

Transcript – Prime Minister Rowley’s Remarks at the Launch of the School Improvement Program

Date: Saturday 1st October, 2016.

Notes: Dr the Honourable Keith Rowley attended the launch of the School Improvement Programme (SIP) in the Laventille area on Saturday 1st October 2016. The SIP seeks to improve the overall academic performance of students in the Laventille area.

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The Minister of Education, Mr. Anthony Garcia and the Minister of Education in the Ministry of Education, Dr. Lovell Francis, hailing all the way from the south coast, today claiming ancestry in Laventille, Minister of Works and Transport, Laventillian, Mr. Fitzgerald Hinds, Minister in the Ministry of Works, Mr. Adrian Leonce, my other Cabinet and Parliamentarians colleagues, and I have to say to the Minister of Communications and Minister of Public Administrations, I see them, and Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Education, technical officers and senior members of staff, permit me a very special welcome to a lady whose passionate about our education system of our children, Ms. Zena Ramatali, Principal of Success Laventille and other Principals from the greater Laventille area, teachers, parents, students, members of the Security Services, members of the media, Good Evening to you all.

I am very heartened to come here this evening and see so many of you representing such a wide cross section of national interests responding to what I consider to be a simple common sense call. When we met under an initiative of I95.5, which was the Laventille Project, it was just a situation where the other citizens operated on radio stations, decided that they wanted to do something about focusing on Laventille and assisting Laventille to move from where it is to where it can be. I participated in that program simply to provide support to those persons who saw that with the proper intervention; the Laventille problem can be addressed and can be solved.

It was in that arrangement that I made this call to the Minister of Education to focus and provide leadership for a program of this nature. On that day I made it quite clear that such a program and such efforts by I95.5, by the Minister and by the Government, will come to north if you the parents didn’t buy into it. Today I am beginning to feel that the there is hope for this program. This program is about an intervention on behalf of and with, those who today are categorized as children. So in other words, we are saying, that those who are adults, we probably have passed through, where many of us might consider ourselves as successes, but there is too much negative

associated with Laventille, to much failure and too much potential failure. If we intervene, in a taking in hand the children, in a definite program of this nature we could break the cycle. I tell you I am a Member of Parliament as you know, and I have schools in my district and from time to time I would visit the primary schools. Whenever I visit a primary school, it is always and uplifting experience for me.

When people ask me, why are you in politics and taking all this abuse? Why do you do it? Some people say it straight to me, "I can never do that." On the day I visited the primary school, I walked away feeling that my life is very valuable and my contribution is very valuable. But then something else always follows me from those trips. Because when I go to these primary schools and I look at the children, every single one of them so energized and energetic and everything is positive about them, and then somewhere along the way you begin to hear that our young people are associated with failure, with crime, with lack of interest, and you ask yourself how is this happening and why is this happening. When do these little angels turn into demons? When do they lose hope? When do they become people who do not think they are valuable and valued?

Somewhere between there and where they ought to be as adults who can contribute to national upliftment and take part in national development, something goes wrong. I believe and the experts are convincing me that me that it is so. That if the parents and the teachers and the community work together we will break that cycle and we will generate a stream of better citizens and that is what this program is all about. That is what this program is about, an intervention to break the cycle.

The Minister said that he is confident that the program will succeed. I have great expectations that the program will succeed. This program will succeed if there is the leadership and if there is the discipline, if those ingredients are available, leadership and discipline. By leadership I am talking about, leadership from the home, leadership from the community, leadership from the government, leadership from the Ministry, leadership from the church and the panyards. If there is discipline particularly disciplines in the schools, you will be amazed at what the schools will turn out in Laventille. When I say Laventille here, I am no talking about Laven-tille. This Laventille program is the greater Laventille, from Beetham to Morvant from Belmont to Success Village, this community the greater Laventille community.

The issues are the same and if we identify the issues as we are trying to do now and identify our role in it and I am very pleased and impressed to hear that the international agencies are paying attention to the program offering to help. If that assistance is grasped and if the parents play the role and we minimize the number of people that are stigmatized in the name Laventille, then are our way. The people of Laventille, I empathize with you but it is not hopeless. I remembered when growing up in Tobago, in what was very open community influenced environment for a child. As I speak to you know, I distinctly recalled the trauma I experienced on the night when somebody killed somebody in that village. I repeat that up to know if I think about it and I think

about you in Laventille to live with this every day, you need an intervention like this. Your children need an intervention like this.

