfortunately, mediocrity seems to be the order of the day; and in all spheres, it seems that mediocrity is being accepted more and more as the norm. Quality service, value for money spent, treating customers fairly, respecting and honouring diversity, productivity and tolerance—they are all under siege. The solution to this mediocrity begins with the transformation of the man and the woman in the mirror.

Distinguished Members, education is the key to sustainability because if any country wants to secure its place in a competitive global world, it has to develop its human capital. An open and meritocratic education system is fundamental to establishing standards in our society—promoting and rewarding individual effort and commitment. It is the key to unleashing creativity for which this country is famous, and the key to accessing the full potential of our people.

A strong system of higher education provides a community with leaders building a sustainable research capacity in our education system. Our business sector is also expected to contribute and support the education goals of the Government, specifically as it relates to high quality research in science and technology. Such a contribution is essential to the sustainable economic growth of any country.

We each must do our part in creating a culture of learning and motivational ambition among our people and it begins with the very young. As an initiative in this direction, I have monthly "Lunch with the President" meetings with young primary school students between the ages of five and 12. I also made a promise as Head of State to visit every single school in Trinidad and Tobago and I have since visited some 28 primary schools going from classroom to classroom refusing to do school assemblies—the easy way out—to spread the message of hope, ambition and infinite possibilities in the lives of our school children, building self-esteem and a belief in themselves in terms of what is possible and probable in their lives.

As adults, we like to tell young people what is required of them but we are not prepared to accept what they require of us. A youth Parliament, therefore, with powers of intervention must be part of any rejuvenated Constitution. Until such

time, I will attempt to do what needs to be done. I have appointed three persons below the age of 40 and one in her late 20s as Independent Senators in this Eleventh Parliament. In passing, I also wish to mention that for the first time in the history of Trinidad and Tobago, the Office of the President will be hosting a two-day retreat to sensitize the nine Independent Senators of their duties and responsibilities and about the burdens that await them, the burdens that await them.

I will continue in my clarion call for appropriate legislation to lower the age requirement to be in the Senate. A Constitution must provide for the exceptional young man or woman that comes along in every generation. There was a young man under the age of 25 that I came across who can match strides with many of us in this august Chamber and he could have been appointed by this President if that bar was not in place. I considered a First Class Honours student that is visually impaired as a possible Independent Senator but I was informed that it will take a year or so to put Braille technology in place in this Parliament.

But this President is not giving up because I draw inspiration from the Caribbean region from the visually impaired. I have met and I have admired the honourable Kerry Ann Ifill, the President of the Senate in the Barbadian Parliament. And how could I forget the Honourable Floyd Emmerson Morris, fully blind since school age who persevered and obtained his Masters in Philosophy at UWI. In 1998, at the age of 29, he became a Senator and in 2013, became the President of the Jamaican Senate. We must inculcate in our society, in our Parliament, real and genuine inclusivity for all of the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago.

Yet all of us accept that Malala Yousafzai, that female activist in her youth has done far more for education, youth and woman empowerment than many world leaders and politicians in and out of their respective Parliaments. Ladies and gentlemen, this is an era of enlightenment. Informational reservoirs are in abundant supply and the young are demanding their space and their inclusivity in governance as never before and rightfully so.

Let me tell you a little story about the influence of education, values and the power of youth perspective in governance. Last week, when I was put on a spot in my office by a 17-year-old about the need to amend the composition of the Privileges Committee, my first thought was that as a nation, we must be doing something right. Not because the Privileges Committee rules do not need amending but because we are raising a future generation of young people who are not just involved, but passionate about the issues of governance, parliamentary procedures, independence and autonomy.

Murvani Ojah Maharaj is a sixth form student of Hillview College and he was, along with his classmates and colleagues of other schools, invited to attend a presentation of credential ceremony for an ambassador at the Office of the President as part of my youth initiative I implemented since I assumed office. This initiative affords our nation's schoolchildren a personal and up-close view of diplomacy, international relations and global democracy at work—matters normally reserved for adults in these august halls of Parliament and elsewhere.

