

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

Thank you very much, the Worship the Mayor of Port of Spain, Alderman Joel Martinez, Minister of Local Government Senator Kazim Hosein, my Cabinet colleagues, the Minister of Finance, Mr Colm Imbert, Minister of Planning and Development Mrs Camille Robinson-Regis, Minister in the Office of the Prime Minister and Office of the Attorney General, Mr Stuart Young, other members of Parliament, outgoing Mayor, Keron Valentine, outgoing Councillors, new Councillors and Aldermen, Burgesses of the City of Port of Spain, fellow citizens, members of the security services, members of the media, ladies and gentlemen, I apologise for my terrible voice but I have to be grateful for small mercies, 48 hours ago I couldn't say a word so I'm making considerable progress. I was hoping that I would be here and not have to say anything to you but being listed on the program so I try to make my few remarks and I trust that you can hear me as I try to join the celebration this morning of placing in office a new Executive for the city of Port of Spain.

I just want to make one or two points which would be important to us at the level of the Cabinet and that is that those of you who have taken office today, you have taken office hopefully in the acceptance that you are not an ordinary Council. You are not an ordinary Executive; you are the Executive Management of the capital city of the nation of Trinidad and Tobago. And that being so, while you speak about Port of Spain as your city being that the city of the Burgesses who reside within the boundaries of the city of Port of Spain, Port of Spain is more than that, Port of Spain is the city of every citizen of Trinidad and Tobago by virtue of its designation of the capital city.

It is a place of location which is entered into by many more than the Burgesses who live within its borders. So as you manage the affairs of the city, you are not managing the affairs for those persons who reside within the city but also for those tens of thousands of persons who come into the city on a daily and nightly basis to participate in city life, whatever that life might be. That might very well be one of your heaviest challenges, to operate the city so that it can satisfy the needs not only of the Burgesses of the city, but of those who spend significant hours within the city. From that standpoint your workload would have to include issues such as transportation into and within the city and therefore the whole question of the suitability of the arrangement for traffic in the city, particularly parking, is an issue that I trust that this Executive will address.

You are not the first Executive of the city of Port of Spain, we've had many Executives before and the issue of parking has always been a challenge. The absence of proper traffic flows within the city is an indication of one area of improvement which is sorely needed.

It is my expectation that in collaboration with the Central Government and with the proper initiative and quality of management which I expect to emanate from this Executive that the whole question of modernisation of parking arrangements in the city of Port of Spain would be one of the objectives of this Executive and by that I mean I trust that we can move to the threat and the promise of parking meters in the city of Port of Spain to executing the installation of parking meters so that there can be some proper arrangements for the utilization of the streets of Port of Spain.

Free parking in a city is something that only works well in a very large city with very large streets and a very small population. Our city is very congested, the streets are very narrow and it is very heavily trafficked and while we would like to see people come and use the city, the right to free parking is not a right enshrined in the Constitution. Therefore I am calling on the city of Port of Spain to take steps to make better arrangements for parking.

The city of Port of Spain is a cultural centre of the nation and of course culturally we know what to do when we go to other people's countries but when we are home in Trinidad and Tobago we certainly don't know how to behave or cooperate with the legislation, the laws and the regulations. I am calling on the city of Port of Spain to set about to improve the quality of life and to let you know from now that it is my expectation that there will be no improvement in the quality of life in the city of Port of Spain without proper enforcement of the laws and regulations that are meant to establish that quality of life. It is against that background that at the level of the Central Government one of the aspects of Local Government Reform which is coming your way is that expansion of your city Police Department. I know that you've had a Police Department for quite some time and that Department is referred to as Market Police. Well, at this time of year and given the nature of the quality or absence of quality of life in the city, when we expand your constabulary, we're not just expanding it to take care of issues in the market. We talking general enforcement by way of improved patrols and of course getting the benefit of more uniformed officers in the street to bring about an improvement in safety and security and enforcement of the regulations.

