



MINISTRY OF EDUCATION

ADDRESS BY

**Dr. the Honourable Tim Gopeesingh,
Minister of Education**

**AT THE LAUNCH OF
WASA'S 2ND NATIONAL SECONDARY SCHOOLS' QUIZ COMPETITION
'IN THE KNOW WITH H₂O – WASTEWATER & REUSE'**

Monday 16th January, 2012

- Mr. Ganga Singh, the Chief Executive Officer of the Water and Sewerage Authority.
- Executive Members and managers of WASA.
- Ministry of Education Officials.
- Our District School Supervisors
- Teachers, parents, students.
- Mrs. Ellen Adamson, acting Corporate Communication Director.
- Distinguish specially invited guests
- Members of the Media
- Ladies and Gentlemen

A very pleasant good morning to one and all.

As I join you all here today at the launch of a very important initiative for not only our education system but our country as a whole, I am reminded of the words of the former Russian President, Mikhail Gorbachev, who once said, and I quote:

“Water, like religion and ideology, has the power to move millions of people. Since the very birth of human civilization, people have moved to settle close to it. People move when there is too little of it. People move when there is too much of it. People journey down it. People write, sing and dance about it. People fight over it. And all people, everywhere and every day, need it.”

When he said those words over 25 years ago, it was at a time when the world was only just beginning to realize that we were well on the way to destroying our most precious resources which have historically guaranteed global sustainability—our environment, and especially our water supplies.

Today, across the globe, we are dealing with not just the stoppage of that destruction, but the implementation of measures to restore the damage we’ve already done.

Water, as we all know, is essential for all dimensions of life and over the past few decades, the use of water has increased, but in many places its availability is falling to crisis levels.

Statistics show that more than eighty countries, with forty percent of the world's population, are already facing water shortages, while by year 2020 the world's population will double.

The costs of water infrastructure have risen dramatically in countries throughout the world while the quality of water in rivers and underground has deteriorated, due to pollution by waste and contaminants from people, industry and agriculture.

All over the world ecosystems are being destroyed, sometimes permanently.

According to global statistics, over one billion people lack safe water, and three billion lack sanitation; eighty per cent of infectious diseases are waterborne, killing millions of children every year.

In fact, by 2015, according to estimates from the United Nations and the United States government, at least 40 percent of the world's population, or about three billion people, will live in countries where it is difficult or impossible to get enough water to satisfy basic needs.

We have reached a stage of our development where clean water is a necessity that we can no longer take for granted.

Each year more people die of water related diseases than any other cause of death on this planet.

That equates to a higher rate of suffering and mortality than diabetes, cancer, high cholesterol, or war; or any two combined for that matter.

An entire economy is growing around water.

Those without money are suffering the most and risk severe illness from contaminated sources.

Trinidad and Tobago has to ensure that we do not fall into this category, and it means that if we are to have any hope of satisfying the food and water needs of the world's people and the citizens of this country in

particular in the years ahead, we will need a fundamental shift in how we use and manage water, as alluded to by the Chief Executive Officer a while ago.

I am quite happy to see that WASA is fully cognizant of these realities and has made direct moves towards ensuring that as a nation, we embrace the solutions and technologies which exist to provide clean, affordable drinking water for our population.

But if we are to conserve and preserve our water supplies for posterity it would require a whole lot more than the implementation of technology and Governmental policies to so do—it would require a fundamental shift in the thinking of our population, and this is what H2 O Water is doing here today starting with our children, where each and every single citizen recognizes that water conservation and preservation is his or her sacred duty, and I want the students to listen to this again, every single citizen and child and student must recognise that water conservation and preservation is his or her sacred duty, so to our quarter million students, I want to exhort you to remember that.

It is never easy to change the way a people think, and when it comes to environmental conservation and in particular water preservation, we have always had a tremendous battle to do so.

The reality is that for many of us, in the past few decades, water simply flowed from a faucet, and we think little about it beyond this point of contact.

As a people, we seem to have lost a sense of respect for the wild river, for the complex workings of a wetland, for the intricate web of life that water supports, and the time has come for us to regain that respect and reverence for water.

This is why this initiative by WASA here this morning is such a great one.

As a quiz which seeks to unite secondary schools from across Trinidad and Tobago into a spirit of competition and unity, it is a noble effort.

I am informed that it seeks to provide students with basic knowledge for the many university programmes which now exist in the study of water and wastewater, which include:

- Associate Degrees in Water Resources Management and Water & Wastewater Management at the College of Science Technology and Applied Arts of Trinidad and Tobago... (COSTATT).
- A Bsc in Water Resources Management and Wastewater Management also at COSTATT
- The Masters of Science Degree in Water & Wastewater Management Services at the University of the West Indies.

It will also play a major role in engendering the informal education and growth of knowledge in the areas of sound Water and Wastewater practices, by encouraging students to research the day-to-day challenges in this area, and by emphasizing the very important responsibility that WASA has to collect, adequately treat and then release quality wastewater back into the environment in order to protect public health and to preserve our physical environment.

In so doing, WASA will have ensured that our children who will become our country's leaders in a few years would have learnt how crucial it is for water and environmental conservation to become a way of life for citizens if our country is to survive.

That, my dear friends, amounts to a tremendous service in patriotism, for, to quote the late, great American politician, Robert Kennedy Jr:

“What we are fighting for when we fight for environmental conservation is not just the fishes and the birds. We protect nature not for nature's sake but for our own sake because it is the infrastructure of our communities, and if we want to meet the obligations of our civilization and our culture which are to create communities for our children that provide them with the same opportunities for dignity and enrichment as the communities that our parents gave us, we've got to start by protecting that infrastructure; the air that we breathe, the water that we drink, the landscapes that enrich us. We're not protecting nature for nature's sake. We're protecting it because it enriches us, yes, it

enriches our economy and we ignore that at our peril. But it is also enriching us aesthetically, recreationally, culturally, historically and spiritually. Human beings have other appetites besides money. And if we don't feed them, we're not going to grow up...we're not going to become the kind of beings that our creator intended us to become."

As such, this competition this event is truly an act of patriotic duty and let me say to the organizers in WASA—all of you—congratulations on finding a way to serve your nation and its people now and in posterity in a way which is fundamental to its survival and development.

To our wonderful, brilliant children who will participate in this completion, I am told the quiz will be carried on national television so remember that you will be looked upon as role models and educators yourselves by virtue of being seen on this very powerful medium and so I urge you all of you students, to be especially innovative and diligent when you participate, and show the people of this country that our young people today, our young students are as great as they were in

the past and even better and are full of positive achievements and can truly fulfil our hopes and expectations of greatness.

And so, as I close, let me wish all the participants the very best of luck in this competition, and may we all reap the rewards it seeks to give us academically, socially, culturally and individually.

Thank you all very much and May God continue to bless us all.