



FEATURE ADDRESS BY

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MINISTER OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

MP FOR SAN FERNANDO WEST

RETURNING SCHOLARS SYMPOSIUM

HYATT REGENCY

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Ministry of  
Public Administration

## SALUTATIONS

Master of Ceremonies,

Ms. Gillian Macintyre, Permanent Secretary

Ms. Prabha Maraj, Deputy Permanent Secretary in the  
Ministry of Public Administration

Dr. Franklin Ali, Chief Executive Officer, GHRS

Ms. Jacqueline Johnson, Director of Scholarships & Training  
Division, and members of Staff of the Ministry

Most importantly, Returning Scholars

Good morning

Today you are returning scholars. Tomorrow you will be employed. If we had our way this would be a reality. You would all have jobs in your professional areas and you will

all have meaningful work and opportunities for professional development and advancement.

Whatever happens, you will have guaranteed employment for at least a year but the fact that you may not be employed in the field in which you graduated, an area of study deemed relevant, necessary and essential to the sustainable development of our country, is an imbalance that we are working hard to resolve.

Our statistics show that 43% of returning graduates eventually find permanent placements in the Public Service. This is something that we have encouraged and are building on.

You have returned to our country at a time when the Public Service is undertaking a process of transformation, a journey towards a Diamond Standard of Excellence in Service Delivery.

Those of you who join the Public Service will be part of an exciting process of renewal that will produce greater opportunities for innovation, creativity and flexibility. You will experience the shift in the definition of what a workplace is and you will see the extent to which we are making the work environment more comfortable for both public officers and our clients, the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

This indeed is an opportune time for bright, young scholars to join the Public Service of Trinidad and Tobago. I am looking towards you to lead the ICT and customer service revolutions. As Mahatma Gandhi once said, *“A customer is the most important visitor on our premises. He is not dependent on us. We are dependent on him. He is not an interruption in our work. He is the purpose of it. He is not an outsider in our business. He is part of it. We are not doing him a favor by serving him. He is doing us a favor by giving us an opportunity to do so.”* I want you to remember this when you interact with not just the public, but your colleagues and associates in the various Ministries and Government Agencies.

Our goal, our mission really, is to ensure that the services which we provide are easily accessible to every citizen regardless of race, religion and region. It should not matter where you live or who you are, we should be able to deliver our services at the smallest inconvenience to you, the customers. We owe the people of our nation services of the highest possible quality at the lowest cost, with the least inconvenience.

Those of you who choose a career in the public service will be part of a new career-development process in a new structure or a new human resource architecture that will give you great freedom to excel and more scope for upward mobility. We call this the Journey from Gold to Diamond that will lead to a 21<sup>st</sup> Century citizen-centric public service.

Your role in the Public Service, those of you who become part of it and stay for the long haul, would eventually be one of leadership. You will be the ones actually driving the process along the path of professionalism and high performance. We have improved the learning experience, we are creating a supportive environment for growth and maturity, and we will use the diversity that you represent to pursue and achieve innovations.

Another area of interest to you that I know that you all will excel in is our quest to ignite the innovation spirit in public servants. About two weeks ago, we teamed up with CARIRI to initiate a deliberate programme of encouraging innovation and creativity using a process called the Medici Effect.

I notice that many of you here are arts, humanities, management, education and engineering graduates. While some of you may not have studied the Renaissance you should all be aware of the term Renaissance Man or Renaissance person. A Renaissance person is someone, no longer just men only, who spans the many different fields of learning and makes connections that take the world into new directions and new spheres of achievement and endeavour.

The key to this technique in practice as it will be applied to the Public Service, is that we will use the diversity that is the hallmark of Trinidad and Tobago, which you represent, – diversity in races, religions, skills and talents – and build on the already existing platform of invention and innovation for which we are famous to improve the services we offer and

the environment in which we operate. Don't forget, we are the inventors of the steelpan.

At the level of the public service as a whole, while we in the Ministry of Public Administration are trying our best to get you employed in your fields of study as soon as you return, the system has not yet changed sufficiently to accommodate the speed at which the Government is working.

