

INAUGURAL ADDRESS BY CHRISTINE CARLA KANGALOO –
SEVENTH PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO

- Dr. the Honourable Keith Christopher Rowley, M.P., Prime Minister of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago and Mrs. Sharon Rowley;
- The Honourable Mr. Justice Ivor Archie, O.R.T.T, Chief Justice of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, and Mrs. Denise Rodriguez-Archie;
- Her Excellency Paula-Mae Weekes, O.R.T.T., Former President of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago;
- Senator The Honourable Nigel de Freitas, President of the Senate, and Mrs. Shayna De Freitas;
- The Honourable Mrs. Bridgid Annisette-George M.P., Speaker of the House of Representatives, and Mr. Newman George;
- Members of Cabinet;
- The Honourable Farley Augustine, Chief Secretary of the Tobago House of Assembly;
- The Honourable Kamla Persad-Bissessar M.P., Leader of the Opposition;

- Your Excellencies and representatives of the Diplomatic Corps;
- Members of the Judiciary;
- Members of Parliament;
- Members of the Media;
- All Other Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen;
- Our nation's schoolchildren;
- My Fellow Citizens...

1. It is March 20th 2023, and Trinidad and Tobago has just installed its Seventh President.

2. The ceremony by which we have done so is the result of the hard work and dedication of a large number of persons, to whom the country owes a tremendous debt this morning. And, the very first thing I should like to do, as I begin this term of the country's Seventh Presidency, is to say thank you to all the hands that have pulled together to make today's ceremony happen.

3. I would like to thank, especially, Her Excellency President Paula Mae Weekes. As new Head of State, I am sure that I am constitutionally authorized to act on behalf of the entire country in thanking President Weekes for her noble and selfless service over the last five years, and I do so unreservedly.

4. But, outside of constitutional entitlements, and simply as a human being, I want to thank President Weekes for the kindness and the empathy that she has shown to me, especially over the past few weeks, in helping me to prepare, not just for today's ceremony, but also for the term of office that lies before me. Madam President, you have my deepest and my sincere gratitude.

5. Permit me, as well, to express my gratitude to the Electoral College for having elected me to serve as the country's Seventh Head of State. The feelings which have overwhelmed me since my election, are simply too much to put into words. All that I can do in return is to undertake to strain every muscle to vindicate the College's confidence in me, and I promise to do so.

6. When I was growing up, the number 7 was considered a lucky number. When teachers would hand out raffle sheets for us to take chances to raise funds for school, I would always select "7" as my number. Insofar as Presidents go, the Electoral College has selected me to be our country's number '7'. And, if, in time, history were to show my selection to have been a lucky one, let one thing be absolutely clear – that will only have been so, because of the 6 dedicated and devoted men and women who have preceded me in this office. My first request, as new Head

of State, is that you therefore join me in expressing our country's collective thanks to these 6 outstanding sons and daughters.

7. And so, allow me, on behalf of a grateful and a beholden nation, to pay tribute today to His Excellency President Ellis Clarke –for his intellect and his courtliness. Allow me, on your behalf, to pay tribute to His Excellency President Noor Hassanali – for his steadiness and his dignity. Allow me to pay tribute to His Excellency President Arthur Napoleon Raymond Robinson – for his pioneering and his gallantry. Allow me to pay tribute to His Excellency President George Maxwell Richards - for his erudition and his ingenuity. Allow me to pay tribute to His Excellency President Anthony Carmona – for his passionate love of country and his vitality. And allow me to pay tribute to Her Excellency President Paula Mae Weekes – for the clearness of her convictions and for her fortitude.
8. By virtue of the efforts of these, our six (6) previous Presidents, this country has written a glorious Presidential past. Today, we come together to start writing a further chapter in our Presidential history. Permit me now, to share with you a little of what I hope that future will look like.
9. One of the questions which invariably emerges whenever the occasion for the election of a President arises, is the role of the President in the first place. Through our collective fault, 47 years after our nation attained Republican status, significant portions of our citizenry remain unclear about precisely what the role of the President is.

10. During my term, I would like to continue the work begun by my predecessors in trying to demystify the role. I think that a good place to start is at the level of our primary school children.

