

**FEATURE ADDRESS BY  
SENATOR THE HONOURABLE CONRAD ENILL  
MINISTER IN THE MINISTRY OF FINANCE  
ANNUAL LONG SERVICE AWARDS CEREMONY  
CUSTOMS & EXCISE DIVISION HELD AT CROWNE PLAZA HOTEL  
MAY 10th, 2003 AT 7 :00 P.M.**

Mr. Chairman, Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen.

Good Evening. I am very pleased to be here with you to celebrate your Annual Long Service Awards. In particular, I extend special greetings to those of you who are being honoured tonight in recognition of your dedicated long service to the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago by your service in the Customs and Excise Division of the Ministry of Finance and indeed in the public

Ladies and Gentlemen let me at the onset congratulate those whose service ranges from fifteen years to thirty-five years. To each and every one for your time, commitment, energy, skills, and experience we salute you.

Your past achievements tell us that it is possible to develop effective responses to the challenges that confront us. One such challenge that is on us is the transformation of Trinidad and Tobago into a developed nation in the shortest possible timeframe but certainly by 2020.

Ladies and gentlemen, Government's vision # 2020 is about improving the quality of service to our people. We are aware of the diverse nature of our society and we believe that we must develop our society to a stage where it is cohesive and caring, celebrating our diversity based on the principles of democracy, human rights and social justice.

It is recognized today that one of the consequences of globalization is that increasingly, our economic fortunes are being linked directly to the quality and effectiveness of our institutions and the people that manage them. This has significant implications for all of us because new and improved standards of governance coupled with first world standards of service delivery will be the new requirement. This will apply to both public sector agencies and their counterparts in the private sector.

In the world of today, as our country responds to globalization, we recognize that the business of Government, in many ways, is not unlike any other business. Like our counterparts' in the private sector, advancing globalization compels us to rethink the way we conduct the business of Government.

Globalization demands that we change the way we organize and structure our institutions, the business processes that the institutions of Government utilize and the nature of the resources, particularly the human resource that we employ.

Our institutions can no longer continue to dispense their services in the traditional manner. The world in general and this country in particular, has evolved at a pace and a rate but many of our systems and our people have not been able to respond. In this regard I ask you whether you are happy with the efforts that you have made in improving the service delivery to citizens based on a changing and competitive new environment. The mere fact that the quality of our institutions so significantly impacts the prospects of economic growth and development means that these institutions must be continuously improved. Ladies and Gentlemen, to do otherwise will place our aspirations in serious jeopardy.

Mr. Chairman, it is in this context that the Customs and Excise Division in Trinidad and Tobago plays a particularly crucial role in the process of trade liberalization and facilitation. The Customs and Excise Division must be seen also as the first line of defence of our national security agenda. You are, therefore, one of the frontline delivery institutions of Government.

I am aware that in recognition of these responsibilities, the Division has already embarked on some initiatives to respond to the emerging challenges and has accepted the mandate to achieve international standards of performance and service delivery.

Almost a year ago, I had the opportunity to address this very occasion and even then I sensed a commitment among both the leaders and staff members of the Division to achieve the objectives set by Government.

It is clear to me that we need to focus on a new direction and a new purpose. We must transform our intentions into reality. We must act together and act now to improve management accountability, succession planning, and most importantly, eliminate practices that provide opportunity for willing parties to subvert the credibility and effectiveness of the Division

Ladies and Gentlemen, Government has a desire to provide to the managers of the customs and excise division the tools to allow you to be one of the best institutions in the region. However at some levels we do not see the work that needs to be done, occupying the priority it requires.

We are concerned that the Customs and Excise Division must be in a position to deliver more competitive employment opportunities with explicit career paths to a cadre of staff who are results-driven, service-oriented, and who add value to the organization.

We believe that in order to achieve this we must be able to manage our human resources and also attract the best people to the service. As many of you may be aware we have agreed that a vehicle that can achieve this result is a revenue authority. We propose to begin very shortly the required work to achieve this objective, and of course we intend to ensure that the Public Services Association will play a crucial role in our deliberations as we move forward.

We must find ways to better serve the public through efficient delivery of the best possible tax, trade and customs services.

Ladies and Gentlemen, I cannot over-emphasize the magnitude of the challenges to which we must respond. In order for us to compete successfully, our response to these changes must be immediate and decisive.

To this end, the functions and operations of the Customs and Excise Division must be geared towards achieving greater capacity building and institutional strengthening through better integration of planning, policymaking, and improved revenue performance and accountability management.

Of course for many of you, this is not nothing new as evidenced by your dedication to duty and long years of valuable service. To those of you who will be leaving the service shortly, you have the satisfaction of knowing that you helped pave the way for an improved Customs and Excise Division. To those of you who will continue to serve, know that you are in a transition mode, in a fast-paced changing environment in which you will no doubt be called upon to offer your expertise, knowledge and support.

I want to express my gratitude to you for your dedication and commitment to duty, and to wish you success in your future endeavors.

Ladies and Gentlemen, Thank-you.