We have identified the medium and long-term needs of this country in all aspects of sustainable development and have paid special attention to the human resources and the diversity of skills we will require for national development. The scholarship programme is a key building-block of that sustainable future.

Last night, as I made my contribution to the Budget debate I spoke about Scholarships. Allow me to say now that we spend close to \$300Million per year on scholarships. These are taxpayers' dollars, and for this reason, we must ensure a reasonable rate of return on that investment of these taxpayers' dollars.

As a consequence of this we have to ensure that you are aligned to the developmental needs of Trinidad and Tobago. However, we also have the responsibility to ensure that we not only maximize the development potential of Trinidad and Tobago, but we must maximize **your** development potential.

This is why we are developing and revising many policies with regards to the Scholarships. One of the policies is

Placement, and we are looking at revising our Placement Policy to ensure that your placement, whether in the Private Sector or Public Service will maximize your potential and the nation's potential. At the end of the day, it is the country that matters.

However, even in the Public Service there are bottlenecks. What is difficult to understand or accept is that the number of scholars actually being recruited into vacant established positions or contract employment in the Public Service is significantly low - something we are working on. The majority of scholars continue to be employed through the Associate Professionals (AP) Programme and that only guarantees employment for a year.

The public sector is where you are most likely to encounter the “Youth Versus Experience” dilemma. Young people like you graduating from University, returning to your homeland expecting to find work, and are then rejected because you lack experience. This begs the question, “If you cannot get a job where will the experience come from?” How else do you gain experience?

The other problem you face is what they call “overqualified”. Either you are “overqualified” or “lack experience”. At the same time we keep hearing of the many opportunities and the number of jobs that are available in the private sector. Minister Howai referred to this situation in the opening of the Budget Debate.

However, on closer examinations these jobs seem to be available only in the unskilled category or in the fast food sector. There is no doubt that you are overqualified for this. But when you apply for higher level jobs even at the entry level for professionals, you are then told that you lack the experience for the higher level jobs. Were it not for this Government and our concern for the future, you would not have even gotten the scholarships or the guarantee of jobs for a year.

How do we expedite this acquisition of experience? For those of you joining our Associate Professional Programme, we intend to expedite the acquisition of experience. We have launched the Professional Development Programme. The MPA has listened to comments from scholars and it is for

this reason, that we have revised and enhanced the Professional Development Program for scholars like you. The PDP is intended to assist you in building competencies critical to achieving work and organizational goals. The primary activities include:

- Developing skillsets in project management, interpersonal communication, and teamwork.
- Identifying your competency strengths and areas of improvement that would have a direct and future impact on current and future work performance; and
- Developing your Individual Development Plans (IDPs) to manage competency strengths and areas of improvement. These areas will also be used to develop your individual mentorship framework. In a nutshell, we

are providing you with the skills, tools and other requisites to perform better.

If you have the same people doing the same things at the same time, you might have stability but you may not have innovation. There is not enough diversity for a true Medici effect. If you settle down into an ongoing state of complacency, then you will not be competitive. I believe that the private and state sectors need to rethink their hiring practices.

They need to rethink the role of young professionals and the need to invest in them for the dynamism and new knowledge, the skills and competencies they bring to a business. We have to encourage all our state agencies and

private organizations to bring back Graduate Training Programmes.

I have seen businesses that are still laboriously filling out receipts by hand and faxing documents because they are not even in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century far less the 21<sup>st</sup>. There is no limit to the value that young, competent, computer-savvy and personable young people, like yourselves, will add to their businesses.

### **Scholars must become entrepreneurs**

I want to try out a challenge for you today. My dream is that scholars like yourself become the owners of your destiny and how do you do this? One step towards independence is by becoming your own boss! The research illustrates that

creating a cadre of entrepreneurs is the fastest means of attaining sustainable economic growth. I would like to share with you a few facts on the role of entrepreneurs and small businesses in stimulating the economy. According to the Economist (2011),

- The majority of new jobs are created by entrepreneurs and small businesses. This is across all jurisdictions.
- Small high growth companies account for 70% of economic growth over the last decade.
- Entrepreneurship drives competitiveness at the domestic and international levels.
- Entrepreneurship accounts for at least two thirds of all technological innovation that is, 50% of all incremental innovation and 95% of all radical innovation.

