

OFFICIAL ADDRESS

The Hon. Winston Dookeran
Minister of Planning and Mobilisation

The Rt. Hon. Prime Minister of St. Lucia, Mr. John Compton, the President of the Senate, Professors Richards and members of the diplomatic committee, researchers, scholars, invited guests.

I must first of all on behalf of the Government of Trinidad and Tobago say a special welcome to Prime Minister, John Compton to our shores once again in Trinidad and Tobago.

As Head of the Caribbean Heads of State, it is very appropriate for us, and we are very pleased that he was able to be here to inaugurate the session of the Caribbean Academy of Sciences. I will also like to take the opportunity to say a word of welcome to all those who have come from abroad to join in this very auspicious occasion here this morning.

The Caribbean Academy of Sciences, as we are told, is a new institution, and sometimes in the Caribbean we are very concerned about establishing new institutions when we cannot get old ones to function. But I feel assured, that with the new dimensions that the Caribbean Academy of Sciences hopes to bring to bear on the affairs of the Caribbean's science and technology, that this will not only be able to bring about greater co-ordination, but will be able to ensure that there is at the same time, greater dialogue between our various institutions in the field of science and technology. Too often within our national boundaries and certainly within our Caribbean boundaries, our institutions do not speak to each other in a meaningful, purposeful way. And, I therefore welcome this opportunity that will be provided by international links, and by the necessity to foster cooperation within the

Caribbean that the Caribbean Academy of Sciences will bring to bear on our environment in our region.

It is indeed a new step; some refer to it as bold and imaginative. In a regional survey that was conducted prior to the establishment of the Caribbean Academy of Sciences about two years ago, I understand that over 98% of the regional community of scholars gave their total support to the formation of this body. It is an indication of the yearning that there is for the functions that will be performed by the Caribbean Academy of Sciences.

It is also noteworthy that this is a non-governmental organization so that we can continue to break the chains of dependence between our institutions and our government, but yet we can have our institutions perform serious developmental roles in our society. Internationally, non-governmental organizations are playing a more important role in the promotion of development and cooperation, and this being a non-governmental organization, you are therefore entering the scene at a time when international acceptance of that new role is well entrenched. N.G.Os., as they are called, provide an efficient conduit for bringing inputs into the development process, and provides an effective delivery system and greater flexibility in public awareness. It is therefore to your credit that you are now within the framework of a non-governmental organization with greater flexibility and with the full recognition that such organizations will have to play a more important role in the future development of our societies.

I am therefore very pleased that the organization is setting itself on this basis of self-reliance and in so doing will set an example for many other non-governmental organizations to develop within our societies to tackle our serious social, economic and development problems.

In my view it is very appropriate that this meeting is taking place here in Trinidad and Tobago. We are a small developing country and as such we find ourselves faced with the problems not only of the developing countries but also of size. The field of science and technology has been largely dominated by the larger countries, whether developed or developing. There used to be a time as we strive to achieve some command over our environment that we search for ownership of our natural resources and of the enterprises that were to utilize these natural resources. But, in today's world ownership issues have not given way to issues of international marketing and technology. This means of influ-

ence over our environment largely rests with marketing and technology arrangements rather than ownership arrangements, and this therefore is one of the recognitions that we as a small developing country must make as we chart a new course ahead to be able to have greater influence over our environment. The role of technology is clearly one that we must come to grips with. In the new emerging world order ahead of us, technological developments could have either positive or negative impacts on our society. And, it is absolutely essential for us recognising this, to be able to chart a course that will ensure that we are not left behind in the technological advances that obviously will take place at the turn of this century and beyond, the foundations for which have already been set in many areas of science and technology, whether it being materials sciences, bio-technology or communication. We recognise that as small societies we must become equipped to deal with the issues so that we can have greater influence over our environment and in so doing provide the kind of future that our people would like to have. But the emerging world order is one in which small developing countries and indeed developing countries seem to have a very passive role and very often we hear about the necessity for us to move on what has been described in academic circles as the south-south axis. It is an area that is fertile for development in the field of technology. As developing countries between themselves and among themselves can develop greater relationships so that they can advance their own cause, we too can benefit from the lessons that we would have learnt over the last two or three decades.