I can tell you know exactly how I felt and the effect it had on me on my freedom of a child, my impression of what life is going to be and more than that, how human beings relate to one another and how other human beings trust each other, I can tell you distinctly how I felt when a woman came up to my grandfather to tell him that her brother had just killed his sister. But Laventille, these are too many stories that people experience. We want the children of Laventille to come forward and not be exposed to that, never. And as we put this program and sow the seeds in Laventille we are confronting those who believe that failure is your potion and minimizing the numbers who believe that is all you are about. This program is about emphasizing the positives while not ignoring the negatives.

There are so many positives in your community and when we begin to emphasize them you yourself would ask if this is Laventille? Mr. Anthony was just telling me of a young lady we know, because he introduced me to her when she was a young child. She went to a school in Laventille and was guided by a principal who had a discipline hand and he reminded me, it wasn't Jamila, it was a handful of them produced by that school, this school here and he was telling me she is in Africa having gone through the university system. Her parents are still in the country; her father is still here experiencing a difficult life; her mother is still here living the life of an ordinary person going to work every day and making ends meet but this child has gone through the ends of the best this world has to offer and she is a product of Trinidad and Tobago flying our flag high.

Many of you don't know that or know her. I can tell you this evening there are a lot of people in the national community who are desperate to help you out of your situation. As Head of the Government I want to say something else to you, your problem is not just about money and you don't measure success by how much money. Money is important because goods and services have to be paid for but a lot of it is- attitude. You cannot put a price on attitude. As I tell you that I am not saying that is only peculiar to your community of you, it's a national problem. The bundles of problems in this country, where there are too many people believe that they can be solved by money.

Money with the wrong attitude has no chance of solving the problem. Yesterday, the Minister of Finance read what we often call the Budget and he covered a wide range of national interests and a number of arrears of governmental activities. I was listening to hear what the response was from the national community. Because we work very hard during the last few months to be able to give that three hour speech to the nation and what we are about going forward. There was one comment that I attach my attention to and it is a comment coming from the business community, a business leader whose comment on the budget was that the budget lacked something and what it lacked was a stimulus package. Now that sounds very impressive. Because it means in simple language that the government didn't find a pool of money to spend, to increase the spending so

that spending would generate contracts and those who will get those contracts will continue to earn money the way they use to earn before. I said to myself as long as that is the mentality that is the mentality that would keep us where we are today. Because the budget yesterday, was not about a stimulus package. Because unlike Barack Obama, who could have given the American community a stimulus package when their economy collapsed in 2009, we don't have a Federal Reserve Bank to print money and give you a stimulus package for years and maintain your problem. We don't have that. We have on the other hand have the opposite. We on the other hand have to be careful that we don't borrow money to maintain our lifestyles and put ourselves in bankruptcy when we can't repay the money we borrow.

Anybody who is telling us that the way out of our problem is to borrow money to spend it on a stimulus package to maintain our lifestyle as Lloyd Best would say, "Them is people to watch." What the budget represents yesterday represents the background against the background of what we are doing today, what that budget represents against what we are doing today in Laventille is opportunity in participation for making the most of what we have available to us. Opportunity! I have been in this country for a long while in the politics and I been in a number of Cabinets, I have listened to a number of Budgets, there has been no budget read in this country in the history of this country where the participation of the nation in the national development has been open than yesterday's budget. It opens the door to participation.

I say to you the citizens here in Laventille, and elsewhere in the country, we are going to have to do things differently. Every road to be built in this country has to be built by the government every school, every health center, every this every that, because in this country for the last generation or two we grown up on the government. Well, you better begin to wean of the government. Because the government shoulders cannot carry the burden anymore. When the Minister of Finance tells you that the monies we are likely to get coming in as revenues in 2017, is 37 billion dollars and you are told the last government in 2015 had a budget of 63 billion dollars, I know you in Laventille knows the maths. If you had at one time the opportunity to spend 60 billion and you can now have available 37 billion, if you want to live at 60 billion level the only way you could do that is to borrow the difference and live on borrow money. And of course if you borrow and you can't repay then I should ask what will happen. But what we going to do is, to make sure that we don't only convince ourselves that in the absence of money of 60 billion, there is no hope for a good and progressive life.

