



FEATURE ADDRESS BY

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MINISTER OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

MP FOR SAN FERNANDO WEST

AT THE

CARIBBEAN LEADERSHIP FORUM

MONDAY 22<sup>ND</sup> APRIL, 2013



Ministry of  
Public Administration

## SALUTATIONS

Madam Chairman of today's proceedings

The Honourable Wade Mark, Speaker of the House

His Excellency Gerard Latulippe, High Commissioner of the Canada to Trinidad and Tobago

Ms. Gillian Macintyre, Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Public Administration.

Mrs. Jacqueline Sampson-Meiguel, Clerk of the House

Most importantly, a special welcome, to Permanent Secretaries, Deputy Secretaries and other Public Officers.

First let me welcome all of you here today to Trinidad and Tobago and to thank you for inviting me to participate in the Leadership Development Programme funded by CIDA, executed by the Canada School of Public Service (CSPS), and hosted by the Cave Hill School of Business of the University of the West Indies. CIDA has been an extremely good friend and partner of the entire Caribbean and has again demonstrated its willingness to help us help ourselves and one another.

I am extremely intrigued by the topic of today's session – Leadership and Valuing Diversity. What leaps out at me as I look around the room is that the guests or participants here today are public sector leaders from the different countries of our English-speaking Caribbean. Many people on the outside think of the Caribbean as a homogenous society which speaks the same language and are solidly linked by a common culture. Until you get closer it is difficult to understand that, small though we are, we are all sovereign states which jealously guard and protect our sovereignty.

Despite these political differences, we have a lot in common. We have a rich heritage on which to build a successful and sustainable common future. All too often we get carried away on the wings of insularity and parochialism and lose sight of the fact that we have considerably more in common than we have differences. In the context of leadership and valuing diversity let me make some points that underlie public service renewal and the importance of developing leaders who cross the natural border of the Caribbean sea and the man-made divisions of states and countries to create a new domain of public service leadership that spans the narrow frontiers and limitations of time, space and national identity.

First of all, we all emerged from a colonial experience where the civil service, as it was called then, was an arm of the British Government and under the control, for the most part, of British managers. One observation of the time is that we tried so hard to be like our overlords that we adopted the same postures and behaviours – our civil servants were described as being neither civil nor servants. An ongoing concern is that while Independence brought with it the need for national public services, the changes in attitudes and behaviours did not occur to the extent that was expected by the population. This is part of the challenge of renewal and transformation.

What we have a lot of in the region are Governments. What we don't have enough of is Governance. The World Bank defines governance as "the manner in which power is exercised in the management of a country's economic and social resources for development." All governments have power but how that power is exercised and in whose name is what governance is about. In this sense governance is a neutral concept, distinct from politics, comprising the

complex mechanisms, processes, relationships and institutions through which citizens and groups articulate their interests, exercise their rights and obligations and mediate their differences. In other words, good governance is citizen-centric and addresses the allocation and management of resources objectively. It is characterized by participation, transparency, accountability, rule of law, effectiveness and equity. What is becoming more apparent is that what is important is not what you accomplish, but how you accomplish. It is not about what roads are built, but in the how they were built. It is interesting that every speaker this morning alluded to trust and credibility. If we are to rebuild that trust and credibility in the public service and in you, their leaders, then the onus is on you public service leaders here today, and the future generations of leaders that you develop, to put in place the Governance structures that will be so firmly entrenched that they will survive any change in Government.

The second is that we are all citizens of our own countries but we are also CARICOM nationals. The Caribbean Community is a grouping that is yet to serve its purpose of bringing all of us closer together through common systems of government, through governance mechanisms that are transparent and objective, and values that are shared. Caribbean Unity might be a work in progress but the common complaint is that it is taking far too long. Interestingly this is also a criticism that is common to attempts by the nations of the region to renew or transform their public services. The newspapers and humorists are having a field day now over a trade war between Jamaica and Trinidad over toilet paper. It seems there is a regulatory problem as there was in the recent cement matter which went to court. However, what both teach us is that if we have a problem with the ease of doing business right here in the region, how can we compete globally? Today, with the growth of the service industry, new opportunities emerge for each and every one of us individually and collectively as counties in this region to increase our participation in the global competitive environment. However, every survey has shown that the public service is the biggest impediment nationally and regional to ease of doing business in the region. Clearly, it is an area where leadership is lacking.

The third is that when we come together in events like today we realize that we are one people. Despite history and geography and regardless of race and religion, there is one, and only one, Caribbean. All of us share and delight in certain common characteristics. We are bright people and express ourselves well. We are compassionate people and feel for others. Yet, we can also be formal, rigid and place too much value on the possession of the office instead of the performance of its functions. Ease of doing business is an example but there are many others which I would like to see explored within this workshop session. Our countries individually and collectively, have made a huge impact on the culture of the world, on sports, on entertainment and through our writers and artists and yet we are unable to do it as successfully, as consistently and as completely in the spheres of public service and business development. The question is, why?

