

CIPRIANI COLLEGE OF LABOUR AND COOPERATIVE STUDIES

2015 GRADUATION EXERCISE

**FEATURE ADDRESS DELIVERED
BY
HIS HONOUR MR. ALBERT ABERDEEN
ON BEHALF
HH DEBORAH THOMAS-FELIX
PRESIDENT OF THE INDUSTRIAL COURT
OF TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO**

NATIONAL ACADEMY OF THE PERFORMING ARTS, SOUTH CAMPUS, SAN FERNANDO

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A warm welcome to all!

I am truly honoured to share this special occasion with the Cipriani College of Labour and Cooperative Studies and most of all with the graduands, to whom this day rightly belongs. The President of the Industrial Court, Her Honour Deborah Thomas-Felix, was recently appointed a member of the International Labour Organisation Committee of Experts on the Application of Conventions and Recommendations. As a result, she is currently in Geneva attending to those duties. She has asked me to therefore convey to you, on her behalf, her heartiest congratulations on your achievements and it is my pleasure to do so at this juncture.

The following is Her Honour's speech to you:

It is fitting, that the theme for today's ceremonies is "*Education is the most wonderful weapon you can use to change the world*", a quote from a man often referred to as the global conscience - Nelson Mandela, *Madiba* - himself the definition of what excellence is and *can be*.

To be certain, excellence is not the pursuit of perfection but rather the belief - as beautifully expressed by Henry David Thoreau, the noted American philosopher, abolitionist and historian whose views and philosophies on civil disobedience later influenced the political thoughts and actions of notable figures such as Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King, Jr. – that,

"If one advances confidently in the direction of his dreams, and endeavours to live the life which he has imagined, he will meet with a success unexpected in common hours."

Our graduands have done exactly that: set their respective goals, applied themselves to the requisite tasks to achieve these goals, and today, met with success unexpected in common hours. For this, you deserve the numerous plaudits you will no doubt receive today and over the next few weeks.

Remember though, attaining an education goes far beyond the conferment of any degree, title or honour. It would in fact be remiss of me to not highlight

this and to not emphasise to you that your journey has only just begun. For what does the word 'Education' itself mean?

If we examine the etymology, the roots of the word, we find that it derives from the Latin word "educatus", which means "brought up" or "taught" and which gave us the verb "educere" which means to draw out latent potential. Therein lies our first clue as to why Education is the best weapon you can use to effect meaningful change, in your lives, in the lives of your families, in your communities and in the world at large.

The role of Education is therefore not to simply allow one the means to accumulate material wealth and the various symbols and trappings that may accompany this, but rather, and more importantly, to equip you with the tools you need to simply be *the best that you can be*.

These are *powerful words*. They constitute a powerful call to action. They serve as a powerful reminder of not just the role of education, but the importance of adequately trained teachers, adequately oriented syllabi, adequately equipped schools and adequately supportive families. They also remind us in the most powerful way that perhaps we are not quite doing enough nor doing as well as we should or can do.

For the word "educere" reminds us that if we are to produce world class Public Servants, technocrats, scientists, plumbers, nurses or teachers - the list is *ad infinitum* – and draw out the best from our people, then we must seek to

constantly and unstintingly, invest the very best that we have and even what *we don't have*, in our children, in our future.

We need not look further than our own recent history, to see the evidence writ large, of the residual impact of Education on the national development trajectory of our twin-island republic and on the full potential of our people.

The accessibility of Education precipitated the most profound social and economic changes in Trinidad and Tobago over the past 65 years. Our country has moved from the colony it was in pre-Independence 1937 when Tubal Uriah "Buzz" Butler galvanized a movement in the heart of Fyzabad that revolutionised life in our twin-island state and was also the catalyst for far-reaching changes in the social, economic and physical foundations of the country.

This was in part due to the recommendations of the West India Royal Commission Report - popularly known as The Moyne Report. The Report was fully published in 1945 in the aftermath of the labour unrest in the British Caribbean colonies over the period 1934 to 1939. It brought to light the horrendous living conditions in Britain's Caribbean colonies and provided the colonial masters with a snapshot of what life in its Caribbean colonies was really like for the vast majority of working class persons. It is therefore no accident that Labour has continued to be a major catalyst for change and improvements in the quality of life of the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago. The remit of the Labour Movement, and its call to action, has, after all, always been *the achievement of Social Justice*.

