



GOVERNMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO
OFFICE OF THE PRIME MINISTER

**MESSAGE TO THE NATION BY
DR THE HONOURABLE KEITH ROWLEY, MP
PRIME MINISTER OF THE REPUBLIC OF TRINIDAD & TOBAGO
ON THE OCCASION OF
EMANCIPATION 2016**

The pageantry with which we celebrate Emancipation day today underscores the jubilation, triumph and euphoria of a people freed...freed from the worst manifestation of state enforced inhumanity - chattel slavery – a system which legally allowed persons to be bought, sold, bartered and even murdered with impunity.

But freedom would bring its own challenges. The formerly enslaved Africans, individually and collectively, would now have to take responsibility for the direction of their own lives. Amid prejudice and ingrained philosophical beliefs of one group's inherent right to dominate and denigrate another, they created opportunities for their own advancement.

Emancipation closed the door on a dark period of our country's history, not to be forgotten, but from which we may learn and chart our future. It shattered an unjust status quo. Emancipation brought a new dynamic to colonial society fuelling upheavals and changes which would later take us along the path to Independence.

As Afro-Trinbagonians, at Emancipation we reflect on our history and proudly claim our ancestry. We celebrate freedom and recognize the immense sacrifices made by our ancestors and we are justifiably proud of our accomplishments as their descendants.

And while Emancipation Day may be a more intense emotional experience for persons of African descent, we must remember that emancipation irrevocably changed the political, economic, and social reality not only for those who were freed but also for the population as a whole and all those who would follow.

Today Trinidad and Tobago benefits from the contributions of all our citizens, regardless of race, and it is unfortunate that some among us still seek to create chasms within the population.

Instead, in examining our history, should come the realization that struggle, oppression, discrimination and violence were endured in varying degrees by many of our ancestors and yet through sheer determination, the will to succeed and the power of an unconquerable spirit; they surmounted what was intended to crush them.

The stories of our past should not condemn us to the turmoil of acrimony; but rather they should show us a path for achieving the positive and prosperous development of our country now and for the generations to come.

We are currently writing new pages in our history. We need to ask ourselves, are we facilitating new prejudices and divisions in our society? Are we perpetuating a mindset of entitlement – claiming rights where instead we should accept personal responsibility? Are we committed to working together in the best interest of our country? Can we look past the “me” and “my group” to the bigger picture of nationhood?

Emancipation Day, along with our other national days of recognition, are welcome avenues for personal celebrations but I believe they are asking us to do something

more. They invite us to better understand ourselves and each other, seeking commonalities while accepting differences.

We have suffered pain, grief and intolerance. We need another narrative, one driven towards collective respect, appreciation and unity of purpose.

In the spirit of Emancipation Day, we look with renewed hope to our potential as a people and a Nation. On behalf of the Government, I extend to each and every citizen of Trinidad and Tobago best wishes for a thoughtful, reflective and happy Emancipation Day.

