



CONSULATE GENERAL OF THE REPUBLIC OF TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO
NEW YORK

Media Release

CONSUL GENERAL IN NEW YORK HOSTS DIVALI CELEBRATION

Mrs. Rudrawatee Nan Ramgoolam, Consul General for the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago hosted a Divali Celebration at the Consulate's premises in downtown New York on the evening before Divali. Invited guests included Consul Generals from the Caribbean Community based in New York, Trinidad and Tobago Diaspora, US government officials and friends of the Consulate. The programme was a collaborative initiative with the Shiva Mandir in Richmond Hills, Queens, New York, who illustrated the meaning of Divali through bhajans and classical Indian dance. Guests were invited to join the Consul General in lighting deeyas and partaking in a traditional Trinidad and Tobago Divali dinner. Contributions were also received from Deo Gosine and the New York Alliance Sports and Cultural Club.

In addressing guests, Mrs Ramgoolam described the importance of Divali in Trinidad and Tobago and expressed an interest in engaging the Trinidad and Tobago Diaspora in New York.

The Consul General's Divali Message

"I take this opportunity to specially welcome each and every one of you to the Consulate of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago. To many of us present, the Consulate is the nexus between our place of birth and our adopted home. And for this and many other reasons we are eternally grateful that you have taken the time to join with us here this evening to celebrate and mark the auspicious occasion of Divali, the festival of Lights.

Many or all of us know that on Wednesday, 26th October, 2011 over one billion Hindus around the world will be celebrating Divali, also referred to as the festival of lights. Divali in the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago is a public holiday and as a result, this office will be closed

tomorrow to mark this very important day in our calendar. This evening, therefore, on the eve of Divali we have gathered here to celebrate this auspicious occasion, to note its significance to the people who celebrate this festival, as well as to underscore the many universal lessons this celebration has contributed to mankind as a whole. Divali, my dear friends has much significance to the people of India and the Indian Diaspora around the world and this is inclusive of those of us who reside in the United States of America and by extension New York State. This occasion marks the start of the Hindu New Year and many merchants use this day as their fiscal year. But according to Hindu mythology Divali represents the celebration of good over evil when Sita, the wife of Lord Rama was rescued from the evil clutches of Ravan and returned to her husband. It also marks the couple's return to their kingdom of Ayodha after fourteen years of banishment into the forest and to welcome them home the people of Ayodha lit their return path with small clay receptacles called diyas. Many also observe this occasion to celebrate the end of fall and give thanks for a bountiful harvest. Hence the belief that Divali is a celebration of good over evil, light over darkness and wealth and prosperity. Our Revered Pundit will illuminate us more on the significance of Divali when he shares his Divali message with us later in the programme.

Ladies and gentlemen, in Trinidad and Tobago Divali is celebrated with great pump and festivity. In her Divali Message to citizens of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on the 15th October, 2011, our beloved Prime Minister, the Honourable Kamla Persad Bissessar had this to say and I quote:

"It is very important for us to celebrate our festivals. In so doing, it helps us to gain an understanding of ourselves as a multi-cultural, multi-ethnic and multi-religious society. Our diversity is in fact one of our greatest strengths, for it allows us to introduce so many different perspectives in forging our vision and in the solution of our problems. Truly, through our diversity we give each other and to the society our best gifts."

In celebrating this important festival my dear friends, Hindus in Trinidad and Tobago and the world over pay particular attention to the cleaning of their homes and surroundings. They invite friends and relatives to gather together in worship and to give thanks to Mother Lakshmi and Lord Ganesh; the former representing the symbol of light and the giver of wealth and prosperity

while the latter represents the remover of all obstacles. This celebration is then followed by greetings, the giving of gifts and fellowship.

And so on behalf of the Government and people of Trinidad and Tobago, and in particular, our staff at the Consulate and myself, I take this opportunity to wish each and every one of us a very happy, holy and blessed Divali. Further, may Mother Lakshmi bestow on each of us her choicest blessings, and may her light illuminate and enrich all our lives. We also ask Lord Ganesh to remove all obstacles in our path and instill in us a sense of hope and service to all humanity.

I extend to you Shubh Divali!”



Consul General, Mrs Ramgoolam, addressing guests



Consul General and CARICOM Colleagues lighting deeyas with Pundit Sharma Maharaj, Shiva Mandir



Consul General and staff at the Consulate singing a Divali bhajan



Esther J. Ramdeen and kirtan group from Shiva Mandir