



MINISTRY OF EDUCATION

REMARKS OF

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

at the

OPENING OF THE TOBAGO SCHOOL FOR SPECIAL NEEDS CHILDREN

TOBAGO

Thursday 15th December, 2011

Salutations:

- The Honourable Prime Minister Kamla Persad-Bissessar
- Cabinet colleagues
- Leader of the Tobago Organisation for the People, Mr Ashworth Jack
- Principal, teachers, parents and students
- Members of the media
- Distinguished ladies and gentlemen

Good afternoon and Seasons Greetings

A former Vice President of the United States of America—Hubert Humphrey—once said that, and I quote:

"The moral test of a government is how it treats those who are in the dawn of life—the children; those who are in the twilight of life—the elderly; and those who are in the shadow of life—the sick, the needy and the disabled."

The People's Partnership Government has aptly demonstrated that we have passed this moral test with flying colours, since, under the leadership of our Prime Minister, we have sought to actively and efficiently improve the lives of our nation's children, elderly and differently-abled citizens.

In the education sector, I have been mandated by the Prime Minister to ensure that our education system, simply put, offers nothing but the best that can be provided for our children anywhere in the world, because, as you all know, she held this post over a decade ago and begun during her tenure many great initiatives that have ensured that our people rank among the best educated in the world today.

Thus far, we have implemented policies that will see all our nation's children access free early childhood care and education by 2015; a technological revolution in the education system through our laptop for all policy as well as great strides in curriculum development.

Today, I have the honour and pleasure of announcing that, in keeping with the Prime Minister's mandate to ensure that ALL our children benefit from our progressive education drive, the Ministry of Education has also embarked on a programme to build at least five schools for the differently-abled children of Trinidad and Tobago by 2015.

This is due to the fact that education is the first requirement above all others which ensures that people with disabilities can participate in their communities as working, productive members of society.

These schools will incorporate all aspects of the curriculum—sports, information technology, visual and performing arts and traditional academics—which are of the highest standards with state of the art facilities that are second to none.

The children attending these schools will benefit from proper, specialised teachers, counselors and guides that will cater to their every learning need—be it visual, hearing, speaking impediments, autism, down syndrome, physical disabilities and learning disorders.

In addition to this, we will also seek to ensure that these children and their parents and guardians will be provided by the State with the material support to pay the costs of their special education needs—for example—

they will benefit from proper transportation to and from school free of charge, and given the special love that our Prime Minister has for children and her personal aim to ensure our people are taken care of in the best way possible, I am sure she will implement our proposal to have tax exemptions on the education materials and equipment for these children as well.

We intend to ensure that when these children emerge from these schools, they are well prepared as adults to take their places in our society and the workplace as equal citizens who enjoy their rights of freedom of access to all employment opportunities.

The Ministry of Education will also be implementing an aggressive public information drive and education programme when each school is completed, to urge and ensure that the parents and guardians of these beautiful children are made aware of the very great need to have them

enrolled in these schools to be educated and not keep them at home, as has been traditionally done.

We are officially beginning the construction of the first of these schools today in Tobago.

The Ministry of Education is also proud to announce that we have fulfilled the Prime Minister's mandate to ensure that the existing school for Tobago gets the much needed Braille machines to assist the students in their learning.

The time has come for us as a society to stop "tolerating" our differently-abled citizens and start celebrating them for the great people that they are, because it takes a lot of courage to be differently-abled, and thus, they are some of our country's greatest heroes.

The Ministry of Education will thus be taking an active role in making this fundamental social change, and I urge all citizens to join us in this mission.

Before I go, let me say that I know as Minister of Education that the parents, guardians and caretakers of these wonderful, beautiful children often feel alone in their task, but let me say that you are appreciated more than you will ever know for your dedication to them and we thank God for your love, caring and patience.

You have the fullest support of the Ministry of Education and the Government and I know that by working together, we will succeed as a nation and a people, regardless of our challenges.

Let us hold on to this promise as we enter the final week of preparations for the Godly, wonderful Christmas season, and may we never forget the true meaning of this great holiday—and that is that every time a child is born, any child, he or she gives us hope that God is not yet disappointed in man, and hope will always endure.

Thank you and Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year to all.