11. One of our nation's founders spoke of the future of our nation being in our children's school bags; I believe that heightening awareness at the primary school level about the role of the President, will help promote a better understanding of the Presidency. I am aware of at least one primary school in South Trinidad - the San Fernando Girls Government Primary School, Standard 4 (Singh) - that has embarked on a project to heighten awareness about the role of the President. So long as that school's Principal permits, I should be very happy to meet with the students in Standard 4 (Singh) to discuss with them how they and their teachers might be able to help to lead and spread projects like theirs across the country.

12. This is one of the things that I hope the Presidential future that we are starting to write today, will look like. A future in which there is a population that is better informed about the Presidency, and that is therefore better able to hold it to account.

13. Another means through which I believe the youth - and those who interact directly with them - can come to the country's aid, particularly in this season of rising crime, is through the model provided by the steelband movement in its preparations for Panorama.

14. For decades, there have been those who have been telling us that the discipline and the structure that the panyard brings into the lives of young people each year in the lead up to Carnival, combine to create one of the most effective youth delinquency prevention programmes available in the country. As President, I will be anxious to meet with and listen to those voices, as I will be to use the voice of my own Office to advocate for the adoption in our communities of youth programmes based on the panyard model - not just limited to specific periods in the year, but on a year-round basis.

15. This is another aspect of the Presidential future I envision - a future in which the Office of the President continues to collaborate with communities to explore, and advocate for, means by which our young people can be steered towards endeavours that are glorious and life-giving, and away from the allure of antisocial behaviours.

16. As our democracy and our society mature, there is an increasing demand for our leaders to become more and more accessible. The Office of President is no exception. There are certain levels of security that attend the Office of President – including as the President moves around in public spaces and, as many of us have experienced, on the nation’s roads. There are also certain protocols that guide – and often limit – how citizens interact with the President. I ask the country to understand and to bear with these arrangements: in the main, they are necessary to preserve the dignity of the Office and the safety of its occupant. But they are not immutable, and they should not be inflexible. We must be careful not to make the mistake of elevating these arrangements, into ends in themselves. And we

must avoid, at all costs, conscripting them into the dubious service of making the highest office in the land, also the most remote office in the land.

17. I therefore undertake, during my term in office, to build on the work of my predecessors and to examine ways of modernizing the protocols that govern how citizens relate with the Office, and vice versa.

18. One of the ways in which I would like to see the Office of President made more and more accessible, is by having its facilities put to even greater use in hosting cultural, educational and artistic ventures - particularly among the youth. For example, I would like to see the Bandstand put to regular use as a platform for new and emerging young artistes. I would like to see the main ballroom and the grounds at President's House used to host displays, such as art exhibitions by primary and secondary school students. And I would like to see the public areas at President's House opened up to facilitate endeavours such as book club meetings, and programmes to introduce young people to music. As the pre-eminent Office of public service in the country, I would like to see President's House and its grounds serve the public by becoming a cradle for intellectual, cultural and artistic exploration among our youth, and, in so doing, helping to improve observation, perception and communication skills among young people.

19. I have described the Office of the President as the pre-eminent Office of public service in the country. That is no accidental description. And it must be no pie-in-the sky

ambition. It is my intention to build on the work begun by my predecessors, and to complete the transformation of the Office of the President into a fully-modernized, highly-efficient and effectively-run organization, commensurate with its status and with the rightful expectations of the public whom it serves. I believe that the Office of President should serve as a model to all other public-service institutions in this country, of how to conduct the public's business, both internally and externally. I shall spare no effort in this regard.

20. One of the initiatives that I feel particularly passionate about pursuing, is putting together an archive of our Presidential history and of the customs and the conventions that attend the Office of President. Such an archive is badly needed. Without it, I have had to rely on the willingness, the patience and the generosity of volunteers, both in and outside of the Office of the President, to work out what to expect, both in the lead up to today's inauguration, and thereafter, during the term of office that lies ahead. I would very much like to see the Office develop its own recorded, documented history and practices, from which not only future Presidents, but the entire nation can benefit. This will not only help promote a better understanding of the Presidency; but it will also save us from losing an important part of our history.

21. And so, looking ahead to the Seventh Presidency of Trinidad and Tobago, some of the things I hope to see are a demystification of the role of the President; advocacy for the adoption in our communities of year-round, youth delinquency prevention programmes like the panyard model; protocols attending the Office that are refined and modernized to better reflect our culture and our history; a President who, by virtue of

these reformed protocols, becomes more and more accessible to, and less and less isolated from the public; an Office that becomes a cradle of intellectual, cultural and artistic exploration among the youth; an Office that is modernized, inside and out; and an Office that records and preserves our Presidential history and the customs and conventions of the Office.

