

**THE
PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES**

OFFICIAL REPORT

**IN THE SECOND SESSION OF THE EIGHTH PARLIAMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF
TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO WHICH OPENED ON OCTOBER 17, 2003**

SESSION 2003—2004

VOLUME 1

SENATE

Monday, September 29, 2003

10.00 A.M.

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

REPUBLIC OF TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO

No. 32 of 2003.

[L.S.]

By Her Excellency Dr. LINDA SAVITRI
BABOOLAL, Acting President and
Commander-in-Chief of the Republic of
Trinidad and Tobago.

LINDA S. BABOOLAL
Acting 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, LINDA SAVITRI BABOOLAL, Acting President, do hereby appoint the Red House, Port of Spain, Trinidad, as the place at which the Second Session of the Eighth Parliament of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago shall be held and 10.00 a.m. on Monday 29th September, 2003, 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 18th day of September, 2003.

Leave of Absence

Monday, September 29, 2003

PRAYERS

[MR. VICE-PRESIDENT *in the Chair*]

LEAVE OF ABSENCE

Mr. Vice-President: Hon. Senators, I wish to advise that Sen. The Hon. Dr. Linda Baboolal, President of the Senate, will be absent from the Senate for the period September 24 to October 10, 2003. During this period, the Vice-President will preside over sittings of the Senate, and Mrs. Joan Hackshaw-Marslin will act temporarily for the President.

Hon. Senators, I have granted leave of absence to Sen. The Hon. Knowlson Gift and Sen. Prof. Ramesh Deosaran from today's sitting. I have also granted leave of absence to Sen. The Hon. Joan Yuille-Williams and Sen. The Hon. Mustapha Abdul-Hamid from today's sitting only.

SENATORS' APPOINTMENT

Mr. Vice-President: Hon. Senators, I have received the following correspondence from His Excellency the President Prof. George Maxwell Richards.

“THE CONSTITUTION OF THE REPUBLIC OF TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO

By His Excellency GEORGE MAXWELL RICHARDS,
President and Commander-in-Chief of the Republic
of Trinidad and Tobago.

/s/ G. Richards
President.

TO: MRS. JOAN HACKSHAW-MARSLIN

WHEREAS Senator Dr. Linda Savitri Baboolal is incapable of performing her duties as a Senator by reason of her absence from Trinidad and Tobago:

NOW, THEREFORE, I, GEORGE MAXWELL RICHARDS, President as aforesaid, acting in accordance with the advice of the Prime Minister, in exercise of the power vested in me by section 44 of the Constitution of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, do hereby appoint you, JOAN HACKSHAW-MARSLIN, to be temporarily a member of the Senate, with effect from the 29th September, 2003 during the absence from Trinidad and Tobago of the said Senator Dr. Linda Savitri Baboolal.

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 26th day
of September, 2003.”

Senators' Appointment

Monday, September 29, 2003

“THE CONSTITUTION OF THE REPUBLIC OF TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO

By His Excellency GEORGE MAXWELL RICHARDS,
President and Commander-in-Chief of the Republic
of Trinidad and Tobago.

/s/ G. Richards
President.

TO: MRS. MAGNA WILLIAMS-SMITH

WHEREAS Senator Knowlson Gift is incapable of performing his duties as a Senator by reason of his absence from Trinidad and Tobago:

NOW, THEREFORE, I, GEORGE MAXWELL RICHARDS, President as aforesaid, acting in accordance with the advice of the Prime Minister, in exercise of the power vested in me by section 44 of the Constitution of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, do hereby appoint you, MAGNA WILLIAMS-SMITH, to be temporarily a member of the Senate, with effect from 29th September, 2003 and continuing during the absence from Trinidad and Tobago of the said Senator Knowlson Gift.

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 26th day
of September, 2003.”

“THE CONSTITUTION OF THE REPUBLIC OF TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO

By His Excellency GEORGE MAXWELL RICHARDS,
President and Commander-in-Chief of the Republic
of Trinidad and Tobago.

/s/ G. Richards
President.