In myriad ways, Education along with Health and Labour, partner to form a winning triumvirate that history has shown, when applied in equal measure

and judicious balance, leads to improved, inter-generational development outcomes.

In sum, a healthy, well-educated population where women and men are equipped with the tools to foster their full development and allow them to participate in the labour market in jobs that meet the criteria for Decent Work, leads to superior development outcomes for all.

It is useful at this juncture to further explore the concept of Decent Work since improved educational prospects have been proven to be central to the ability of a person to obtain such work throughout their economically active lives. Decent Work is defined by the International Labour Organisation (ILO) as opportunities for work that is productive and delivers a fair income, security in the workplace and social protection for families, better prospects for personal development and social integration, freedom for people to express their concerns, organise and participate in the decisions that affect their lives and equality of opportunity and treatment for all women and men. This constitutes Labour's *raison d'être* and to do our subject justice, I wish to engage you to examine these questions of the role of Education in effecting change:

- ❖ **How does Education impact the attainment of Decent Work?**
- ❖ **What can we do to ensure that Education remains relevant to our labour needs and our development goals?**

❖ Lastly and perhaps most critically, if we accept that Education precipitates meaningful change and we understand its impact on human development, then where does this leave us?

On the first question, the data clearly indicates a trend that we have always known anecdotally for decades: that youth with post-secondary education in middle and low-income countries stand a better chance of obtaining Decent Work than those with only primary and secondary education. A 2012-2013 ILO study comprising school-to-work transition surveys conducted across 28 countries including Jamaica, Peru, Brazil, Colombia, Bangladesh, Nepal, Cambodia, Tanzania, Egypt, Liberia and Zambia, yielded that having the highest level of education “serves as a fairly dependable guarantee” toward securing a formal job.

The figures are striking: eight in ten, or 83% of the young people surveyed with a post-secondary education were in non-vulnerable employment in the 27 low to upper middle-income countries examined. The ILO noted that the “guarantee” was slightly less prominent among low-income countries but highlighted that 75% of the young persons with a university education still managed to find a paid job.

What is of interest to us as a developing country, is that the ILO warns that simply increasing the level of education in our emerging workforces will not by itself ensure the absorption of higher skilled workers into non-vulnerable jobs. However, what remains clear and what the organization cautions against, is continuing to push undereducated, under-skilled youth into the labour market.

The Report warned that this would constitute a no-win situation for both the young person who would remain destined for a hand-to-mouth existence with precarious and vulnerable employment and for the economy, that gains little in terms of increased labour productivity potential.

In short, *no one wins*.

This provides a natural segue into the second question of ensuring that Education remains relevant to our labour market needs and development goals. The above-cited study also illustrated how important it is to have an in-depth, nuanced understanding of these gaps in our labour market and educational analysis.

In developed and upper middle income developing countries, the skills mismatch is largely defined by “over-education”, where there is a challenge to absorb higher-skilled young people who then take jobs for which they are over-qualified. In low income countries, the “mismatch’ is that of under-educated young workers who have no choice *but* to take vulnerable jobs and thus be subjected to precarious and sometimes unsafe employment in the informal economy.

In Trinidad and Tobago, with the provision of universal tertiary education, we are beginning to see initial signs of the first mismatch that tends to be more prevalent in developed countries, yet we also have the second, more characteristic one that dominates in developing countries.

In expanding further on the subject, the lack of education, the ILO has noted, feeds the perpetuation of poverty across generations, as unskilled workers

earn lower wages and are unable to fund the schooling of their children. This perpetuates a vicious cycle of persistent poverty and, as the ILO reminds,

“....confirms the role of education in shaping labour market outcomes of young people. It also highlights the need for more investments in quality education, from primary through academic levels...”

As I review the ILO’s findings on this subject, it is noteworthy that 45 years earlier, the Calypso King of the World, Dr. Slinger Francisco, the Mighty Sparrow, arrived at the same conclusion. Instead of cross regional surveys, he used homespun wisdom and the keen eye of the calypsonian – who has always been society’s pre-eminent social and political observer - to capture the importance of Education with masterful lyricism in 1967, cautioning that,

*“Without an education in your head,
Your whole life will be pure misery,
You better off dead.
For there is simply no room in this whole wide world,
For an uneducated little boy or girl...”*

This brings us to our final question: if we accept that Education precipitates meaningful change and we understand its impact on human development and thus its outsized role in engendering human security, where does this leave us?

