



MINISTRY OF EDUCATION

ADDRESS BY

**Dr. the Honourable Tim Gopeesingh,**

**Minister of Education**

at the

**Opening of the 43<sup>rd</sup> Meeting of the  
Caribbean Examinations Council  
and the Regional Top Awards  
Ceremony**

**Thursday December 1, 2011**

**Salutations:**

- Chairman of the Caribbean Examinations Council, Professor E Nigel Harris
- Deputy Chairman of the CXC Mr. Pulandar Kandhi
- Registrar of the Caribbean Examinations Council, Dr. Didacus Jules
- Pro-Registrar of the Caribbean Examinations Council Mr. Glenroy Cumberbatch
- Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Education Ms Kathleen Thomas
- Other Officials of the Ministry of Education
- Carlge George CXC Honourary
- The very distinguished top awardees of the CXC examinations for 2011
- Specially invited guests
- Members of the media
- Ladies and gentlemen

A very pleasant good evening to one and all and may I say a very special welcome to Trinidad and Tobago, and I hope your stay thus far has been very pleasant, and continues to be very enjoyable.

I must say from the very outset, that tonight's occasion fills me with deep pride and hope, and as I recall the words of two great leaders of modern history.

The first is former United Nations General Secretary, Kofi Annan, who once said that, and I quote:

"There is no trust more sacred than the one the world holds with children. There is no duty more important than ensuring that their rights are respected, that their welfare is protected, that their lives are free from fear and want and that they can grow up in peace."

The second is the late, great American President, John F Kennedy, who said that: "Children are the world's most valuable resource and its best hope for the future."

Tonight's celebration of the outstanding accomplishments of our region's children indeed unites both philosophies and I must say it comes at a most appropriate time in our region's history.

The Caribbean Examinations Council has had a strong history, since Dr. Jules indicated, 1988, of honouring our candidates throughout the region for their outstanding performances in the Caribbean Secondary Education Certificate (CSEC) May/June examinations in various categories.

In June 2006, the CXC introduced a further category of awards—this time, for outstanding performance in the Caribbean Advanced Proficiency Examination (CAPE)—again, for a variety of subject areas.

If the CXC's mission is a simple one—which is to promote greater public awareness of outstanding performances by students; and encourage students across the region to strive for excellence in these examinations—then I would say to the Council tonight that you should take a bow and know that your mission has been long accomplished.

But more than that, you should congratulate yourself with the realisation that far beyond ensuring that our region's top students know they are recognised and appreciated—you have subconsciously played a very major role in enhancing Caribbean unity and the development of our region as a people and an international academic commodity.

It is no secret that ours is a region which shares a common history yet a marked diversity—of cultures, religions, ethnicities and beliefs.

We represent to the world the ideal personification of unity in diversity but for decades now, we have tried, without great success, to form political and economic unions that reflect such a magnanimous philosophy.

Over the years, people have looked –and rightly so—to the natural union of our West Indies Cricket team as the beacon and symbol of true unity that seems more and more, as the years go by, to elude us as a region.

But interestingly enough, our region and national societies have perhaps never viewed the Caribbean Examinations Council as one very crucial, significant element of regional unity, and I say tonight that the time has come for us to change this.

We recognise that our tertiary education system, in the form of the University of the West Indies, is one of our common regional bonds, but we do not seem to apply this to our secondary school system, when in fact, the common exams that our children sit annually in the form of CXC and CAPE, is perhaps our strongest existing regional bond. We therefore tell the world by that our children share an educational bond that unites them in the method in which they fundamentally think and for that, the Council must realise that it is perhaps one of the most important institutions of our region's past, present and future development and survival.

Throughout the decades, when our individual countries had diverse economic prosperity and political and cultural differences, CXC remained the only institution which ensured that our children had equal access to education and academic qualification, and thus, equal access to social mobility and transformation.