TO: MR. WALTON FRANCIS JAMES

WHEREAS Senator Professor Ramesh Deosaran is incapable of performing his duties as a Senator by reason of his absence from Trinidad and Tobago:

NOW, THEREFORE, I, GEORGE MAXWELL RICHARDS, President as aforesaid, in exercise of the power vested in me by section 40(2)(c) and section 44 of the Constitution of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, do hereby appoint you, WALTON FRANCIS JAMES, to be temporarily a member of

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the Senate, with effect from 29th September, 2003 and continuing during the absence from Trinidad and Tobago of the said Senator Professor Ramesh Deosaran.

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 26th day of September, 2003."

OATH OF ALLEGIANCE

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

Joan Hackshaw-Marslin, Magna Williams Smith, Walton Francis James.

Mr. Vice-President: Hon. Senators, His Excellency The President desires to address both Houses of Parliament assembled together. This sitting is now suspended.

10.14 a.m.: *Sitting suspended.*

PRESIDENT'S ADDRESS

His Excellency, The President of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, Mr. George Maxwell Richards, addressed both Houses of Parliament as follows:

Vice-President of the Senate, Speaker of the House of Representatives, Members of Parliament, we have convened in this awesome place, this hallowed hall that has witnessed so many important aspects of the evolution of our history. We have convened to fulfil a charge that has more than a civic dimension. We have convened to do the people's business and this is a sacred trust, for government is of God.

We have been placed in this Parliament as a privilege with a mandate to be of service to a country that has seen the presence of God intervene in such ways as to leave no doubt in the mind of anyone but the obdurate that this country must have been set apart to fulfil a particular destiny.

There are those who believe that they can define that destiny. Others are not convinced. It could be said with justification that after 41 years of independence, and 27 years as a republic, it is time for change. It is time to seek new systems of governance that will be better suited to our circumstances and our times. That may well be so, but while we are at this stage, we ought to work with what we have in response to the confidence that has been demonstrated by the people who have elected us to seek their interest in this Chamber.

President's Address

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The paramount concern must be the people's business. That is the purpose of this august body and place that we call Parliament. This is where, through reason and discussion, we must strive to foster and to uphold the dignity of the human being by way of legislative programmes, for example, that take account of matters of critical importance to the well-being of our citizens.

We must bear in mind that the people who have put us here have done so with great expectation of the betterment of their condition. We have been placed centre stage in the highest forum in the land on which the eyes and ears of the nation are focused.

Our role, then, is not just one of theatre, as some might suppose, although the temptation may be great in that regard. It is one that should serve as an example. We must lead our people above the cut and thrust of commonplace politics to a level of understanding of nation building that will continue the work that was begun even before we claimed and were given ownership of this Parliament.

It was in this setting that our predecessors took up the challenge and with dignity, great dignity, and sense of purpose and responsibility, took us from colonial territorial status to independence. Adversarial positions there were, without a doubt, but they, responding and respecting their call to service, by and large, did not allow themselves to forget the requirement of respect for the representative role that was given to them.

There was no shortage of humour in the midst of serious debate. No lack of "picong", that cherished national gift, but our people, particularly the youth, could be inspired by the quality of oratory and the regard for office that was manifest.

May I, therefore, humbly submit, esteemed Members of our nation's Parliament, that we should pause, reflect and consider whether we have not somehow been distracted from what I regard as an opportunity for the development of statesmanship that no country can afford to eschew.

I make this observation especially for the benefit of the children of our nation. For the sake of our children, we need to take a look at the path that we have been travelling and see whether some adjustments to our modus operandi are necessary. If they are, it is the duty of each one of us to make those adjustments.

Much has already been done, but much more needs to be done to take our country forward, but we continue the task of developing our country in a climate of increasing globalization. We must realize that even as nations come together in their geographic groupings and are consolidating their economic blocs, there is

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evidence that simultaneously, bilateral activities are as vibrant as ever. The reality is that in our international efforts, in whatever sphere, we are not assured of support, even within our region.

It has become clear that in a unipolar world, many countries are constrained to yield to bilateral arrangements that seem best suited to their interests, if only in the short term, a position that we can well understand. Nevertheless, we must continue vigorously to strive for solidarity in our traditional groupings wherever this is possible.

