

ANNOUNCEMENT

Mr Chairperson: Ladies and Gentlemen, we have today the immense pleasure to welcome three officials from the Tobago House of Assembly namely:-

- (i) Mrs. Anne Mitchell-Gift, the Presiding Officer;
- (ii) Miss Cynthia Alfred, the Deputy Chief Secretary and Secretary for Community Affairs; and
- (iii) Ms Shirley Henry Charles, the Clerk of the Assembly.

I do understand that they are present here today in the context of the “*Festival Creole*” and they are accompanied by 2 Drummers who are actually performing in Rodrigues. We first and foremost have to thank them for having accepted the invitation of the Executive Council to address this Assembly today.

Together with some Members of this Assembly, I have had the privilege to meet these officials back in their home in Tobago during our visit there. I can say that the welcome we had had, was really beyond our expectations. This is shared with all of us who went there. Our visits in Tobago have been fruitful and enriching. There are many issues which have attracted the interests of the delegation from here, may be I can cite some of them; their International Airport that can accommodate big aircrafts, their decision to purchase and run tourism projects and probably most importantly the issue of allocation of financial resources that have been resolved there.

In a nutshell we have been able to have an onsite and in depth examination on how their political autonomy is actually working and how beneficial it has been to Tobago in general and to all its inhabitants.

We had had useful talks with the three officials who are presently here today and others back in Tobago including Hon. Orville London, the Chief Secretary. I am very thankful to Mrs. Gift who had arranged and allowed the Chief Commissioner and me, as Chairperson, to address all the members in their Assembly Chamber back in Scarborough, Tobago.

Lastly, I would add that the Presiding Officer and the Deputy Chief Secretary would become the first foreigners that would be addressing this Assembly in a minute. I thank you very much for your attention. Thank You.

I now invite the Presiding Officer to come forward for her speech.

**ADDRESS BY MRS. ANNE MITCHELL GIFT AND
MISS CYNTHIA ALFRED**

Mrs Anne Mitchell Gift:

Mr Joseph Lamvohee, Chairperson,
Mr Johnson Roussety, Chief Commissioner,
Deputy Chief Commissioner,
Other Commissioners,
Deputy Chairperson,
The Minority Leader,
Honourable Members of the National Assembly,
Members of the Regional Assembly,
Other Members,

Good Morning. I am not even sure what time of the day it is. We are very happy to be here today. Actually we left our own Assembly Day celebrations on the 4th of December and got here some time in the mid hours of this morning. But we are here, ready to go and we are very grateful for the opportunity to be here. In fact we are right here in the Rodrigues following your kind invitation; they have us here and have us address your Assembly.

During the recent visit we did say that we will pursue our already initiated contacts and we would try to further enhance the association we have between the Tobago House of Assembly and the Rodrigues Regional Assembly, particularly, as we are very conscious of the fact that the Tobago Assembly Act and the Standing Orders have been used and some of the guidelines which you would have adopted when you initiated your own Assembly in 2002. I am sure that you would remember that our Assembly was reincarnated because we didn't have a Tobago House of the Assembly years ago. In 1980, that was the Act in 1980, was established the present House of the Assembly. This Act was revised in 1996 and, since, we note the only thing which in constant is "change". We are presently collecting views in the process of another revision of the Tobago House Assembly Act. As we review the Act we are also looking at the Constitution of Trinidad and Tobago because I am sure you would really appreciate that the Constitution would affect the implementation of the clauses within the Act.

I wish to bring you greetings from the entire Tobago House of Assembly and so as to renew the acquaintances of some of the names, which I know, people we have met during the visit. I would like to start with the greetings from the Chief Secretary, Mr Orville London. Fortunately, he is ably represented here by the Deputy Chief Secretary, Miss Cynthia Alfred whom we will hear in a while. I also extend greetings

from our Leader of the Assembly business, Mr. Hilton Sandy, whom some will remember. Then we have the Minority Leader, Mr. Ashworth Jack and the Chief Administrator asked me to extend a special greeting on his behalf I refer to all the other numerous persons whom you would have focused during your visit to us in September. With our delegation today, we have included at your request two accomplished panists and we are sure that most of you will not have heard it because of the interest shown in the pan movement. You would have the opportunity of seeing and hearing from two of our very accomplished panists. I also need to tell you that the Tobago House of Assembly has decided that because of the interest shown in the pan movement, we have decided to start off by donating two pans, two, to the Rodrigues Regional Assembly.