I would take this opportunity here in an audience of this nature to call for a strengthening of South relationships in technological developments. Such strengthening should take place not only through institutional links but also through the commercial links, so that we will be able to have closer relationships among the Third World countries in this particular area. As a small developing country therefore and with a reasonable base in science and technology, we are well poised and your institution that we are inaugurating here today could be a catalyst to assist us in the furtherance of the cause of South-South relationships in the field of technological development. We are also fortunate that the conference is taking place in Trinidad and Tobago because over the last year the Government has been making a special effort to bring to the front of the national agenda issues relating to technology and development. The mere fact that the portfolio of science and technology was identified as part of the Ministry of Planning and Mobilization began to signal the intention of the new government in order to bring

to the front of our national agenda, developments in this area. It is in recognition of the fact that if we were to grapple with these problems we will be able to provide a better future for our people in the next century. Since then we have been attempting to put into place a number of new mechanisms so that we can achieve some of the benefits of the technological processes in which we are now engaged. Some of you may have heard of the establishment of a business incubator facility in Trinidad and Tobago which very shortly ought to be inaugurated. The business incubator facility is an instrument for the transformation of our society as it attempts to provide the link whereby research findings could be translated into economic products; where we can bring a new form of entrepreneurship based on high skill component and based on innovative thoughts into play. It is clearly one of the new instruments for the long term transformation of our society and we are very pleased that this is one of the new areas that we have been able to tackle over the last year. While however we attempted to set up these various institutions we recognise the potential of the exclusive economic zone, and as a small developing country we have made a call for a regional approach to this issue so that we can identify the ways and means by which we can make a determination and exploitation of our resources within the exclusive economic zone.

At the last Standing Committee Meeting of Ministers responsible for science and technology in the Caribbean, we urged that this matter be placed on the agenda and we are very happy the Caribbean Governments had agreed to take a closer regional approach to this very important issue that will have far reaching effects for the next generation. In Trinidad and Tobago we have already begun to search for ways and means for training our professionals in various techniques applicable to performing the functions of the determination and exploitation of the resource of our exclusive economic zone. This may seem long and far-off to some of us, but it is the basic foundation we are trying to lay in the Caribbean and in Trinidad and Tobago so that future generations would be able to benefit from our efforts today. But perhaps the most striking cause to which I wish to refer is our efforts within recent times in the field of bio-technology. It was not long ago that we encouraged a number of participants from the Caribbean and elsewhere to come to Trinidad and discuss the issue of the bio-technology revolutions that are affecting the world and the agricultural sector, and through the efforts of our National Institute for Higher Education, the Caribbean Industrial Research Institute, and the U.W.I., we have been able to put together a bio-technology research unit within the last

year that has begun to perform in a commercial manner. For the first time in Trinidad and Tobago, Tissue Culture using a bio-technological process, has been commercially applied. Pineapples, bananas and ornamental plantlets have been produced by this Unit. Over the last seven months 10,000 plantlets have been produced and distributed, 505 to small farmers. These plantlets are cheaper, disease free and uniform in quality. This development offers real prospects for the transformation of our agricultural sector, and it is in that context we are very pleased that we have started the basis for reaping some of the benefits of the biotechnology benefits that we can achieve over the years. These are just some of the various areas of science and technology which we have been engaged in while we can continue an overall approach for the rationalisation of our research and science institutions. We look for new ways and means by which we can establish business plans as associated with our research institutions as we charge them with the responsibility to become export oriented, in exports, in the services and to bear a larger share of the financial account from self-financing means. Some or all of these developments have been incorporated in our new national plan that is being developed as part of the process for bringing to the fore science and technology developments in Trinidad and Tobago.

The benefits will be for the young people of this country in the next generation and the Government is committed while it deals with the short term problems it faces, to set in motion a foundation which would be able to respond to the long term requirements of the changing world in which we are now living.

The Caribbean Academy of Sciences therefore must be seen in this context as a positive step, an institution which I am informed will be based on achievements and merit and will celebrate scholarship and intellect and uphold all the traditions of excellence. Such will obviously be done in the context of the development goals of the society. I will like to make special mention to the fact that you are basing your new institution on merit and achievement. Indeed merit and achievement and truth in knowledge must once again become part of our *modus operandi* of all our institutions, whether they be private or public. We must once again aspire towards merit and achievement as the basis upon which we judge our own progress. All our professional bodies, I hope, will respond to your call to re-introduce in a serious manner, ways and means where this can now re-emerge, for indeed it is the strongest pillar upon which we can build a center of civilization in the Caribbean. I have no doubt therefore with the ideals that you have set for yourself in the context of an international and local development, nationally and

regionally, that the Caribbean Academy of Sciences will play its special important role in the shaping of a Caribbean society well into the next century, and I'm very pleased as the Minister responsible for Science and Technology to be present here today and to associate with the efforts that are being made for its inauguration and functioning.

Thank You.