

Ministry of Social Development & Family Services

Salutations to Centenarians

Remarks by Prime Minister, Dr. the Honourable Keith Rowley

Thank you very much Lady of Ceremonies.

My parliamentary colleague, my ministerial colleague, Minister of Social Development.

And, of course, councillors – I see three councillors here from Diego Martin West.

Chairman of the Diego Martin Corporation.

Our Honourees, family members, children.

Members of the Media.

For a moment there I thought Dr. Rouse was going to introduce me as the entertainment knowing that I have spent so much of my time with people who have been fortunate to have grown well beyond the three scores and ten, that maybe she probably thought that I was the appropriate person to entertain them. But, I must tell you that these are very special moments for me and today is a very special day for me. I grew up with my grandparents since I was one year old and I knew my grandparents and their friends and I have a very special affinity to people who have grown old, living their life and enjoying it and I too have been taking two cod liver tablets.

So I hope that I will be as fortunate as these ladies and gentleman to have the honour and the pleasure of living a good life for so long and representing to us what has been said and promised, for those of us who read the Bible, it says that man's life is three scores and ten but very very many don't make any scores. But it also says that by reason of strength you can get to four scores but even these special people with their special strengths have gone a whole score beyond that and for that alone we should congratulate them for looking after themselves.

There's one of them who I know very very well, because she has a party every year, and I remember the first party when she was a hundred we had a family party in Carenage and it was full – all these grandchildren and great grandchildren – the entire was full. And I came in late from some other function and I got there about eight-thirty or thereabouts and was enjoying the carryings-on and the family was doing all kinds of things – singing and dancing and putting on skits and so and entertaining her and I got tired and wanted to go home by about ten o'clock and I think the others got tired. And guess who didn't want to go home? Party had to continue. She was sitting in this royal chair, you know and she sat there regally and we all had to wait. Eventually, I had to leave because she was having a ---good time. And every year we acknowledge her birthday in Carenage as one of the highlights in the community and I am very pleased to be participating in that.

And of course, Gladys Bartholomew --- when I first went to see her I expected that they would take me to a bedroom or see somebody – the lady walked out and greeted me and I couldn't believe I was talking to a person who had lived for a hundred years. And her memory was as good as ever and she gave me my first insight into coming to live in the cocoa estates of Covigne, when Covigne was in fact an agricultural area where there were few houses and it was all about growing cocoa – and she gave me such an enlightening thesis on the area. Today you probably would not find a single cocoa tree in Covigne. And of course I was very pleased to hear that there were others in the community who had achieved this great millstone in life. These people would have seen our country in a way that very many others have never seen.

They would have lived through the second World War and at least two of them would have lived through the first World War as well. Two of the most historical events in modern times, they would have lived through those periods. They would have lived in Trinidad and Tobago when food was rationed. I'm not going to tell you that I saw a ration card but I knew when food was rationed in this country and there used to be a card, it was blue, and you go and get your rice and then they'll tick it off so you can't come back because the card was used. And they knew when government vehicles drove around this country, probably the first Land Rovers in Trinidad and Tobago, and on the doors of those vehicles were the health insignia and the programme was "Yours

Eradication Programme” where there was a programme in this country to treat with an affliction that was commonplace and had to be eradicated.

They would have known when the only schools in this country were schools run by the denominational bodies, there were no government schools. They would have known when the first government school was built in this country. And these are moments of history that we all take for granted or disregard as unimportant.

It’s a pity that we have not been able to record, in a digestible way, what they have to say to use. But, maybe it’s not too late because today it’s so much easier, the technology allows us to do it more easily.

Now I would want to comment to the Department of Ageing that you have these conversations, record them and eventually the scholars will put them together as authentic expressions of the people who travelled a road that many of us will never travel which is the road at the beginning of the occupation of this modern Trinidad and Tobago.

Today, we in Diego Martin West, don’t want to say that good things are in the West because if they were in the East they came from the East and they went West – so there may be a few more in the East but we don’t know but if they do have centenarians in the East we congratulate you all – but find them and let us as a people, as a nation, acknowledge them. Because I must tell you, looking after themselves to have reached a hundred years old is in fact a fantastic achievement – to look after oneself to get to a hundred years old. And to be up and about as they are, I think we really should be proud to have them as citizens of Trinidad and Tobago.

It’s interesting to hear what they eat because I am sure if you talk to them about their diet especially in their early and active days they will tell you that that diet was one of the good food not from boxes with grease and fat and not imported in packs with salt and whatever. They grew what they ate and they ate what they grew and I’m sure they ate some good fish when they caught that and they had some good ground provision seasoned by the local condiments.

And, of course, they will tell you that there was no place for laziness in their life, good hard work – good for some people, most people, maybe everybody. Physical activity keeps the human body in shape all the way across the three scores and ten in many instances. So today, I want to acknowledge these outstanding constituents of mine, I feel particularly proud to have represented them for quite some time and to have known them personally in some instances and to congratulate the families who provided them with that very special and extra care as they get to a hundred and six, a hundred and seven, even to a hundred and fourteen or wherever they would go as God wishes.

I want to thank the families for looking after them because they are very special to all us. And, I want to thank the Department of Ageing for taking their assignment so seriously that as soon as I – I think it was a text message that I sent to Dr. Rouse – I sent her a text saying that I have these very special people and I am sure that she would want to join me in acknowledging them and she took it over from there. I am very grateful that you were able to...

And as we go along the road of nationhood, more and more people will hopefully be living longer and enjoying a quality of life worthy of that accomplishment. And therefore, as we plan the nation's business, we have to plan for more and more of our nation's citizens moving towards three score and ten and beyond. And there are certain special requirements, with respect to budgeting, with respect to infrastructure with respect to family life and family care. And that is why the ministry that my colleague here runs is called the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services because there are certain family services that are required to ensure that these people, these special people, all those who look towards a long and healthy life and sometimes not very healthy but could be long – and the challenges in health comes in age the social service department and family service department will have to play a more and more important role to ensure that in the golden years they do enjoy a quality of life of which we can all be proud.

So thank you all very much for this little function, thank the media for coming and I hope that you will highlight our centenarians here in Diego Martin West.