Despite the negatives, I am an eternal optimist, I am positive and have reason for hope in both public service transformation and in the sustainable development of our region. This programme in which you are participating can, and will, contribute substantially to develop the future leaders that we need, the structures in which they will work and the public service organisations that they lead.

When we West Indians come together for a single purpose there is a natural synergy that develops. It is the reason why a small group of countries with a tiny talent base was able to dominate the cricket world through their sheer talent and togetherness. On the other hand it is also why we were not able to stay at the pinnacle of world cricket – the playing talent was not adequately supported by the administrative structures. The lack of foresight and forward planning meant that our stay at the top of the game was brief and the aftermath was bitter.

I know that with time, effort and better governance the West Indies will rise again. It is the same hope that I have in our future as a grouping and as individual nations.

This is why I want to share a dream with you, a vision really. In the case of Trinidad and Tobago, I share a dream with my officers that we will have by 2022 a public service that has transformed itself so that all the services it delivers are of the highest possible quality and meet the most demanding standards of excellence.

I dream of a Trinidad and Tobago, and a Caribbean region, in which citizens can stay at home and use computers or cellular phones or, at worst, will not have to venture far from their homes to access every service the Government has to offer. A region where every citizen enjoys the highest possible quality of service, regardless of race, creed, gender or geography. A public service that is willing to walk the extra mile to ensure that its clients are satisfied. And, most of all, Governments that are putting the resources in place so that the citizen is the centre of the public service universe, the sun around which our efforts and achievements revolve.

Further, I dream that with training and encounters like this programme, every country will achieve its goals for transformation and renewal. More, I dream that when I go to Grenada, Barbados, Jamaica or any of the countries of the region, I would not need a paper document that has to be scrutinized and stamped, that I can access some services that we share within the region as easily as any of us can access these services in our own home country, and that I feel at home in your country as much as I would like you to feel at home in mine. I dream of a network of people who share my dreams and with whom I communicate and share ideas. This is my dream. However, the realization of it is not in my hands alone. If you share this dream it is up to all of us to work together to create a new Caribbean reality and make our dreams come true.

One major challenge is defining and treating as sacrosanct the concept of public interest. We keep saying that we are working in the public interest. We keep spending taxpayers' dollars in the public interest. But what we need to have is a clear sense of what that entails. In my view we must have a culture that values, recognizes and rewards public officers who display and portray, who demonstrate and personify the values and virtues of honesty and integrity, fairness, transparency and conscientiousness and who add value instead of debasing the integrity of the system. Are we ready for that? Are you prepared to do that?

Secondly, you can hold on to power and dole it out sparingly to those who report to you, or you can genuinely empower your staff. You can either keep them on a leash chained to your every word and need, or unleash the creativity within them, the energy and the entrepreneurship. Yesterday at the opening of the Administrative Professional's week I indicated that research

shows more and more that innovation in service delivery is taking place with frontline staff empowered to make timely and quality decisions in order to facilitate this innovation in service delivery. Therefore, for front line staff to be innovative they must be confident they have your support and encouragement especially when they take risks to make customer service better or to help stakeholders to enjoy a better experience in their encounters with the bureaucracy.

Alvin Toffler, the Futurist, talks in his book “Powershift” about a major change in the global environment that is also taking place in our workplaces and in many other aspects of our lives. His view is that the old launching pads of power- money and muscle - have given way to “mind” power. All of us here today are knowledge workers. Knowledge is our stock in trade and information is the basic currency of every transaction and encounter that we have. What we need to be aware of is that public service renewal requires a power-shift. If we want to achieve a citizen-centred society then we have to expect and engineer a power-shift where the needs of the citizens and our other stakeholders are paramount. This power shift is what we need between you and your next in line and between the public service and the citizenry.

What helps in the powershift is that information as a resource is shareable. When I give you information, I still have it. And if you give it to others, you still retain it. There is no loss of power for the public servant. If there is, public service renewal will not work since nobody gives up power willingly. What will emerge is that through sharing information and making access to it easier, everyone will benefit. The public officers and public service leaders can shift their emphasis from being what is referred to as “a pair of hands” to developing improved systems and processes for making life better for all, including themselves and their families.

Fortunately, there is a convergence taking place of all the key elements that will make our task easier. Think of what happened when the television, telephone, computer and other technologies merged and shrunk. We had the smartphone. We have the iPhone and iPad which many of us now consider part of our vital supplies. You have all converged in Trinidad as part of a regional forum where you each bring unique knowledge, skills and abilities that will help to transform all of us as we interact with one another.