(Applause)

The pans which you, therefore, shall be hearing are your pans and the boys will teach you how to play those pans and how to keep those pans because I need to warn you that they are very delicate instruments and since you do not have a tuner on board we need to make sure that they are not put out of tune or they might not sounds full tune. So, be warned that you need to treat the pans carefully.

I would have mentioned earlier that we left on what is the Tobago House of Assembly we called it, Assembly Day. In 2003, the Executive Council of the Assembly decided that we should put aside this one day, when we would focused on the works of the Assembly. Like you, we are struggling for autonomy and we continue to need all the help and the support we can of all Members. We must have as many Members on board as possible particularly in all activities. This day is really then, to attempt to focus on the workings of the Assembly. When we initiated the first Assembly Day in 2003, we established one logo that would be used throughout because at that time there were various logos used. Since we are using versions of one of the former logos used as I said during our former Assembly.

So, we established a standard logo, we established colours to be used which are standard to assembly colours and we choosed blue, green and yellow and these colours are also reflected in our logo. We sensitised the schools. So, we had programmes in the schools to have their interest attracted. We had cultural programmes like you know it very well, in our culture. So, we did have cultural programmes, exhibition and generally just try to collect, get the people together because of their views and I know that I speak for all of you, this is a continuous struggle. A big brother or a little sister of a big brother, trying to get as much autonomy as we can from the bigger state within the unitary state because it is always a very suspicious and the suspicion reveals that we are trying to take over. So, the more people we would have helped to understand what we are trying to do, the better we are to succeed in our efforts.

So, that's one of the things we had been doing. It's one of the things that I have said, we usually spread over a couple of days. So, the main day is on the 4th December in 1980. Why did we choose the 4th day of December? In 1980 the first Assembly was inaugurated on the Thursday 4th of December. So, we decided to use that day as a day we would focused on, where we would showcase the effort of the Assembly and trying to educate people and trying to get people on board and those who are spreading suspicion, what we are trying to do, is to get better autonomy so that we would be more in control of all our affairs.

I am sure that like us, this is what the Rodrigues Regional Assembly is all about. So we are very happy that we have contributed and will continue to contribute to the growth and the development of the Rodrigues Assembly. We know that we are going to have a very fruitful visit and we therefore look forward to continuing relations and relationship between the Tobago House of Assembly and the Rodrigues Regional Assembly.

Thank you very much for having us there.

(Applause)

Mr Chairperson: Thank you very much Mrs. Gift, the Presiding Officer from the Tobago House of the Assembly who is the Chairperson equivalent there. I now have the pleasure to invite Miss Cynthia Alfred to come forward for her address.

Miss Cynthia Alfred: *Bonjour Monsieur, Madame.*

Chairperson, Mr. Chen Lye Lamvohee,
Chief Commissioner, Mr. Johnson Roussety,
Deputy Chief Commissioner, Mr. Gaetan Jabeemissar,
Commissioners,
Deputy Chairperson, Mrs. Lordana Meunier,
Minority Leader,
Honourable Members of the National Assembly,
Member of the Regional Assembly,
Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

“Mo ena gran plaisir zordi dans zot joli ti ile Rodrigues”.

(Applause)

It is indeed a pleasure to be here in the beautiful Island of Rodrigues and for this little bit of French and Creole, I have to thank the Honourable Joseph Christian Leopold, member of the National Assembly for that.

I am very happy indeed, like Mrs. Gift, the Presiding Officer to be here in your really beautiful island of Rodrigues. Rodrigues remind us very much of Tobago, it is beautiful and we look forward to see even more of this lovely island.

I just want to talk a little bit on Tobago. Tobago is 116 square miles and the topography is almost the same as here. Here is perhaps a little more hilly. In the northern part of Tobago, North and East we have some more hills and in the western side we have a flatter region but basically it is the same as Rodrigues. Tourism is our main economic benefit and I must say that for four straight years the Tobago has won the best eco tourism destination in the world, that is at the international level.

(Applause)

We have as the Presiding Officer mentioned, a Chief Secretary, Mr. Orville London and I am the Deputy Chief Secretary. One may ask what the Deputy Secretary does? Of course, the Deputy Chief Secretary deputizes for the Chief Secretary at times. So, if the Chief Secretary leaves the country then the Deputy may take over or the Chief Secretary may ask the Deputy Secretary to deputize for him in Trinidad on some small matters.