As I speak to you now, there is one person who is constructing and is living permanently in the Queen's Park Savannah and if you don't do anything about it soon, by the time the next function of the city we might be approached by the Association of the Queens Park Savannah Dwellers because when you allow something to happen that ought not to happen others are looking on to see what is going to happen and if nothing happens then you create a new aspect of our culture. Of course our culture is the culture of "How you will do the man that? Where the man will live?" and when you do that it leads to a general deterioration and at the end of your term, you would have survive 3 years and you would have made no improvement in the quality of life in the city of Port of Spain.

I would like to see city work and the effort of the Corporation focusing on things that we know can be done. The whole question of street dwellers in the city, no one has a right and an entitlement to live on the street, on the pavement. We do have some arrangements for taking care of those persons who have found themselves without a shelter of their own and if that is so then those persons who are on the street with no place to go ought to be made to go into those shelters and if you don't do that you will end up with a situation like Chacon Street which at 5 o'clock in the morning is an open sewer. So is one thing to talk about wanting to have investment in the city and to do this and to do that but if you turn a blind eye to some of the happenings in the city there will be no improvement in the quality of the city.

One of the things that have happened in the city of Port of Spain in the last 20 years or so is the reduction in the resident population in the city. The city has good infrastructure which can support a larger population and it is the objective of Central Government that that infrastructure be made to sustain more persons meaning that we accept the city of Port of Spain as our capital city and we will work with you to ensure that we create the environment in which more people can reside and have a better quality of life.

So as a cultural centre you are required to lead the nation with respect to things cultural. You are the centre of carnival yes but every year you celebrate city day and I want to hold out to you that while we love a mud mas in Trinidad and Tobago, every city day doesn't have to be a mud mas day. There are lots of other things that we can do. Your city is full of art and culture, find other ways besides mud mas to celebrate city day. You did mention a while ago and I want to hold you to it that particularly at this time when our revenues are considerably challenged that one of the challenges of this Executive, like others is to make sure that you make the most of what little resources you have and set about ensuring that as you manage the affairs of the city that you ensure that you get for the Burgesses value for money. Very soon, I think it is March, we are aiming to implement the Procurement Legislation and it will apply to all those who are involved in managing and spending public monies and the public servants who work with you, all your staff, all of you, would have to ensure that as you obtain goods and services spending public monies that you would now be on the law required to conduct those transactions in a particular way so as not to be in breach of statute which demand that certain kinds of activities takes place. What that is hoping to do and is expecting to do is to ensure that you get the benefit of competition, the benefit of efficiencies and as we move to implement the law of Local Government exercises that we have spoken about in the recent election which brought you into office, a number of changes will be coming your way. I ask you to cooperate with the public service, cooperate with the Central Government, use your initiative, have a vision for what you want out of this reform and as we go step by step giving you more authority, we would like to believe that you would be worthy of receiving that authority and using it all for the benefit of the Burgesses you represent.

We expect that the city of Port of Spain will demonstrate to other Local Government bodies how Local Administration could bring about an improvement in the quality of life of all our citizens and the lead city of the country therefore you are the lead Executive and you have a duty to demonstrate a higher quality of performance.

I know that you all represent one political party and there is danger in that, that you do not have an Opposition to pull up your socks. I just want to say to you that you are not a group of people who come on your own; you represent a political party with tremendous experience and Mr Mayor you have joined a long line of very distinguished citizens and I expect that you too will make your mark so that when your picture is on the wall as a Mayor who has served, we'll want to point out to what you have accomplished because it is not just a question of serving for two years, it's about accomplishing change for the better.

I have great expectation during this term that as we make the efforts to bring about Local Government Reform exercises and even as we are doing so against reduced expenditure; we expect that we can bring about significant improvement.

So the city of Port of Spain is waiting on you to see what your work program is, to see what you will address, to see what you will change, to see what improvement in the quality of life will take place in Port of Spain and being the cultural city, being the entertainment capital of the nation, being the financial capital of the nation, being the area of the nation where opportunities come if only by virtue of a gathering of people, you have your work cut out for you for making Port of Spain an area of economic growth, an area of safety, an area of employment, an area of investment and an area of pride for all the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

I wish you well in your term and we are depending on you. We look forward to a very successful term of office and may God bless you and your Executive and may God bless us all in Trinidad and Tobago.