As we do so, however, we must be careful not to neglect those domestic issues that require the concerted effort of all the representatives of the people. We must work together in our Parliament to ensure that decisions are taken and laws enacted that reflect clear provision for the welfare of all of our people.

If our laws do not insist upon fair opportunity for all, including the differently abled and the poor, we can hardly count upon the ability or the willingness of the people to help us achieve the targets for development that we have set ourselves.

Unlike many developing countries, our country has been endowed with tremendous natural resources. For this we can take no credit and we would do well to be mindful of the fact that the energy resources with which we are endowed are a wasting asset. Consequently, the laws that are put in place for their exploration and exploitation must reflect consideration for the generations to come, as well as possible effects on our fragile environment.

The distribution of national income is a matter to which careful consideration should also be given. This is an area in which there are no easy answers as there are legitimate demands all around. Moreover, we cannot legislate wealth nor industriousness, but systems may be put in place through laws that provide for ways of encouraging productive pursuits.

In this regard, the development of communities might be seen as a critical plank of national development and the increased funding provided accordingly for this purpose. It is through the strength of the villages that the strength of the nation will increase.

Provision should therefore be made so that all over the country people will be directly involved in projects that cut across barriers of whatever sort. This calls for greater decentralization and an enhanced sense of community by elected representatives, but the thrust begins here. Communities will respond as they are influenced by their leaders. They will respond to the degree that leaders at the national level display commitment to their welfare in a sustained way throughout their term of office.

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Our communities cannot thrive without law and order. These are words that must be uppermost in the minds of all of us who are witnessing deterioration leading to anarchy in many of our institutions. There is no question but that the decline has reached alarming proportions. But where do the solutions lie? Is it in the passing of new laws in the Parliament? I think not. There are already many laws that are not enforced. I believe, rather, that law enforcement agencies must see to it that every infraction, no matter how small, is dealt with, with the full force of the law.

Am I advocating a police state? Not by any means. I am saying, however, that we have come to that point in our affairs where it has become necessary to apply discipline rigorously in defence of our nation. Lawlessness in any form must not be tolerated, and we the Members of the Parliament must do whatever lies in our power to encourage the upholding of the laws of the land.

Trinidad and Tobago has positioned itself in a significant way on the international stage. This is not by accident. We have come to be regarded as a country that is politically stable, where many races dwell together in relative harmony. Our many festivals are becoming better known throughout the world and through the hard work and relentless dedication of our sons and daughters, we have achieved an international profile in areas such as culture, international civil service and within more recent times, international law.

How can we build on what we have gained and optimize the resources and opportunities that exist? We can do so by lifting our sights beyond narrow, parochial interests and recognizing our capabilities for securing a better life at home and influence in world affairs.

Trinidad and Tobago has already proven that even as a small country, it is possible to make a difference in international affairs in the service of human beings everywhere, now and in the future. We do not need the validation from outside that we so often seek. We must recognize our own strengths. I question whether we are as conscious as we might be of the part that we can play to enhance our influence in world affairs.

We are not insulated from world currents and so we must nurture a people who see themselves as patriots first, but also as contributors to the development of the outside world with which we have forward and backward linkages. It is the world in which our children must live and we owe it to them to make it better. That would require of us a mature understanding of the rules of conduct, if you will, for leaders.

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[HIS EXCELLENCY]

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Our nation needs healing. In this Parliament, we must demonstrate farsightedness. We must know when to put on battle gear and when to call a truce. We must be able to criticize and to congratulate. We must defend our interests and support the common good.

We, the people of this Parliament, represent a beacon to which the rest of the nation looks for guidance. Let us, therefore, uphold high standards of which we can all be proud.

May God bless our nation.

11.21 a.m.: *Sitting resumed.*

ADJOURNMENT

The Minister of Public Administration and Information (Sen. The Hon. Dr. Lenny Saith): Mr. Vice-President, I beg to move that this Senate do now adjourn to Tuesday, October 21, 2003 at 10.00 a.m., at which time we will begin debate on the budget.

Question put and agreed to.

Senate adjourned accordingly.

Adjourned at 11.24 a.m.