

Transcript - Prime Minister Rowley's remarks at the Swearing-In of San Fernando Mayor (2016)

Your Worship, His Worship the Mayor, the Minister of Local Government, Kazim Hosein, Minister of Housing, Mr Randall Mitchell, Attorney General and Member for San Fernando West, Faris Al-Rawi, other members of Parliament, members of the city of San Fernando, Corporation, particularly those members who have served who are now moving out of office. I gather there is a former Mayor or two in here, members of the clergy who prayed for all of us this morning, Burgesses of the city of San Fernando, members of the protective services, members of the media.

I must apologise for my less than audible voice this morning. I'm fighting the trumps and I am very pleased that I am able to be here this morning because I wanted to be here but on Saturday and Sunday I had no voice at all. I couldn't even say anything so I am glad that I am able to sound even as bad as I am sounding now and hopefully I would be able to reach you at the back of the room.

I really wanted to be here today to support the city of San Fernando for more reasons than one and one of the reasons I wanted to be here is because I wanted to acknowledge San Fernando with all your challenges and with all of our national challenges, I want to acknowledge San Fernando as one of the places in the country where we are trying to do the best we can under the very challenging circumstances and as Prime Minister I acknowledge San Fernando, its City Corporation as one of the best run in the nation. When we embarked on the exercise of Local Government Reform, I joined you here in this very room, I think it was this room, when we had the public consultation and you were out in your large numbers and we had a very lively meeting as to what we can do to improve Local Government and what we can do to advance the process of Local Government.

I'm here this morning after the election campaign where we spoke a lot about that commitment to Local Government Reform to tell you that the elections are over, the results are known and the commitment to Local Government Reform remains and Central Government will now proceed to do what has to be done in phases to ensure that the things we said, we can do and should do, would be done as far as we are able to do them and the Central Government will work with you very closely to ensure that notwithstanding whatever our circumstances might be with respect to reduced revenues, challenges with crime, inexplicable conduct of humanity in our society, greed, laziness, all of these things, in the face of all of that, we will set out still to hold on to hope to be a better place and we believe that Local Government Reform would bring about some improved quality improvement of life that we now enjoy.

I want to acknowledge this Corporation in San Fernando as a group of people who are doing what really should be done if we as a people would lift ourselves as we proceed because public service is not easy. When you offer yourself for public service, what comes with the territory is ridicule, insults, ingratitude, unreasonable conduct by those who they may serve but at the end of the day we have to believe that it is all part of the landscape and I want to congratulate those young people in particular who have come in to public service and who have now joined the experienced ones who have been re-elected to the Office of Councillor and Aldermen who have come in and we expect that San Fernando Corporation would continue to be a shining light in Local Government in Trinidad and Tobago.

We heard this morning about volunteerism. A few months ago I made a call for a nationals wherever you might be, whoever you are, what skills or talents or resources you might have, to get involved in some aspect of volunteering in your community. I must say when I did that I observed that the city of San Fernando's leadership took up that call and on more than one occasion I was informed as to how people in San Fernando had participated in exercises which were not all to be funded by the exchequer because there are a lot of things that can be done without a budget being assigned or some huge amount of allocation and in some instances these things are better done without a bucket of money being thrown at them because the involvement of the citizenry in getting done what should be done for themselves has a value which one cannot apply upfront. In a sense, an environment where money is in short supply as we are now, a lot of volunteer activity guided by a good vision from the leadership could see a lot being done. We do have people in the private sector and some people in the public sector, when they work together can do wonders for the improvement and the circumstances. That is why today I am holding out great hope that San Fernando Corporation would be a beacon to all of us as we set about to implement these various facets of Local Government Reform.

You would be given some responsibility with which you are familiar with, this whole question of handling rates and taxes for property. You would be encouraged by law, when the legislation comes to the Parliament, you'd be required to make certain decisions but you would also see the decision making being broadened from the Council into the public community by virtue of a requirement for public consultation in the decision making process and that will allow persons who feel that they are left out or who have something to contribute, to be protected by law so that certain decisions will not be made without their input and this hall I expected would be a beehive of activity because the law would require that on a monthly basis certain things be done and if people want to build a five storey building next door to your two storey dream house then something will happen at the Corporation where you will have a say. These are the kinds of developments we will see.

At the end of the day it boils down to decision making and observing the regulations that we agreed to be governed by. The outcome of that would be better law and order, better fair

treatment for our Burgesses, better accountability for the monies you spend and a better interpersonal relationship between the governed and the governors. Based on what San Fernando already is, I have great hopes for this city of culture. As you know I came from Tobago many years ago as a young man and long before when I was living in Trinidad I knew of San Fernando because I have a number of relatives who are part of San Fernando and what always struck me about San Fernando was that cultural drive that used to be San Fernando.

I remember coming to San Fernando for Panorama many years ago and Panorama in San Fernando for me was even more exciting than it was in Port of Spain because there were so many community steel bands in San Fernando and it was the same thing in culture and dance and I got to know, when I got into politics, some of the people involved and San Fernando really has a rich history of art and culture and I hope that the Corporation, taking greater responsibility for being a stimulus and a catalyst for community life and quality of life improvements would pay some attention to rebuilding and reviving this cultural centre that used to be San Fernando.

We have become a people who are losing some of the valuable aspects of our lives and complaining about what isn't against a background of yard sticks which might be unknown to us when we were developing. We had yard sticks that were not given the kinds of value that they should have been given and having lost those valuable yard sticks and replace them by complaints and lack of involvement and general slothfulness, our society has deteriorated.

I'm sure that there are leaders within us, within San Fernando who know what to do to bring us back and grow from where we used to be. Those are the things that will make us remembered by our grandchildren and make us acknowledge that the place that we are living in is a place that should be envied. Sometimes it doesn't take a whole lot to do it, just an idea and an intention and that brotherly love and if there is a city of brotherly love in Trinidad and Tobago, I will say that city is San Fernando.

San Fernando has a charm of a village and an operation that is not to overwhelm and it has a group of people who know who they are and can identify with tremendous successes and that is why I crave your indulgence to acknowledge our original and first Olympic gold medallist, Hasely Crawford. I want to take the opportunity to acknowledge my former Cabinet colleague Mrs Hazel Manning who had the responsibility for guiding the initial exercises that were done under the Manning Government with respect to Local Government Reform. I must tell you, one of the reasons why I am bent on ensuring that we do something now about Local Government is that in looking at the Government work program, coming into Government and recently, I'm amazed at how much documentation passed through Trinidad and Tobago, Trinidad in particular, about Local Government.

There is a pile of documentation this high about various aspects about thinking about Local Government; this Committee, this report. I looked at the whole pile and I just pushed them aside and I said I am not reading any of these anymore. I'm going to where we were in the last set of consultations and I am taking it from there and as Head of the Cabinet I'm going to make the decision that it is only those who don't do anything, who don't make mistakes and if we make any mistake about Local Government Reform is because we have done the reform and that's where we're at, at the moment. We're going ahead with Local Government Reform and I'm asking you here as citizens to make Local Government Reform succeed because if you don't participate, if you don't accept it in the way you accepted it here in the discussions we had in that first consultation, if you don't get involved then it is going to be left to the bureaucrats and a handful of Council members to be pushing this great big boulder up a hill when in fact if you get involved there are tremendous benefits that can be had in the short term if we do the things that we say we will do.

So I'm asking you to get on board, support your excellent Corporation, support your city that has a tremendous record in Trinidad's history and a bright future. So San Fernando we'd be looking at you, we can learn from you and we want to work with you. I wish you a very successful term and we wish you all success for 2016 going forward.