This young man submitted convincingly that the Privileges Committee, comprised as it is of Members appointed by the Speaker in the House of Representatives and the President of the Senate in the Senate, both of whom are themselves politically appointed, can well lend itself to bias or the perception of bias and political alliances and interests in making decision about the conduct or misconduct of parliamentary colleagues. This is Murvani's concern. And he mapped it out in a subsequent comprehensive letter to me to be conveyed to you the parliamentarians, if possible.

But there is a bigger, more lamentable picture that underlies this concern of bias, whether real or apparent, of the Privileges Committee. It is that even our young people are noticing the misconduct and misbehaviour of our country's leaders, parliamentarians and managers. They are also noticing the blatant lack of consequences for such misconduct by some of our parliamentarians.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, a German Lutheran Pastor who ironically participated in the resistance movement against the Nazis said, and I quote:

> *"The ultimate test of a moral society is the kind of world it leaves to its children."*

Hon. Members, think about the Trinidad and Tobago we will leave to our children if we continue to throw stones at each other in and out of the Parliament, on the radio and TV shows; if we persist in the tired insults and degradations of each other because one side does not agree with the other on a particular Bill or policy, not on merit or demerit, but because of political or partisan allegiance.

Our young people are aware and they are paying attention and one day the young Murvanis will grow up and sit exactly in these seats of Parliament. We often forget that our Parliament is the sanctum sanctorum of our democracy. It gives effect to our Constitution which guards our human and civil rights, liberties and responsibilities.

The people of Trinidad and Tobago, those poorest, those wealthiest, those in between, our young people, they all repose unflinching faith that our Parliament will deliver on their hopes, visions and expectations.

Hon. Members, if we recognize and we establish for ourselves the role of our Parliament as the sanctum sanctorum of our democracy, we are already on the right road. The urgency of now beckons. The time to get our actions right is now.

A better democracy and indeed better politics mean debating issues and not people; avoiding distorted truths, fallacies, conspiracies, and if I may coin it, "emotional unintelligence" in our debates and rather engaging values, facts, principles and truth. I assure you the consequences of so doing will be the faster, more fluid and effective passage of progressive laws, harmony and decorum in our Parliament and perhaps most impacting that each of you hon. Members here will be exemplars of honour and statesmanship to guide and inspire our young people. Call it the audacity of hope on my part. But I believe we can reform our conduct and give our nation, and especially our young people, something to look up to and believe in.

Hon. Parliamentarians, I hope I did not sound as if I was engaging in pontificating. It has to do with the profundity of my conviction which I want to share with you all.

Trinidad and Tobago, as we stand here at the dawn of this new Parliament, the future is pregnant with possibilities. Even though the current scenario is difficult, we must be positive in our approach to hard work, focused effort, teamwork will put us on the threshold of a new era, one that is bright with the prospect of unlimited opportunities and challenges, along with the promise of continuing reward. It is at times like these that you should reflect thankfully on the commitment, determination and dedication to duty of all of those who are here today and also to those who have gone before, who have contributed to our success thus far.

As we look forward to the activities of this Eleventh Parliament, I am sure citizens may be expecting to see more actions that serve to strengthen the governance structure of state machinery, enhancing disclosure and transparency and fostering an atmosphere of high ethical standards and compliance. These measures will help to attract and protect investors, make the country more effective, more respected and restore integrity to civil society governance.

Finally, to you the parliamentarians, many of you present here today, you must be aware that you are the human face of the nation's developmental thrust. You are therefore a crucial point of interface between state action and the population. That is why we are here today, to give you this platform of positivity to kick off your deliberations that will contribute affirmatively to the future development of Trinidad and Tobago.

To the many naysayers, I say broaden your horizon, think positively. Have some faith, do good and be good. You know, in the Bible, at Matthew Chapter 6, verses 25—33, there is a saying of "oh ye of little faith." In that context, these are not words. These are words of encouragement, not words of condemnation. It is in this spirit that I call upon all present and not present to join with us as we launch the opening of this Eleventh Parliament.