Laventille, what I am asking the Minister of Education to do here in this program is to ensure that the ministry provides the leadership and whatever money is allocated to the Ministry of Education, that we get the best value for that money. As long as we do that, we will be on the right track and I judge success on this basis. When teachers in the Laventille schools are proud to tell TTUTA and the rest of the national community that I am a Laventille teacher teaching in a Laventille school and do that with pride I would know that success have become to come. And when parents in the greater Laventille area are pleased and happy to send their children to the schools in their neighborhood and they are proud to tell their friends that my son/ daughter has

gone to this school or that school in Laventille, I would know that success has taken place in Laventille. That is my yard stick for measuring. And I will tell you something else to, because of the nature of problems in Laventille and because this government believes that special problem requires special solutions the government would look at special treatment for the teachers in the Laventille district.

Because the assignment is not the same and it is not sufficient for a teacher in the Laventille district to come to school in the morning possibly late, leave in the afternoon possibly early and not come back. Those of us who are successful in rural schools and in difficult environments, it is the teachers who went beyond the call of duty getting beforehand, staying with us and staying after the bell has rung just to make sure we get the guidance and attention. That is what is required of those teachers and if they have to that in Laventille they will required to be regarded as special teachers and this government is prepared to do that.

I hear you talking about dress code. Well I am not interested in the shirt and pants dress code; I am interested in something that will identify a teacher, something saying, "I am a Laventille teacher," and the same way the steelpan was born in Laventille and today you can't go anywhere in this country and not meet people playing steelpan, La Brea, San Fernando, Tobago and Caroni, this project we are launching today in Laventille will spread across Trinidad and Tobago as long as we are successful. Because the ingredients are worthy of emulation. There are other communities in the country which have the same kinds of problems but may not have the same label and what we are trying to solve in Laventille if we solve it here, it can spread into the rest of the national community. Let it be known that Laventille was the area where the parents and the teachers came together and worked together with the government using whatever resources where available at the time making maximum use to ensure that our children get the guidance and the opportunities that they are worthy of.

I know of no parent in Laventille who doesn't want the best for his/her child. And, parents in the secondary schools, we are going to reactivate and push the school board arrangement. It is for you the parents to give a little of your time and a lot of your time to the parent/teacher association (PTA) in your district. You as parents, you are required to be at the fore front of your children's interests. You can't just send your children to school and just deliver them to the teachers you have to be a part of their development and more than that, you have to prepare them at home for what the teachers are prepared to impart to them at school. And members of the Clergy some of you are here this evening, regardless of whatever is your dominions you provide leadership in the community and you to have a role to play. School is not only about morning when the bell rings and afternoon, school in these communities ought to be a way of life.

This program is going to encourage that. I just said to the Minister of Education, the next time I come to Laventille, it will be to address every student in every one of these twenty five schools. We are going to have a rally of Laventille school children so that their leaders can talk to them and tell them what their country is expecting of them. And when we do that, they will impress us

in the same way these young men impress us this evening. I have every confidence that there is great in Laventille. I don't know of how many of you in this hall will know, but right behind there it used to be a ready mix business which use to operate right behind here, I used to be there as a little boy because my mother used to work there. My mother use to feed the men who use to work there and I will come from Tobago to my mother and come into Laventille there. My mother lived in Laventille, it was the first place I went to have a great vacation. I just read about it in that book I published. It was a great vacation because coming from Tobago I could imagine how you all lived on this hill because it was so different. As I got older, I realize how special Laventille is and whatever they say and whatever they do, Laventille still has the best view of this country. Best view. And it is my attention that, that view must be envied by the rest of the country.

So, this evening I want to congratulate you the parents for associating with this project. When you go back up the hill or go across the Beetham, encourage your neighbours to get involved, keep an eye on your children, encourage the children, respect and encourage the teachers and have confidence in your government to make the change that you want in the next generation. Thank you very much.

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