



GOVERNMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO  
ADDRESS BY THE HONOURABEL KAMLA PERSAD BISSESSAR  
PRIME MINISTER OF THE REPUBLIC OF TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO  
ON THE OCCASION OF THE EMANCIPTION DAY

## **TOGETHER WE STAND**

### **Salutations:**

- Cabinet and Parliamentary Colleagues
- Mr. Khafra Kambon, and Executive Members of the Emancipation Support Committee
- Members of the Diplomatic Corps
- Distinguished Guests
- Members of the Media
- Celebrants of today's procession
- Ladies and Gentlemen

Good Morning [pause and smile]

As I look out into the sea of colour, charisma, and character, I think Oh what a beautiful people we are; I think of what a blessed Nation we are, to be standing here together, side by side, hand in hand, in commemoration and celebration of an event that has touched us all, and has impacted on our generations. We stand together in commemoration of the 173<sup>rd</sup> anniversary of Emancipation in our nation and the 19<sup>th</sup> year of the Emancipation Support Committee's dedicated production of this festival.

Our commemoration this year is even more momentous, as we celebrate within the context of 2011 being declared by the United Nations as the International Year of People of African Descent.

### **International Year of People of African Descent:**

As you know, on 18 December 2009, the UN General Assembly proclaimed the year beginning on 1 January 2011 the **International Year for People of African Descent**. The Year aims at strengthening National Action and Regional and International cooperation for the benefit of people of African descent. And what does this mean? This includes their full enjoyment of economic, cultural, social, civil and political rights, participation and integration in all political, economic, social and cultural aspects of society, and the promotion of a greater knowledge of and respect for your diverse heritage and culture.

You may know or may not know that over 200 million people who identify themselves as being of African descent live in the Americas. Many millions more live in other parts of the world, outside of the African continent.

In proclaiming this International Year, the international community is recognising that people of African descent represent a distinct group whose human rights must be promoted and protected.

The main objective of the Year is to raise awareness of the challenges facing people of African descent. It is hoped that the Year will bring discussions that will generate proposals for solutions to tackle these challenges.

Recognition has long been made of the need to raise awareness and promote a deep understanding of the lasting consequences of slavery and the Slave Trade.

The commemorative year gives us an opportunity to remember and to note with gratitude, the contribution of the African ancestors to our economic, social and cultural heritage.

We are today enjoying the fruits of the struggles of our ancestors and the foundations laid down by them in spite of great deprivation and denial. **But as we acknowledge the dark and bright pages of history, let us be clear about one thing and that is whilst some countries in the world continue to practice different forms of slavery, we in T&T have become a model to the world where all our people live in harmony, side by side, where equal opportunities have become a process, where our constitution provides for the rights and freedoms of all, where education is the right of every person and where freedom of association is the law of our land. One testimony this is that configured by ethnic and gender considerations. And I've seen the women here today; I have read the placards that they carry; the women they ask me to share with them and we will rise together. Mother I hear you and we will do what we can to take care of you. As I stand before you this day in celebration translates more than the spoken word can tell.**

My Sisters and Brothers, as I stated at the official launch of the commemorative year, the Government of our land intends to develop, through partnership with various key stakeholders, a Programme of activities, **not just to recognize the UN declaration, but to construct a platform by which the meaning of 2011 will live for generations to come.**

May I report to you briefly that we have appointed a multi-stakeholder team to formulate a National Plan of Action for Trinidad and Tobago, involving the Ministry of Arts and Multiculturalism, the Ministry of Education, the National Library and Information System Authority, the University of the West Indies, the Tobago House of Assembly, the National Joint Action Committee, the Emancipation Support Committee, the United Nations Development Programme, the United Nations Information Centre and the National Commission for UNESCO.

This joint team together with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Communications hosted a series of meetings to formulate a national programme of activities around the theme "Retention, Recognition, Respect and Development". The Multi-stakeholder team has recognised the importance of creating a lasting impression on future generations, so these initiatives can continue into the future.

Friends and family all, I am very pleased to share that the committee has devised a methodology of action to be constituency based, widening the scope of the commemoration throughout Trinidad and Tobago. These amongst many other contributions will be undertaken as our continued demonstration of the recognition of this very historic and significant commemorative year.