May God bless all of you. May all of you keep each other in your prayers and may God continue to bless this wonderful Republic called Trinidad and Tobago. Thank you very much. [Applause]

3.55 p.m.: *Sitting resumed.*

PAPER LAID

Address by His Excellency the President on the occasion of the opening of the First Session Eleventh Parliament of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago. [**The Minister of Rural Development and Local Government** (*Sen. The Hon. Franklin Khan*)]

To be printed as a Senate Paper.

ADJOURNMENT

The Minister of Rural Development and Local Government (Sen. The Hon. Franklin Khan): Madam President, I beg to move that this Senate do now adjourn to a date to be fixed.

Madam President: Hon. Members, before putting the question on the adjournment, may I invite the Leader of Government Business to make a few remarks.

REPUBLIC DAY GREETINGS

The Minister of Rural Development and Local Government (**Sen. The Hon. Franklin Khan):** Thank you, Madam President. As Leader of Government Business and on behalf of the Government Bench, I would like to take this opportunity to firstly congratulate you on your elevation to the office of President of the Senate. This is indeed an esteemed position in the governance structure of our Republic. I am confident that you will do justice to the appointment and that you will conduct the business of the Senate with decorum, integrity and an even hand.

I would also like to congratulate our Sen. Nigel De Freitas on his election as Vice-President of the Senate.

To Members of the Senate on all sides: the Government Bench, the Opposition Bench and the Independent Bench, I offer my personal congratulations, and I have no doubt that you will also do justice to your appointments.

I now speak specifically about the Government Bench. Madam President, you will realize that our Bench reflects a judicious mix of experience and youth, or what I like to call "freshness", because it is this administration's policy and intention, as recently articulated by the President of the Republic, that under the leadership of our Prime Minister, Dr. Keith Rowley, to give young people the opportunity to play leadership roles in the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago.

Madam President, if I should say so, and if I am not mistaken, our own Sen. Sarah Budhu just turned 26, I am certain is the youngest Senator ever appointed in the history of Trinidad and Tobago.

Finally, Madam President, I want to give the assurance and commitment to this honourable Senate that we on this side will conduct ourselves with decorum, dignity, always mindful of fair play, transparency and good governance. We promise to be well prepared for the various debates and our contributions will be well-researched and concise.

I urge all Members of this honourable Senate to lift their standards of the Senate debate. While we still operate in an environment of adversarial politics, at the end of the day, fellow Members, we as legislators must always—and I repeat, always—put the national interest above partisan interest, consistent with our Oath of Office.

Madam President, I look forward to a rewarding and productive Eleventh Parliament of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago. I also want to take this opportunity to thank the hon. Prime Minister for appointing me as Leader of Government Business in the Senate, and as usual I will give it my best shot.

I look forward to a productive working relationship with the Leader of Opposition Business in the Senate and the coordinator of the Independent Bench, and while there will be controversies and tit for tat, we want to have a very, very productive session of this Eleventh Parliament.

Finally, let me take this opportunity on behalf of the Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago to wish all citizens of this Republic, a happy Republic Day tomorrow and to remind citizens that Republicanism means that you are in charge of your own destiny. As a country we have to create a brighter

and a secure future for our children and our grandchildren, and our Government is committed to that cause. Trinidad and Tobago must once again become a wonderful place to live, work and to raise a family.

Once again, happy Republic Day to all. Fellow citizens, let us bring back the spirit of patriotism to our Republic.

Madam President, I thank you.

Sen. Wade Mark: Madam President, hon. Members of the Senate, let me join my hon. colleague in first of all warmly congratulating you. We are not strangers to each other; we know each other very well. I would like on behalf of the alternative government to extend to you our collective heartfelt congratulations as the new President of our Senate, and to give you the assurance that this alternative government, now in Opposition, will do everything in its power to cooperate and to uphold the finest standards of parliamentary practice and procedure under your guidance.

May I take the opportunity at this time to warmly congratulate the Vice-President, Sen. Nigel De Freitas, on his elevation to the position of Vice-President of our great Senate.