I submit to you simply that it constitutes a call to arms and a time for action. To know better is to do better and we know without a scintilla of doubt that Education plays a fundamental role in human, social and economic development.

Consider, if you will, the following statistics:

- ❖ **Education narrows pay gaps between men and women:** In Jordan, women with primary school education earn 53% of what men earn; with secondary education, they earn 67% (2013 Education For All Global Monitoring Report from UNESCO);
- ❖ **Education progress delayed today is progress denied tomorrow:** Almost one quarter of young women (ages 15-24) in 2013 – an estimated 116 million women in developing countries - have never completed primary school and thus lack skills for work;
- ❖ **Educated women are more likely to find work:** In Brazil, only 37% of women with less than primary education are in work. This figure rises to 50% with primary education and 60% with secondary education (2013 Education For All Global Monitoring Report from UNESCO).

The question of the nexus of Gender, Education and Labour, is thus an important area of focus, for although women and men generally have equal access to education in Trinidad and Tobago, males still outnumber females up to the primary and secondary level but women outperform men at the tertiary level.

This trend is now becoming the norm rather than the exception, yet the wage gap still stubbornly persists. This has serious long-term implications for our country and sub-region where female household headship is still a sociological distinctive feature of the region's family structure. The 2011 Trinidad and Tobago Population and Housing Census showed that 33% of households in Trinidad and Tobago were headed by females.

When juxtaposed with the findings of a 2012 study conducted by the Inter-American Development Bank (IADB) of households in 18 Latin American and Caribbean households which showed that despite recent gains, where the gender pay gap was reduced from 25% to 17% between 1992 and 2007, the disparity remains high, it means our work is far from finished.

Specifically, the study, entitled “New Century, Old Disputes”, highlighted that women hold only 33% of the better paid professional jobs in the region. Among those included jobs related to law, architecture and engineering. Of even greater concern is that the wage gap is *larger* in these professions, averaging 58%.

This tells us unequivocally that there is still work to be done. *We cannot rest on our laurels.*

Graduands, the promotion of quality education and the search for equity and Decent Work are deeply intertwined with the concept of social justice. In this context, I urge all social partners to continue the excellent work and advocacy that are currently in train.

Trinidad and Tobago also boasts a well-deserved reputation for its development indices and strides made in Education and literacy. For this reason, we should seek to enhance existing frameworks for cooperation with the ILO, UNESCO and other partners who have a long history of cooperation in such areas as skills for employability, youth employment, the elimination of child labour, and the status of teachers.

In invoking the principle of cooperation, it is perhaps only fitting that we recognise that the Cipriani College of Labour and Cooperative Studies, represents the best synergy of Education and Labour. The College has consistently fulfilled its original mandate to serve as a centre of excellence for worker education. Having been originally envisaged also as a focal point for trade union training, the College has evolved to become a fully-accredited, tertiary-level institution that focuses on areas of Labour, Cooperative Studies and sundry other interdisciplinary and specialised training programmes related to social science, business and professional studies.

In fact, some of the graduands here today may be employed in Human Resources or Industrial Relations departments. In my respectful view, it is critical that organisations have a good working knowledge and understanding of Industrial Relations and have staff who are competent and knowledgeable in that area. The College's role in building capacity and enhancing our knowledge base in these areas, is therefore invaluable.

Trinidad and Tobago's legislative framework provides for compulsory arbitration and for the meeting of the social partners to resolve labour disputes. In order to do so effectively, employees, employers and trade unions need to be cognisant of their rights, their duties and their obligations. The training which you have received from this college in the area of Industrial Relations will therefore go a long way in the understanding of the rights, duties and obligations of all social partners. This would hopefully redound to a more equitable, enabling work environment where the

principles and practices of good industrial relations and fairness are the cornerstones.

Cipriani Labour College can now unstintingly lay claim to being a beacon of justice and equity across the English-speaking Caribbean particularly for the working class. Its commitment to providing a broad-based curricula to students at all levels and throughout all stages of their development, stands as a best practice example of a proactive approach to Education and to Excellence.

I take the opportunity to once again extend my warmest congratulations to today's graduands and wish you every success in your future endeavours. I have every confidence that as you embark on this new and thoroughly exciting chapter in your lives, you will do justice to Martin Luther King, Jr's observation that,

"....intelligence is not enough. Intelligence plus character – that is the goal of true education."

May God Bless You,

I thank you