### **Emancipation Support Committee:**

As you know, together with this special year, this year marks the 19<sup>th</sup> **anniversary** of the Emancipation Support Committee's production and staging of this very momentous calendar of events. We can all appreciate that the planning, coordination and cost, to stage such an event necessitates dedication beyond the call of duty **which must be** recognised and applauded. Today I ask you to join with me as I congratulate the efforts of the Emancipation Support Committee and in particular, Brother Khafra Kambon and his team.

As a **testament** to this recognition, I have requested the convening of an inter-Ministerial committee charged with the review of all festival based commemorations, with a view to ensuring that matters of funding, and production will be managed as a matter of course, and no longer as a matter of last minute interventions. No longer shall our citizens and our brothers and sisters working toward ensuring our various multi cultural and multi ethnic festivals and events, be beholden to await word at the very final minute on the Government's proposed subventions.

We stand committed to the success of this intervention and my Minister of Arts and Multiculturalism, Minister Winston "Gypsy" Peters will head this very special committee to ensure you get the funding and you need at the appropriate time.

Whilst I say we've done these things at the government level, I have also heard the cry of Brother Khafra Kambon for a permanent place for the Emancipation Support Committee. I believe it is a just call. The heritage of all ethnicities and cultures must be preserved in our land where every creed and race must find an equal place. It is important that we do so such that generations to come would not only get a sense of their history and ancestry but in addition will draw upon the rich cultural traditions to ensure that our society and our nation of the future will have strong moral and spiritual foundations. I am of the respectful view brothers and sisters, this will not happen unless we take concrete steps to ensure that it happens.

Recently, I promised the Baptists that they would build their long-awaited school with the help of our Government; I have also announced the development of a Ramleela Centre. I am working with the Islamic community who today begin their fast in the month of Ramadan; we are working with them to identify appropriate mechanisms for their activities. The Divali Nagar has become a centre for Indian culture and its expression but it is not enough. In Trinidad and Tobago all cultures must be equally recognised and facilitated. This is why I established for the first time, a Ministry of Arts and Multiculturalism because according to the words of our anthem, every creed and race must find an equal place. No culture must be left back. This is how we are going to build a society where the principles of equity and fairness are demonstrated, principles to which I am committed and your government is committed.

And so this evening, I want to assure you as I want to assure the Emancipation Support Committee, that your cries have not fallen on deaf ears and today I declare that my Government will work with you to find a permanent home for the Emancipation Support Committee. And this shall be a place which shall preserve the African cultural traditions, this shall be a place of learning and history and this shall be a place as a reminder that Trinidad and Tobago continues to lead the way not only in terms of the celebration of Emancipation and freedom from slavery but that our land is also the place that leads the way in ensuring the dignity of human beings everywhere.

This shall be a place also to stand as an important symbol of our country's historical and cultural affinity to Africa and help to develop our trade and economic relations and cultural relations even further.

### **Together We Stand:**

As you are aware, we stand together here this day in the face of a number of challenges facing our beloved land. These challenges that hold the potential to take our nation into a number of different directions; these challenges take me back to the recollection of the challenges faced by our ancestors; such challenges remind me of the necessity to demonstrate strength of conviction, to remind us all of the

importance of banding together as a people to ensure that our Nation's brotherhood and sisterhood are placed as paramount.

I am reminded **that** the many fights shared by our brothers and sisters, as they endured great peril to enjoy the taste of freedom which often times, times we take for granted, and forget what our ancestors have endured to bring us to this point in our nation's history.

Today then as we celebrate Emancipation Day today, I call on our Nation, never to forget the experiences of our past, for they shape the experiences of our future! Let us never embrace collision, for that is the food of chaos! Let us stand together to ensure that as a people and a Nation, we walk together step by step towards the future **for which our ancestors fought**; the future for which some paid with their lives.

As you celebrate today, and you make the joyful sounds, and you beat the powerful drums, and you walk and dance together through the streets in merry celebration, I respectfully ask you **never to forget** the spirits of the ancestors **in strengthening** the fabric that binds us together. **Always remember** that they made clear the path that we now have to follow, that they release in our minds the passion of conviction, and that they guide us as we stand together.

**Closing:**

As I close, I recall the words of our own Brother Kambon: "Sometimes you under-perform because of what you think about yourself. If you don't believe in your capacity, you don't try, you don't fight against the obstacles, you don't fight against the difficulties.... Instead of it becoming a challenge to overcome, it becomes a confirmation!"

Bother Kambon I salute you and the committee. I salute every citizen of this land of African heritage as I say to you Happy Emancipation, May God continue to bless you each and every one of you, and May God Bless our Nation.

**END.**