CXC ensured that children and parents of our region knew that academic achievement was not only their rights as people of democratic societies, but also, their passports to a better future - for the children, for their countries and for the Caribbean region.

It was thus the best example of the great things that can be achieved in the developing world out of sheer will and vision, especially in the sphere of education.

But, as Winston Churchill once said, with greatness comes great responsibility and those words are very much more applicable to the Council at present.

Because the CXC in fact shapes and determines our children's academic future, and therefore, the survival and progress of our nations and the Caribbean region, there is, simply put, a very crucial need for CXC to be the best examinations body in the world.

In this age of globalisation and a worldwide economic crisis, when small countries and a region like ours are under the very real threat of being made irrelevant, the CXC reorganised and redeveloped itself into a council which can train our children to be the best products, academically and otherwise, in the global market.

It must therefore be a body which embodies and espouses global diversity, global competition and global strengths.

I saw that the esteemed Chairman, Professor Harris, has said that CXC will be altering its History and Social Studies syllabuses to be more relevant to our Caribbean past and current realities and I must say I find this to be a very good step in the right direction.

You see, for decades now, our region's commitment to academic excellence has been based on our shared history of colonialism and the very real fact that education was the only way for us as a people to attain social mobility and escape from a life of poverty.

But the reality of today's world is that academic excellence, while still extremely important, is not the only method for our development, progress and sustainability as a people and the time has come for CXC to ensure that it takes the lead in propelling our national and regional educational systems towards that much needed diversity.

In other words there is always room for improvement.

For example, let me undertake a brief analysis of the performance of our children in Trinidad and Tobago from the pre-school to secondary school. We have approximately seventeen thousand students entering pre-school, primary schools. Seventeen

thousand enter secondary school but out of that, by Form Five, only 12,500 students write five subjects or more. Four thousand five hundred have found it difficult to write five subjects and out of 12,500 students, 6,500 pass five subjects or more.

I am advised that a total of 33,318 candidates entered for 34 subjects in the Caribbean Secondary Education Certificate (CSEC) Examination in Trinidad and Tobago.

The number of students attempted five or more subjects in 2011 was 16,098, while those who attempted five subjects or more subjects including Mathematics and English A amounted to 13,623.

7,183 (44.6%) students were successful in five or more subjects while 5,892 (43.3%) were successful in five or more subjects including Mathematics and English A. Mathematics, with a relatively low pass rate of 40.2%, has the biggest impact on the group of students obtaining full certificates.

### **Performance by Educational District**

The percentage of students passing five or more subjects including Mathematics and English A ranged between 22.2% in North Eastern Educational District and 51.2% in the Port of Spain Educational District. Two educational districts - Victoria (50.5%) and Port of Spain (51.2%) had pass rates for students passing five or more subjects including Mathematics and English A above 50%.

### **PERFORMANCE BY SUBJECT AND GENDER**

114,817 subject entries were registered for the 34 subjects in 2011. 48,949 (42.6%) were entries by male candidates while 65,868 (57%) were entries by female candidates.

The percentage of grades I-III for the 34 subjects was between 37.64% in Electrical and Electronic Technology and 96.08 % in Physical Education and Sport. The pass rates in 32 of the 34 subjects were above 50% while the pass rates in 11 subjects were above

75%. 58.94% of males obtained grades I-III while 63.09% of females obtained grades I-III.

## **CAPE Results 2011**

### **National Performance**

#### **Unit I**

In 2011, 28,299 subject entries were registered to write the 24 subjects offered in CAPE – Unit I. A total of 26,294 (92.9%) actually wrote the various subjects with 4,544 (17.3%) obtaining grade I, 5,650 (21.5%) grade II and 6,053 (23.0%) grade III. A total of 16,247 (61.8%) obtained grades I - III with 24,394 (92.8%) obtaining grades I - V. The pass rates (grades I-III) for the 24 subjects were between 26.5% in History and 96.8% in Art & Design.