22. I know that I am setting the Seventh Presidency no small task when I identify these as among its goals. I do so only because I truly believe that Trinidad and Tobago deserves no less, and that we are in a time and in a place where no less will suffice. Rest assured that I am not in the least bit naïve about the struggles that the Office will face in attempting to accomplish these goals. In pursuing them, the Office will be coming up against entrenched systems and ways of doing things. But if there is one thing of which you can be sure, it is that as your President, I will fight to the end to make the Office work better for all of us.

23. The means by which I propose to achieve these goals, and to do all of these things, is simple - relentless advocacy. I will devote all of my energy to advocating for better conditions, for better arrangements, for better platforms, and for better opportunities for all. But let us be clear – I am not of the view that relentlessness means that I must be combative or belligerent. Far from it. That is not my way. My way is to be your Diplomat-In-Chief, making the case for a better Trinidad and Tobago firmly, but without acrimony or bitterness. My words do not need to be shouted in the public square. There is already too much shouting going on in our country today. I believe that

we all need to be calmer and more reflective. And I propose to lead in that regard, by example.

24. I do not, for one second, believe that I, or indeed, any President, can achieve these goals alone. A successful Presidency is the result of a successful collaboration between the Office and the citizenry. In my particular case, I have listened carefully to the conversation that preceded my election to this Office and I am not at all unmindful of the fact that there are those who have expressed disquiet with my occupying this new role and who, for one reason or another, might not currently be fully on board with assisting me to achieve these goals. I know that there have been voices from certain quarters that have given the impression that such collaboration might not be as easily forthcoming as one might have hoped.

25. To any and every such voice, I repeat Merchant's invitation in the song, so beautifully sung this morning by my beloved Southernaires Choir, to "let us forget spites and grudges and concentrate"; and to "come let us sit and try to relate". I assure all who have not yet signed on to the idea of my Presidency that, in the words of Melanie Hudson, so movingly brought to life this morning by my Southernaires, "I will always be there for you, no matter what you do, whatever joy or pain that you are going through". For, what all of us have to realize, as Ms. Hudson reminds us, is that whatever grief and sadness we bring into each other's households, in the end, we are all, and we are still, this country's daughters and sons.

26. And so, I pledge to work with and to respect all citizens – even and especially those who might not yet wish to work with me - to achieve the goals that I have shared with the country today.
27. There are those whom I know I do not need to win over, as I begin my term. I begin with my husband and the source of my strength for the last 24 years, Kerwyn Garcia. He has always been my First Gentleman, and now he is also yours. I read somewhere recently that when you make room for the women to thrive, the entire household benefits. I thank him for making room for me to thrive. I hope, and I pray, that the whole of Trinidad and Tobago now benefits.
28. I hope that he knows that as his reward, I will be leaning on him heavily for help with my advocacy for the various initiatives I have outlined in this address, particularly in promoting the Office of President Office as a cradle of intellectual, cultural and artistic exploration among the youth - an initiative in which I know he is deeply interested. I thank him in advance for his assistance in this area.
29. I also thank my Mother, Barbara, who, on the cusp of her 95th Birthday, has braved the crowds to be here for me today, as she has been for every event of my life.
30. I thank my brothers, Keith, Wayne, David and Colin and all the members of my family, for their undying love and support. To my father, Carlyle, and my brother Wendell, and sister Caryl,

who all left this earth too soon, I thank you for what your love has meant to me, and the values you helped instill in me.

31. To my loyal and my loving friends, some of whom have travelled from abroad just to be here for this occasion – thank you for always having my back.

32. To my church communities – both at Susumachar Presbyterian in San Fernando and St. Ann’s RC in Port of Spain – your prayers and your faith have sustained me for my entire life; I beseech you both to continue to hold me constantly in prayer.

33. And so, my fellow citizens. It is March 20th 2023, and Trinidad and Tobago has just installed its Seventh President. When we close the book on this Seventh Presidency, may history smile upon us all, and say that we were lucky to have been part of a huge collaborative effort.

34. My fellow citizens – may God bless you. And may God bless Trinidad and Tobago.

March 20, 2023.