

The Honourable Minister in the Ministry of  
Education  
Clifton De. Coteau

Eric Williams  
“School Bags”  
Essay Competition  
Speech

13<sup>th</sup> August 2010

SALUTATION:

The Honourable Minister of Tertiary Education Mr. Fazal Karim

Your Excellency, the Jamaica High Commissioner to Trinidad and Tobago  
Ms Sharon Saunders.

Mrs. Erica Williams Connell

Professor Colin Palmer

Ladies and Gentlemen

As you are aware I was not originally scheduled to speak today but let me say that the Ministry of Education is pleased to be part of today's ceremony as we honour the winners of the Eric Williams Essay Competition.

The late Dr Eric Williams led Trinidad and Tobago for a quarter of a century until his death in 1981. It was on August 30<sup>th</sup> 1962, just prior to this country attaining its independence that Dr Williams exhorted; " You the children, yours is the great responsibility to educate your parents....you carry the future of Trinidad and Tobago in your school bags."

The then Prime Minister no doubt meant this as a clarion call as he sought to impress upon the descendents of slavery and indentureship the need to see education as not just an opportunity for social mobility but also as an opportunity to develop and take a newly independent Trinidad and Tobago forward.

This year we celebrate 48 years as an independent country and there is no doubt that to a great extent the then youths of Trinidad and Tobago were able to heed Dr Williams' call with the concomitant increase in professionals and a significant increase in those very descendents who have made it to the top of their professions.

Ladies and gentlemen as time passes so too do the challenges faced by societies.

Today we at the Ministry of Education continue to accept that the future of Trinidad and Tobago lies with the young people and what they have in their book bags.

It is for example no longer just books that the youths would need in their book bags but also a lap top as they seek to keep pace with the technological changes occurring in the world.

This is why we have promised and will deliver lap tops to all students entering secondary school for the first time so that they have an immediate start as they continue their education.

We at the Ministry of Education realize that there must be a system of high quality education. A system that is characterised by excellence which therefore reflects:

- \* High standards of teaching, resulting in high performance by students, both by national and international standards;
- \* An organisation with a strong research and evaluation thrust that allows us to be relevant and to be able to respond to the needs and directions of learners, the economy and the society;
- \* Equity in the provision of access and opportunity for all to participate and learn

We, at the Ministry of Education have recognized that the vehicle that will best take us to our destination is an Education System that promotes life-long learning.

Let me also congratulate the winners of the competition, I am sure that you have seen the merit of hard work and perseverance.

I wish to also congratulate the organisers for maintaining this competition in recognition of one of the country's great scholars and the first Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago.

I thank you