

**Trinidad and Tobago:  
Our Journey to Independence**

Remarks at the

**Launch of an Exhibition Commemorating  
50 years of Independence**

by

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*May 15, 2012*

Salutations

I am very pleased to welcome you to the launch of our exhibition, to commemorate our fiftieth anniversary of political independence. We have titled the exhibition “Trinidad and Tobago: Journey to Independence”, a journey, whose beginning is difficult to precisely define, but whose final lap was clearly dominated by Dr. Eric Eustace Williams, our first Prime Minister, and **recognized by many as, the Father of the Nation.**

I am particularly pleased to have in our audience, this evening, fifteen students from Queens Royal College, Dr. Williams’ alma mater. To us, you are representative of the youth of our nation to whom Dr. Williams paid particular attention when he celebrated the attainment of Independence in August 1962.

Ladies and gentlemen, we are very proud and excited about this exhibition. We hope that the exhibition prompts our nation to reflect on our road to independence and on the many persons and events that marked that road. We hope that the re-creation of the journey to independence will remind our society of the many things that unite us

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and keep us together as a nation. We hope that the story will help us recommit to some of the principles our nation embraced at Independence – things like multi-party democracy, religious tolerance and respect for human rights.

And above all, we hope that this exhibition will remind our youth of the challenge that was laid down to them at Independence.

In case you don't know the story, kids, on the day before Independence, Dr. Eric Williams delivered one of his most historic speeches to the school children of our nation. While the speech was directed to the young people of that time it remains as relevant today as it was when it was delivered.

In that speech, delivered in a rally at the Queens Park Oval on August 30, 1962, Dr. Williams told the youth that,

*“To your tender loving hands the future of the nation is entrusted: on your scholastic achievement, the salvation of the nation is dependent; in your innocent hearts the pride of the Nation is enshrined. He continued “when you return to your classes after Independence, remember (therefore) each and every one of you, **that you carry the future of Trinidad and Tobago in your school bags”.***

The message is equally relevant today - Yours is the responsibility to make this nation the best that it could be.

Let me underscore, ladies and gentlemen, that our exhibition is about **Trinidad and Tobago's journey towards independence** and while the main pilot of that journey was Dr. Williams, there were others who did not simply go along for the ride, but who made sterling contributions to the birth of our new nation. We have tried to identify and recognise these individuals, though in some cases, it has been difficult to obtain appropriate exhibits.

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The exhibition recognizes, for example, the work of **Captain Arthur Andrew Cipriani** who started the political mobilization of the working classes in the 1920s before handing over, to the likes of **Uriah Butler, Adrian Cola Rienzi, Sarran Teelucksingh** and **Timothy Roodal**, all of whom played a major role in enlightening the masses and thereby helping to construct the road to independence.

Because of constraints of material and space, the exhibition focuses disproportionately on the final march to independence – the period following the collapse of the West Indian Federation when Dr. Williams introduced his political mathematics that *“one from ten leaves nought”*.

From this moment, Trinidad and Tobago opted for the fast-track to national independence, with the major stop on the way being the Constitutional Conference on Independence for Trinidad and Tobago, held at Marlborough House, London on May 28, 1962.

The exhibition identifies and salutes the Honour Roll of Delegates at this historic Conference. Their names are listed on a scroll that occupies a prominent place in the exhibition.

Among the seventeen representatives were, on the government side, **Dr. Williams, Sir Learie Constantine and Mr. Wilfred Alexander** and representing the Opposition were, **Dr. Rudranath Capildeo, Mr. Lionel Seukeran, Mr. Ashford Sinanan and Mr. Tajmool Hosein**. The Government Advisors included **Sir Ellis Clarke and Mr. George Richards** (the father of our current President, Sir George Maxwell Richards).

Ladies and gentlemen, we owe these delegates - all seventeen of them - an enormous debt of gratitude, for guiding the ship of state to the safe harbour of independence.

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From all reports, the negotiations were difficult and not always harmonious. Indeed, the issues were contentious having to do with the protection of minority rights, impartiality in civil service appointments and guarantees for the conduct of free and fair elections.

What is significant, however, is that, in the end, with **Messrs. Tajmool Hosein and Lionel Seukeran** playing the role of conciliators, partisan differences were overcome in order to arrive at a landmark agreement that paved the way for independence. It should be a lesson to all of us.

In fact, when the British Minister of State for Colonial Affairs addressed the Parliament on the bill that granted Trinidad and Tobago, its independence, he offered the following tribute-

*“The determination of the Prime Minister, Dr. Williams and the Leader of the Opposition, Dr. Capildeo to work together to unite the people in one nation has been a prime factor in allaying the anxieties of minority groups and generally in reducing racial tension”.*

Dr. Williams, himself, in his Independence Day Address noted that *“the Constitution itself, Independence itself, represent the agreement of our two political parties on the fundamental question of national unity”.*

For all of us who were around, **Friday August 31<sup>st</sup> 1962** was a most memorable day. It was the day when the Union Jack, the British flag, was lowered and British rule finally came to an end. Simultaneously, our red, white and black flag was hoisted for the first time amidst the chorus **“Forged from the Love of Liberty”**.

August 31, 1962 was a day of shared excitement when; a wave of national pride overwhelmed the country. It was also a day when we gave thanks to our God, our

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divinities, and to our forefathers for guiding us along the long winding road. They had not worked in vain and we were the proud recipients of all of their toil and sweat.

Today we take special pride in recognizing three patriots who were members of Parliament on that historic day – August 31, 1962. They are:

- Mr. Kamaluddin Mohammed,
- Mr. A.N.R. Robinson, and
- Mr. Balgobin Ramdeen.

Mr. Ramdeen originally an Educator and Newspaper Editor acquired a reputation as champion of the down-trodden in the 1950's. He was elected a Member of Parliament for one of the three Caroni seats in the 1961 elections and served from 1961 – 1966.

In 2011, a documentary aired on the Parliamentary Channel lauded Mr. Ramdeen's contribution to nation building.

We are particularly pleased to have Mr. Balgobin Ramdeen, as one of our special guests.

Our exhibition seeks to capture the excitement of our journey to independence. It focuses on Dr. Williams because, in the final analysis, his energetic and imaginative leadership was instrumental in making that Independence Day possible. He was not the only one but in moments of history the leader gets the credit or the blame.

However, we must never forget the countless others without whom this day would not have been possible. It is with the deepest admiration and humility that we recognize the supporting cast without whose contributions, we would have been a different people and a lesser nation.

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I close with a passing reference to an article I saw in the newspaper two days ago.... in which the author lamented that the 50<sup>th</sup> Independence celebrations may not stir the patriotism and positive feelings from citizens who know little about the momentous events leading up to Independence.

We at the Central Bank really hope that our exhibition – Trinidad and Tobago: Journey to Independence, helps fill that void, so as to rekindle that patriotism.

I thank you for your presence and I hope you enjoy our exhibition.