#### **Unit II**

In 2011, approximately 13,085 subject entries were registered to write the 21 subjects offered in CAPE – Unit II. A total of 12,350 (94.4%) actually wrote with 2,734 (22.1%) obtaining grade I, 2,721 (22.0%) grade II and 2,631 (21.3%) grade III. A total of 8,086 (65.5%) obtained grades I - III with 11,519 (93.3%) obtaining grades I - V. The pass rates (grades I-III) for the 21 subjects were between 28.2% in Geography and 97.1% in Art & Design.

### **Performance by Gender**

#### **Unit I**

Of the 28,299 subject entries registered in 2011, 11,516 (40.7%) were male registrations while 16,783 (60%) were female registrations.

Female candidates obtained higher numbers in grades I - III and overall scored higher than their male counterparts – 18.2% females obtained grade ones compared to 15.9% males; 23.1% females obtained grade twos compared to 19.0% males and 24.1% females obtained grade three compared to 21.4% males. Overall, 65.4% of female candidates obtained grades I – III and 94.1% obtained grades I - V compared to males

obtaining 56.3% in grades I - III and 90.7% in grades I - V. As far as our interaction with CXC, we have contributed for our students in 2009 \$31 million, in 2010, we contributed \$37.8 million in student fees and between 2007 and 2011, we contributed approximately \$43 million to CXC in other areas.

## **Unit II**

Of the 13,085 subject entries registered in 2011, 5,167 (39.5%) were male registrations while 7,918 (60.5%) were female registrations.

Female candidates obtained higher numbers in grades I - III and overall scored higher than their male counterparts – 22.3% females obtained grade ones compared to 21.9% males; 23.7% females obtained grade twos compared to 19.3% males and 22.2% females obtained grade threes compared to 19.9% males. Overall, 68.3% of female candidates obtained grades I - III and 94.7% obtained grades I - V compared to males obtaining 60.7% in grades I - III and 90.4% in grades I - V.

These results reflect the reality of our education systems throughout the Caribbean—and they sadly point to the fact that our children are essentially failing to attain required and desired achievement when it comes to basic literacy and numeracy skills.

TT ranked 62 out of 82 in the Pearls Index on Primary Schools.

And in this regard, we must be very concerned as regional educators and regional leaders, but more than that, we must be committed to uniting to fix this serious problem. And we must seek to deal with our literacy and numeracy problems.

If we fail to do so, we run the risk of seeing our great strides in education attained over the decades fall apart and that is ominous for our countries' social progress and continued sustainability.

Kofi Annan, the former UN Secretary General, once underscored this when he said:

"Literacy is a bridge from misery to hope. It is a tool for daily life in modern society.

"It is a bulwark against poverty, and a building block of development, an essential complement to investments in roads, dams, clinics and factories.

"Literacy is a platform for democratization, and a vehicle for the promotion of cultural and national identity.

"Especially for girls and women, it is an agent of family health and nutrition.

"For everyone, everywhere, literacy is, along with education in general, a basic human right.

"Literacy is, finally, the road to human progress and the means through which every man, woman and child can realize his or her full potential."

In Trinidad and Tobago, under my stewardship, the Ministry of Education has undertaken an aggressive drive towards curriculum review and educational reform to ensure that our school learning systems are truly applicable and relevant to the daily lives and needs of our nation's children. We are initiating Intervention strategies, at the stage of infant one and two, into primary school. We are intervening early.

We have moved to infuse in a very fundamental way, sports, visual arts, civics, agri-science and information technology in the curriculum, in recognition of the fact that academics alone do not make a successful child.

I urge that CXC adopts this philosophy in their education system.

We have reached a stage in our development where we must recognize that fundamental need for a new education system which must be equally concerned with academic excellence and the holistic development of an individual, and realization of the true potential of a child.