We celebrate our nation's 39th Anniversary of Republican status against the background of a rising tide of socioeconomic challenges. In addition, some of our well-established institutions have come under severe criticism as His Excellency recently reminded us. Crime overwhelms or seems to overwhelm us, particularly murders, and we want to indicate that as a society and as a Parliament, we would want to appeal to the new administration to do what is necessary to take action to restore security, safety and the well-being of our citizens. Do not adopt Nero as your patron saint; do not fiddle while our Republic burns.

It is said that evil comes forth in the guise of good, and may I say doubletalk seems to be the order of the day, where individuals in high places engage in a high degree of what I would like to describe, hon. President, as deceptive rhetoric, but with little or no concrete performance or programme to comfort the citizens thus far.

It is highly impossible to employ evil and destructive means and hope to achieve positive and constructive ends. It just does not work that way. Therefore, on this occasion of our 39th Anniversary of our Republican status, the alternative government of the People's Partnership intends to pursue a course of action aimed at promoting genuine freedom and equality and justice, not just for some of our

citizens, regardless of race, creed, colour, ethnicity, religion, location or station in life. We intend to vigorously and militantly struggle to promote, widen and deepen those values and rights in the coming period.

We say to the Government: Either deliver or face early recall from the corridors of power. On the occasion of the 39th Anniversary of our Republican status, may I on behalf of the alternative government extend sincere greetings, blessings and best wishes to the 1.3 million citizens on such a significant occasion. Our Republican Constitution remains as important as when the first Parliament was convened on September 24, 1976 as a sovereign democratic state.

Madam President, I would like to wish the entire citizenry a wonderful, beautiful and happy Republic Day.

Thank you, Madam President.

Sen. Dr. Dhanayshar Mahabir: Thank you very much, Madam President. On behalf of the Independent Bench, I too would like to warmly congratulate you on your selection and elevation as President of the Senate.

I know we are going to have some very productive sessions; I imagine very late sessions as well. I look forward to the legislative agenda of the Government. When it comes to the committee stage, I can assure you, you will have a great deal of work. We will be there with you ensuring that the laws of the Republic are the best that they can possibly be, given the state of knowledge we have at this time.

I also want to warmly congratulate Sen. Nigel De Freitas on his appointment as the Vice-President of the Senate, and that would provide assistance when necessary. I know sometimes you may even want to call upon Members of the Independent Benches when you both are indisposed, and we would be available to ensure that the business of the House continues and is conducted.

Madam President, I shall not be long, but there are a few things I too would like to say. It is really heartening to see so many young people on the Government Bench, and I look forward to the deliberations that will come from them. There is a sharp divide amongst the under-30 age group and the over-30 age group. I call it the "hashtag" and the "facebook" generation. They are in a different world. They are connected, they are in the globalized world and they will bring to bear on the deliberations of the Senate a perspective that I think will add a freshness and a relevance to the types of laws and rules that we pass in this august Chamber.

I have had the good fortune of working with Sen. Avinash Singh in the Foreign Affairs Committee, and I have seen the quality that has emanated from the Government side. I look forward, of course, to the stimulating discussions. I

have also had the very good fortune of working with practically all Members of the Opposition in the Senate, and I too look forward to working with them, and to ensure that we can bring our own perspective as well when we come to really refine the laws of Trinidad and Tobago.

The Independent Bench as you know is not a bench that can caucus. We are nine individual Republics under the loose federation. [*Laughter*] I just happen to be the manager of that federation, but we are all nine independent individuals: independent in thought, independent in action, independent in how we view the world and we intend of course to continue in that tradition.

This has served our bench very well. We are coming from different perspectives, but really from a range of perspectives, and the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago in the Commonwealth is unique in having this group of individuals appointed by His Excellency the President, from amongst persons who would not normally run for office, but who have something to contribute.