It is simply for these reasons, why I would like to see Trinidad and Tobago's best and brightest as the entrepreneurs that will take this country to highest levels of economic and social growth.

### **Equipping you for the world of work**

We learnt from previous Associate Professionals that despite their attempts to get interviews or jobs, they were not being called for the interviews even though they met or exceeded the requirements. They go for the interviews and then never receive feedback. Or, if they do, it is that they were not selected.

What we have also learnt from the scholars is that some of them are not familiar with the interviewing process and how

to design and present their CVs to maximize their value. This is why the MPA has designed this symposium to improve your ability to market yourselves.

This is the first of this kind. In previous years we would actually have areas where Ministries were present to be here with you and talk to you; sometimes we had participants from the private sector. Having learnt from our past feedback, we have changed the format.

As part of that process you will be guided with respect to effective resume writing and be prepared for the interviewing process. We are also going to introduce you to good workplace behaviours that will help to make you more attractive to employers and much more employable.

Today and tomorrow we will put you through a process that will help you understand professional image management and office protocol, competency-based interviews and possible questions that you might be asked by an interviewing panel, basic career advisory information and an opportunity to practice responding to competency based questions. A “mock” exam so to speak.

We also hope that you will take the opportunity for one-on-one sessions with our resource persons from the GHRS to further develop your skills in interviewing, resume writing, personality assessment, career planning and self-development.

We have also added a special module in “Professional Image Management” which will focus on understanding office protocol, creating and maintaining a professional image and reputation, understanding the importance of effective communication (both written and non-verbal) and being an effective agent for change.

The fact is that we see you all as agents of change but to be credible you have to be consistent. If you want to change other people you have to be able to change yourself. Change starts with you, the person and the professional. You have to take the first step in the change process if you want to get your foot on the first rung of the ladder of professional success.

In the process, one of the things you have to understand is that a degree by itself is no guarantee of success. It is not an instant passport into the world of work or a career. You have to seek out the opportunities and then carve out a career.

I must congratulate all of you; you are all made of the right stuff. You deserve a round of applause for your scholastic achievements. You have all made a name for yourselves and have helped to raise even higher our reputation for excellence in scholarship and education. Trinidad and Tobago is proud of you all. The problem now is for us, the MPA and you to find your foothold in the world of work and to help you work your way up the ladder.

I am sure that what you will go through in the next two days will be of inestimable value to you and I want to thank my staff in the Scholarship Division of the Ministry, the Executive Management led by our Permanent Secretary, the GHRS and the Ministry of Labour, Small and Micro Enterprise Development for all that they have contributed to make this Symposium a success.

In closing, I want to challenge all of you here today to set goals for yourselves and to excel wherever you are placed, regardless of whether it is an area of study. Many of you may say that this was not an area of study – please go with an open mind. Re-immersion into your own country is as hard as your initial immersion in a foreign country. You have changed and the country has changed. Don't be discouraged

if you feel disoriented, displaced or disappointed. This is natural. The key is to know who you are, what you want and what you need to do to get where you want to be. There is no one-size fits-all recipe for success. It is something that you have to customize for yourself.

I would like to remind you of the old adage, “those of whom much is given, much is expected.” In our society today we are surrounded by too much negativity. As this country’s best and brightest, I want to urge you all not to get caught up in these distractions. I want to challenge you all here today, to commit to improving the quality of life we enjoy in Trinidad and Tobago. You are the builders and keepers of the next generation. Form yourselves into think tanks (like the

Bill Gates, Steve Jobs, Guy Kawasaki of the Silicon Valley)  
and drive the radical innovation revolution in this country!

In the year, 2022, most of you will be in your 30s – develop a road map for yourself and I encourage you to put your country first in whatever you do! It is your generation that will propel this country to first world status. Go forth and innovate, this is where you can make your mark!

I thank you all and may God bless all of you.