It must recognize the hazards of academic insularity and it must teach our students and future leaders of our countries the most relevant lesson of all in today's world— and that is the ability to look at someone anywhere in the world, from the great superpowers of

the United States and China, India and Brazil to the IT geniuses of poverty-ridden India -and be able to see the image of him or herself.

The old emphasis upon academic superiority is no longer relevant in a world where the Internet, the world economic crisis and globalisation have made us all equals in ways we may never fully grasp, and this must give way to education for citizenship in the human community.

With such an education and with such self-understanding, it is possible that somewhere in the Caribbean region, we may produce that person or persons who will one day soon come forward with the new inspiration for a better world.

Indeed, these very persons may very well exist now in the shining exemplars of excellence here today to collect the awards, students who are living proof that if we put in that extra effort and innovation in our educational system, we will truly reap the rewards and benefits and achieve our true destiny of greatness.

It is said that every child you encounter is a divine appointment and that children are the hands by which we take hold of heaven.

In this day and age where so much negativity is ascribed to our nations' and region's young people, I say that it is truly a blessing when we realise that the majority of our children prove that they are truly the best investment we can ever have as a people.

To all the outstanding performers of the CXC exams of 2011 here assembled, who hail from so many countries throughout our region, I wish to offer each and every single one of you, my heartfelt congratulations on your tremendous accomplishments.

I say to each and every one of you tonight that YOU are the inspiration for leaders like us in our societies, countries and regions to continue to work hard for our countries.

You show us all that the fruits of our work and service are truly the best gratification a person can have.

You have done your schools, teachers, parents, countries and most importantly, your Caribbean region, proud and I know that some of you would have had to work against many odds to achieve your success.

Tonight is a time when you should congratulate yourselves, reflect on the long, hard hours of academic and general discipline you put yourselves through and the long, hard, emotional and mental stress you endured and conquered..... take a bow, well done... and then realize that your achievements here are the first of many new experiences and triumphs life has in store for you. You have taken a short, single step

You carry a strong burden in going out in today's world as future leaders—of your countries and region, and your task will be to further advance the cause of social justice and economic and political development of your countries and region.

You have done great things in your young lives and I wish to remind you all tonight that greatness lies not in where we stand, but in what direction we are moving and we must sail sometimes with the wind and sometimes against it, but whatever course you choose to sail in life, I hope it takes you to the corners of your smiles, to the highest of your hopes, to the windows of your opportunities, and to the most special places your heart has ever known.

Always remember, tomorrow is a blank page, just waiting to be filled with your dreams. Be proud, confident people and most of all—be happy and do your best for your nations and your region.

Remember, what we are is God's gift to us, but what we become is our gift to God and humanity.

Please continue to ensure that you become the best gifts that can be bestowed to anyone.

To all here tonight, let me remind you that it is a proven fact that if children are given the necessary tools to succeed, they will succeed beyond not only their wildest dreams, but our wildest hopes for a better future.

It is said that children are the living messages we send to a time we will not see.

Our children here tonight are truly our messages for that time in the future we have never been able to see in our lifetimes, but which we know is coming.

It is the time when as a Caribbean people, we realize our fullest potentials of innovation, excellence, unity, harmony, compassion, success and love, and take our true place as a global exemplar of greatness in every possible way.

If we could fast forward perhaps 30 years into the future, I say we will see tonight's function, one where these children who are being honoured among us here, are the ones who fill our shoes as leaders bestowing these tributes to generations of children yet to be born. And there, we will see ourselves remembered as the current leaders of a crucial time, being honoured for our foresight to adapt to a world of new thinking and for the successes we brought about in not only continuing the development of our region, its nations and its people, but more than that, its true success in achieving at last, our truest potential as a great people.

Indeed, we will see ourselves being remembered as heroes of yesteryear, by the people we now praise as the heroes of tomorrow.

May God continue to bless us all in our eternal quest to achieve this reality and may we always know that it is well within our reach.

I thank you.