We have an Executive Council which is virtually like a Cabinet of the Central Government. So, in the Executive Council including the Chief Secretary, there are nine Secretaries and four Assistant Secretaries. So, we have different portfolios. Apart from being Deputy Chief Secretary, I am also the Secretary of the Community Development and Culture. We have Education, Youth and Sports, Health and Social Services, Infrastructure and Public Utilities and so on. Now what is my role as the Secretary of Community Development and Culture? Well as the name, the words Community Development suggest, we are in a business of developing the communities in Tobago.

Tobago is relatively small as you would recognize being 116 square miles and we have about 80 small communities. Interestingly at first we said there were 36 villages and that went to 48 and then when we were doing an exercise some few weeks ago, we started to go into the smaller areas, we recognized that there would be about 40 smaller communities.

So, when we said about the business of going into the communities and reaching the communities rather than going to say 48 villages, we are going to 80 communities

throughout Tobago. So, when we have completed any particular exercise we would then be satisfied that we have covered the entire Tobago.

We started a programme about three months ago called the ABCD Programme (Asset Based Community Development). What we are focusing on that? It is to find out all the skills that people have in various communities. When we will have discovered these skills, when we will have determined through, that the people in communities will tell us, as well as the groups, when we will have got all the information we will be in a better position to deal with the communities as they are.

In other words, over the years, we will have done certain things to develop the communities but we came up with this idea that if we were to find out from the people in the Communities, what they have, what they would like to do, how they would like to improve their skills which will be done through this programme, the ABCD Programme. Then, we would have a better idea on how to go about the further development of Tobago. Our Chief Secretary, has an expression that he uses “*developing Tobagonians in a developing Tobago*”, because we recognize that our main asset is our people, the human element and therefore, it is good to have a physical infrastructure. But if we do not develop our people to even surpass the physical infrastructure, then, we will not have done what we were meant to do; which is to develop the potentials in the people of Tobago.

As Secretary of Culture, our culture is mixed, it is diverse and we have a sort of carnival every January and February. Carnival is a national festival. There is carnival in Trinidad and there is carnival in Tobago. One could make a comparison, Tobagonians are more conservative types, Trinidadians are very outgoing. So, carnival in Trinidad is spectacular, it is a great event. So, some of you must have heard about Trinidad and Tobago carnival. In Tobago we have a much smaller version, but it is carnival nonetheless and what we have been doing in Tobago right now is to try to bring back the traditional dance that is the *Jamjam*, and so on. We are trying to bring that back in the Tobago carnival. So, from carnival we move on to the best village. Dr. William was the first “*Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago*”. He introduced a programme called the Prime Minister’s Best Village Trophy Competition and this was both in Trinidad and in Tobago and the intention was that we since have such a rich heritage but most of the older people of course were dying out, so, he decided and we tried to capture the culture on the traditions of the older people and so what was started then and itself was found, is the “*Prime Minister’s Best Village Trophy Competition*”. We had all the different elements. We have music, we have dance, we have song etc.

Then, we have the “*Tobago Heritage Festival*”. That Festival is particular to Tobago. In this festival which starts in the middle of July and goes probably closest Friday is in the middle of July and it ends on the 1st August which is generally called the Emancipation Day. During this festival the local communities are involved. There is a grand opening night and within two weeks after the opening, different villages would be showcasing their talents and you know every village has its own particularities. Usually, we have diverse but beautiful heritage festival and the heritage festival is not dissimilar to your programme here I believe, your “*Creole festival*” which is one of the main reasons that we are here for the next few days. As I said, may I join Mrs. Gift in thanking the Commissioner and everybody else, the Chairperson and for the invitation to come here to your beautiful island.

Also, we have the Independence and the Republic Day. Trinidad and Tobago became independent on the 21st August 1976. Thereafter, we became a Republic, the country handled its own affairs. No longer, the Queen called the British Monarch is no longer the head of Trinidad and Tobago. She is still there as a Commonwealth but we have a President and of course the President is the Head of State and we have the Prime Minister who is course the Head of the country. We celebrate our Independence and we celebrate our Republic.