Let us look at how these forces are coming closer together. I will use the example of Trinidad but it is happening in varying degrees and speeds in all the countries gathered here today. What we are seeing and helping to create is a convergence of several complementary forces none of which by itself is able to transform the public service but taken together have the ability to generate the critical mass that will help us to all succeed.

Last year we started what we called the “Gold To Diamond” journey which I understand you will be hearing more about later this week. Our country celebrated the Golden Anniversary of national independence in 2012. Our public service came into being as a primary manifestation and instrument of independence. We saw those fifty years as the golden platform from which we can launch our public service renewal. We will celebrate our Diamond Jubilee in 2022 and plan to use the 10-year period to put in place a citizen-centric public service that will be geared for all our service needs for the entire 21<sup>st</sup> Century. The Diamond architecture will facilitate that empowered and innovative organisation with opportunities for new careers. We plan to build on

the convergence of four key factors which are converging and which together will create the environment for both success and sustainability.

The first of these key factors is that citizens are increasingly demanding value for money from government services and, knowing that something must be done, they are willing the transformation to happen.

The second major impetus for transformation is the growing availability and ubiquity of ICTs. These new technologies which shrink space, time, distance and costs are the keys to the delivery of the highest quality service in the shortest time at the lowest cost to the mobile phones or homes of citizens regardless of their location

The third major driver of the transformation process is that public officers are beginning to understand and appreciate that theirs is a profession in which opportunities exist for those who perform at the highest levels.

The fourth and most important factor is that the political will exists for transformation. The present administration in Trinidad and Tobago, and I note that other Caribbean governments, most recently Antigua and Barbuda, have laid considerable emphasis on transforming the public service.

The convergence of these four factors, increasing demand by citizens for value for money, the constantly expanding role of ICTs, the professionalization of the public service and political will, also need to be managed, harnessed and harmonized. They bring with them risks and the need for greater accountability. Introducing new technologies, laws, changes in the Terms and Conditions of employment and everything else that public service renewal implies would require risk-taking.

This is where leadership comes in. This is where the various objectives of the programme come together. At one level there is the need for responsible governance that is responsive to the needs of the stakeholders. At another level we need to set the stage and create the opportunities as well as the supportive environment for new leaders to emerge, not just here in Trinidad and Tobago, but also in the entire Caribbean. More than anything else, we need the right people in the right places at the right time to generate both symbiosis and synergy. Symbiosis, in this case, is the relationship between the public service and its various stakeholders. We need to build on their strengths as much as on ours. We must be sensitive to their needs and respect their positions. We must try to see the world from their points of view otherwise we cannot be citizen-centred.

Synergy is what we are already seeing here in this room but which we would want to see in the public service of the entire region. We need to produce results that will be greater than the numbers of people here.

What all our countries prize and will spend much of the future in achieving is the elusive goal of sustainable development. The demands on the resources, including the skilled human resources, people like yourselves, are considerably more than the supply. Even with the best intentions, most countries cannot keep up with the pace of development and the needs of the citizenry in a

world where we are all, as our first Prime Minister, Dr. Eric Williams said, “sardines in a sea of sharks.”

What I want to impress on all of you here today is that in unity there is strength. There is also strength in diversity. The technologies that have converged as ICTs have given us networking as a fundamental fact of life. We, too, can bind time and space through networking. We can tap the resources and support of other professionals and can even see and talk to them face-to-face. I strongly support the objective of creating a stronger community of senior leaders in this region. I want all of you here today to treat this programme not just as a market-place of ideas but as a meeting place of minds. I want you to create in cyberspace as well as in your own countries, in real time as well as virtual time, opportunities for sharing the wealth of ideas that you have and will gain from this programme. I want you, in other words, to keep in touch with one another and to work together, using what you’ve learnt in this and other programmes, to develop the future leaders of a new and networked Caribbean and the renewed public service that will help to bring it closer together and keep it together.

The question is are you ready, willing and prepared to do what must be done. Are you prepared to push for governance that is in the best interests of all? Are you ready to redefine the public interest and identify your roles in it? Are you ready to give up some of your own power to effect the transformation of the public service and the nation at large? Are you ready to make any major dents in the status quo and to take on the new challenges which will change but will never diminish who you are and what you do?

My friends, we the people of the Caribbean have survived slavery and indentureship, sea voyages in small and fragile ships through storms and tempests, colonialism and corruption, despair and destruction. We have shown that we can adapt and thrive in foreign soil. This is our own soil and our own people. We owe them all that we are and all that we can be. The question is, “Are you ready?”

I thank you.