



# TT - Not a Nation of Sheep

The following is the 50th Independence anniversary speech delivered by President George Maxwell Richards at the re-enactment of the raising of TT's national flag in 1962 at Woodford Square, Port-of-Spain.

Citizens of our beloved Trinidad and Tobago!

When, on the night of August 30th, 1962, the flag of independent Trinidad and Tobago was first raised, it represented more than our right to chart the way forward, for ourselves. That achievement of Independence represented the collective will of the people and, most importantly, our ability and willingness to eschew political differences and take a decision in the interest of all of our people.

The Marlborough House agreement spoke, significantly, to us and may well have been the symbolic platform from which we should launch our new nation.

It is a thought to which I return, 50 years later, with a tinge of nostalgia and encourage us all to ponder the positive effect of collaborative action, on the part of our leaders, action which set aside parochial self-interest, for a larger goal.

I speak of a goal that embraced a number of elements, not least the nurturing of future generations as confident, rooted people, secure in the knowledge that they are of the first order, capable of commanding respect and admiration, anywhere in the world. The accomplishments of our sons and daughters had, by then, left no room for doubt, in that regard.

Tonight's event generates excitement, as it should. The occasion is as solemn, as it is pulsating. But euphoria must not be allowed to cloud sober reflection, as reality will not go away.

We need to ask ourselves whether we are living up to the expectations of our freedom fighters, who did battle, not with guns, but with intellectual prowess, artisan skills, artistic brilliance, sport and diplomatic savoir faire to secure our place among the family of independent Nations.

Our answers must bear the hallmark of honesty, as we take responsibility for who we have become. We have indeed done some things very well and we ought to congratulate ourselves, heartily, for that.

Without going into details in the myriad areas of our accomplishments, I cite, as example, the fact that, post-Independence and particularly in the 60s and 70s, our people were much sought after, in other countries.

That could only have been so, because of the quality of persons that developed here, assisted by our education system and social environment.

Over time, however, money, particularly new money and modernity have taken their toll on proper style and civilisation. We have become modern, but are we civilised?

Without intending to steal our joy, I am constrained to warn that we are nurturing generations of children who are allowed not to take responsibility for their actions.

We are making too much room for non-thinkers, who take the easy, clever way out, once patronage, in any form, is available.

We deserve much better.

This ceremony, a re-enactment of that night, pregnant with hope and possibilities should gather us back to that place in time and to the mantle which we sought and peacefully obtained. While we must not allow anyone to put us down, simply because we are a small country, we must not be overtaken by the false notion that we can be the best, without strong effort on our part. We are not a nation of sheep and we need, as individuals, to become more aware of the power of one, to effect change, where change is necessary.

Moreover, we must be committed to integrity, in every aspect, not least integrity of our word.

**We speak of constitutional reform, for example, but that is in stasis. In this context, Tobago, in 2012, should not have to ask, as Reggie Dumas, clearly speaking on behalf of a number of others, has done: "Constitutional development? Of Tobago? What constitutional development?" His scepticism resonates in the whole country.**

**Let us remind ourselves that a nation divided cannot stand and, while water separates our two islands, broken promises should not.**

**We made a promise to Tobago, a long time ago and, as Eric Williams said in Parliament with the joining of our two islands, administratively, one form of neglect was exchanged for another.**

**This is one of the major areas of brokenness that we can fix and must fix, if we are to proceed with dignity and vigour, in unity, over the next 50 years. Unity in diversity is only one, though very important, aspect of our national character.**

**Unity of purpose is critical. The togetherness that we see during our Carnival celebrations and at other times of national celebration, should not be ephemeral. It should be the seminal quality that defines our character as a people.**

Nations become great because their people are so confident in themselves that they see no insurmountable obstruction to their accomplishments. They believe in themselves, passionately.

If we took the time to consider ourselves, we would recognise that we, too, are capable of great ideas, having also the capacity to learn quickly and to adapt to any environment.

We have the great advantage of being able to see the lighter side of situations, so, in the midst of the most daunting circumstances we are resilient, maintaining our joy. It is this infectious spirit of joie de vivre that draws people to us and secures for us a place in many a visitor's heart. Let us not forget who we are.

We must savour this occasion, August 31st, 2012, for years to come. Let us get to know ourselves better and have a much clearer understanding of the many things we can accomplish for our country, in our country, as we are diligent to do so.

Most of all, let us learn to love ourselves better.

Let us come to embrace the idea that unless all have crossed, none have crossed and some we have to carry.

I wish the national community a good future, with peace, wisdom and understanding at the heart of it.

May God bless our nation!