There is a substantial number of Indians, especially in Trinidad. So, we have the Hindus and the Muslims. The Hindus have their celebrations Divali and the Muslims have their which is Eid but everybody joins in all the festivals. In other words when we have emancipations, the Indians will participate but not as the same extent as those of the African descendant and when there is Eid or Divali it is the same thing. All of us try to celebrate with one another whatever festival celebrations it is.

As I come to the end I want to talk a little bit about the World Championship of the Performing Arts. Over the past three years Tobago and Trinidad took part in the Worlds Championship of the Performing Arts. This takes place in Hollywood and have been taking place before we get involved and I hear it will continue after. We took part, and Tobago did extremely well as a matter of fact, country for country, Island for Island, Tobago will have done the best. There would be something between 54 and 60 countries worldwide taking part into this World Championship and I am happy to let you know that the two young men who came here today, the youngest one whose name is Ojay Richards, he was accredited as the best instrumentalist in the world, playing a steel pan.

(Applause)

He would have competed against the panist, you know people of International repute and the boy is good as you will recognize it later. He was accredited the best instrumentalist in the world. Then there was a group on the name Youth Quake, the name suggest it all and they were accredited the best Dancers worldwide. The other panmen also reached as far as the Championship and he would have won in Tobago. There was a programme called Scouting for Talents and two years ago they have been given the best price in that lot and he would have the first price; a car. So, that's to tell you what sort of talents they are. So, we have two very talented young men and these are just like a drop in the ocean. In Tobago we have nothing else it has talents rather cultural talent and anytime that Rodrigues would want to have a closer relationship culturally with Tobago, we shall be happy to offer any services that we can. We have the expertise, we have the enthusiasm.

(Applause)

Therefore, we would do our best to accommodate you. So, let me once again, let me end by thanking all of you and let me end by saying "*Merci Beaucoup pou zot l'attention*".

(Applause).

Mrs. A. Perrine-Begué: Mr. Chairperson, Sir, in the name of the Rodriguan population, the Minority Group of the Rodrigues Regional Assembly and in particular the Minority Leader, Mr. Louis Serge Clair, Grand Commander of the Star and key of the Indian Ocean who is regrettably absent from the island having received a last minute call for a very urgent business in the mainland Mauritius. I have the great pleasure and privilege to extend our warmest welcome to the Trinidad and Tobago delegation and also to express our pride that our young political land, decentralized autonomous system of Government is modeled and inspired from that island.

Mr. Chairperson, Sir, please do ask the delegation to accept our thanks and gratitude for all the collaboration given to us in the process of the setting up of the Rodrigues Regional Assembly and a warm welcome again for the fruitful interaction with the Rodriguan population.

Thank You.

(Applause)

Chief Commissioner: Mr. Chairperson, Sir,

The Deputy Chief Secretary of Tobago,
Presiding Officer of the Tobago House of Assembly,
Our good friend Mrs. Charles, who has been our guide all throughout our visit in Tobago,
Distinguish Members of this House,

Two months after our visits, our mission to Tobago, we have the pleasure to welcome the first and I hope not the last delegation from our, I would say sister or brother island from the other part of the world. We were told when we landed in Tobago “welcome to the capital of paradise”. I think paradise may have different rooms. I would like to say also “welcome to paradise”, welcome to Rodrigues.

(Applause)

Mr. Chairperson, Sir, as you are aware our mission in Tobago had several objectives. The first objective was political, was to study the political institutions in place in Trinidad and Tobago at this very early stage of our decentralized system of Government and to look into the means, processors and matters that could be helpful to us in the future enhancement and functioning of our own system of decentralized Government.

The Tobago House of Assembly is different from ours in certain spheres. The electoral system for example differs from that we have in Rodrigues. The Tobago House of Assembly is composed of 16 Members.

Mr Chairperson: Please wait Chief Commissioner. I surely deprecate the use of this House made by the Minority Members. I would not have liked such reproach on this auspicious occasion and I hope the minority members will of course continue to abide and observe the rules of the House.

Chief Commissioner: Thank you Mr. Chairperson, Sir. I was saying they have a different system. They have sixteen Members and we have eighteen Members here. Twelve Members are directly elected from the twelve regions of Tobago, while the remaining four are appointed only after the election of the Chief Secretary and the Minority Leader. They are termed councilors and they are appointed by the Presiding Officer, three under the advice of the Chief Secretary and one under the advice of the Minority Leader.