Madam President, I know I said I would not be long, and I intend to keep my word. I am coming to Republic Day greetings, but I would like to assure you that the work of the Senate from the experience that I have had, together with the able assistance of the Clerk of the Senate, has resulted—and I want to specifically address the Members of the Senate who have not been here before.

4.15 p.m.

We have been able to make tangible changes in the wider community via the Joint Select Committee system. For example, Madam President, it was from the Joint Select Committee of Members of the Senate and of the other place, that we were able to get the National Insurance Board, for example, to abandon citizens having to present life certificates twice a year. That has alleviated—coming from the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago—hardship for perhaps half a million people, simply because of the intervention and the cooperation of Members across the aisle, all looking at the public interest, the interest of the public, the well-being of all of our constituents, regardless of where they fall in the political divide, they all experienced difficulties and using our collective talents, we are able to come together to see to the best of our ability how we can serve the population using whatever we can do in the Parliament.

So I look forward to the deliberations in the Joint Select Committee, and it shows that the Parliament of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago is making significant contributions, and we will continue to do so.

Now for the greetings. This will be the end. [*Laughter*] I would like to say as I conclude, it is indeed a real wonderful experience now to be a Member of a third Republican Parliament. I was here in the Fourth. I was here in the Tenth. Now, I am here in the Eleventh.

On behalf of the bench, the Independent Bench, I really would like to say that the Republican status of Trinidad and Tobago really tells us we can no longer look to an external power. We have abandoned colonialism. We are in charge of our own future. When we make errors, let us hope the errors are small, because we must live with the consequences of them. When we do that which is right, we will reap the benefits. We are totally responsible. No one is there in the global arena to produce for us a safety net. We are drifting on our own. This Senate is, therefore, responsible as the chamber of deep reflection for ensuring that as we sail in this now global arena, the laws we pass, the deliberations we engage in, will ensure that to the best of our ability, and with the limited information that we have, we are going to move Trinidad and Tobago from where it is now, to a higher stage, so that the people of the Republic who are really our servants will all say, yeah, they have made mistakes, but they have done well in improving the quality of my life.

On behalf of the Independent Bench, Madam President, I will just like to bring to the national community greetings on this very important and auspicious day of Republic Day in Trinidad and Tobago, tomorrow. Thank you. [*Applause*]

Madam President: Thank you very much, Sen. Dr. Mahabir. Hon. Senators, I congratulate all hon. Senators appointed to this Chamber. I extend my appreciation for your having elected me as President of the Senate. I cannot lay claim to being one of the young faces of this Senate, but I of course say to you that it was a tremendous privilege to have been so elected. But tremendous privilege carries tremendous responsibility, and I want to assure you that I too undertake my duties with a keen sense of tremendous responsibility that my appointment carries.

My responsibility is to preserve the order, authority and dignity of this Chamber. This responsibility I take seriously. All in all, my responsibility is to assist you hon. Senators in carrying out the nation's business in a manner befitting of this Chamber. I invite you all to collaborate with me in this undertaking.

Let us bear in mind that in this place, we are less given to the rough and tumble that attends everyday politics. Let us commit to conducting the nation's business in a manner that will bring credit to, and maintain the integrity and the dignity of this Chamber.

Hon. Senators, tomorrow is Republic Day. Republicanism means the shedding of the last vestiges of colonialism. It signifies in a very powerful way our coming into adulthood as a nation. We join the rest of civil society in extending warmest congratulations to Trinidad and Tobago on this very important milestone.

Our work in this Chamber must contribute to and reflect our growing maturity as a nation. Our deliberations must in manner and in tone demonstrate that we are not only an independent State, but that we are a responsible nation with every claim to republican status.

Finally, permit me to thank all the individuals in the parliamentary service, who have worked tirelessly to bring about this sitting, and upon whom all hon. Senators will be depending in no small way when we discharge our duties. This Senate thanks you in advance.

I now invite everyone to join His Excellency downstairs for a reception. The question that I now put is that this Senate be adjourned to a date to be fixed. Thank you very much.

Question put and agreed to.

Senate adjourned accordingly.

Adjourned at 4.27 p.m.