In Rodrigues the mixed system of first past post cum proportional representation has been adopted. The Rodrigues Regional Assembly has eighteen Members and the Chairperson. Twelve are directly elected from the six local Regions while the other six are allotted by the electoral Commissioner after percentage per vote. In Rodrigues we have had two elections so far resulting in an awkward situation with the ruling party, securing only ten of the eighteen seats thereby allowing one Member to trigger a hung Assembly.

Ordinary election in Tobago is held every four years while in Rodrigues it is held every five years. As far as the procedure of the Assembly is concerned there are a number of differences even though for both Houses the Standing Orders and rules are based on those obtained in the House of commons. The Chief Secretary of Tobago is the Head of Executive Council and presides over the matters and business of the Council. Another difference with Tobago is that the Assembly has to meet each month whereas at the Rodrigues Regional Assembly we can meet at ordinary meeting, to be held as often as the business of the Assembly may require and at least once every quarter.

Mr. Chairperson, Sir, there is no doubt that the mission which the five persons from Rodrigues namely:- Honourable Nicolas Vonmally, myself, yourself as Chairperson, the Island Chief Executive and the Commissioner for Public Infrastructure has been very fruitful and will of course be of great tremendous use. We have had to further understand what the powers are and discipline. Suspicions that may arise very often between Central Government and delegated Regional Government like us. This is why we are here in Rodrigues in the occasion of this visit from our friends in Tobago. We are also in the same situation where much of our choices that we need to make here for our people like in culture because in Tobago we have seen by ourselves are different from Trinidad. Trinidad is more cosmopolitan, Tobago is more traditional, is more attached to its values and into its own particular characteristics in terms of infrastructure, in terms of environment protection and in terms of cultural heritage. This is why they are right and we are right also in affirming what we are and in defending our own views and making it understandable to other people, especially to the National Government. This is I think a world issue, the relationships between delegated powers to Regional Houses and Central Government. This is why everything has to be clear as you are aware we have a big difference of view on the issue of bad weather allowance. This is an example on which we are trying to make Government understand that there is a need for differentiation. This is why we had had the Rodrigues Regional Assembly Act because Central Government cannot effectively decide for Rodrigues which is separate, 600 km away and the people of Rodrigues having different needs, different may be by aspiration of course within the national interest and within the whole Republic of Mauritius.

Mr. Chairperson, Sir, I would like to invite the Members of the delegation to transmit my greetings to the Honourable Chief Secretary of Tobago, to all the Secretaries and to the Minority Leader and to all the Members, some of them are as young as those people that you see in this House. To tell them that Rodrigues as from now have established good tie, brotherly and sisterly ties with Tobago that need to be developped over the years. I know that it is quite difficult to reach Rodrigues and from Rodrigues to reach Tobago it is not like going to Mauritius. It is costly, it is very far away but we are living in a more and more interdependent world and there is need for all people having common interest specially our cultural interest to get together and to share. This is why I have taken good note of the proposal of the Deputy Chief Secretary to have more interaction in term of culture and I would invite my colleagues Deputy Chief Commissioner and Commissioner for Arts and Culture to take steps to implement and to keep contact with his counterpart in Tobago.

I am also very pleased to see that the steel pans are beating, are resonating in Port Mathurin, in front of the Residence and that people are appreciating and people have been waiting for this. Many persons are eager to hear these steel drummers, being given the distinction they have had on the international level, are going to perform for us here in Rodrigues.

Finally, I would like to wish a good stay to our guests from Tobago and to tell them Mr. Chairperson, Sir, that everywhere in the world there are problems, there are things going on and there is an opposition and we were discussing in my office that the opposition will always say that everything is bad, everything is wrong. There is etc etc. So, this is not a reason why we should not move forward and dance, sing during this *“Festival Creole”*.

Thank you, Mr. Chairperson, Sir on behalf on the Rodrigues Regional Assembly, I would like to thank the Tobago House of Assembly for the donations of the two steel drums and I do hope that our learned musician here, will be able first of all to learn and to play it and secondly be able to find tune in it so that they do not end up creating a different version of the steel drum. Thank you, Mr. Chairperson, Sir, I would like to thank the Minority for being here this morning and for their expression of thanks by the respected Member. Thank you.

At 11.50 hrs, the Assembly was, on its rising, adjourned