



MINISTRY OF EDUCATION

ADDRESS BY

**Dr. The Honourable
Tim Gopeesingh
Minister of Education**

*Launch of the Competition
“A better Tomorrow: Do the Right Thing Always”*

National Academic of Performing Arts (NAPA)

Tuesday 27th September, 2011

Salutations:

Chairman of the Integrity Commission, Eric St Cyr

Other distinguished Commissioners and members of the Integrity Commission,

Other Ministry of Education officials

Principals, teachers and students

Members of the Media

Ladies and gentlemen

A very pleasant good morning to one and all and let me say how pleased I am to be present here today at the launch of this very significant initiative in our nation's schools. I have often said that when an institution, any institution, be it corporate or private sector, gives back of its time, money or expertise to the society, it is a testimony of its commitment to true nation building and progressive development, but when that body gives back to our nation's children, it makes the effort all the more valuable and all the more laudable.

Mahatma Gandhi once said that:

"There are seven things that will destroy us: Wealth without work; Pleasure without conscience; Knowledge without character; Religion without sacrifice; Politics without principle; Science without humanity; Business without ethics."

In other words, life without integrity can prove to be one of the most destructive forces of an individual and a society.

When the Integrity Commission was established as an independent watchdog institution for our nation's public officials in 1987, it was done with a mandate for the Commission to also carry out public education programmes for the citizenry to enlighten them as to the roles and functions of that very important characteristic that defines a decent human being—integrity.

In the many years since its establishment, the Integrity Commission has admirably succeeded in fulfilling its primary mandate of ensuring that public officials adhere to the rules of transparency and accountability.

But truth be told, in the past few years, the Commission has been making headlines of a more controversial nature, leading to questions from the public as to its holistic relevance.

It is for this reason that the launch of today's competition—which is aimed at educating the nation's primary and secondary school students about the principles and necessity

for integrity— is timely, as it serves to demonstrate to the public that the Integrity Commission of Trinidad and Tobago is intent on ensuring that it performs ALL its designated functions.

And indeed, nothing can more important than imparting upon young minds the need for integrity, especially considering the state of the society in which we live today, where we are plagued with daily reports of young people, many of them under the age of 18, engaging in some of the worst acts of criminality a person can commit.

The competition that we are launching today is a collaborative effort of the Integrity Commission, Ministry of Education and the Tobago House of Assembly, and is the outcome of discussions among these bodies from up to April of this year.

Under the theme “*A Better Tomorrow: Do the Right Thing Always,*” this competition, I’m advised, will seek to encourage students from ages 7 to 16 throughout the primary schools firstly, and then, the secondary schools of the country, to compete for prizes by writing poems, short stories, skits, slogans; drawing comic strips cartoons, models, charts; organizing panel discussions or performing musical bits on the theme of Integrity.

The overall aim of the competition, I’m told, is to encourage and facilitate students – and teachers – to become critically conscious of the meaning and value of integrity. This is frankly, long overdue.

For too long our education system has focused on the academic development of our students and neglected to impart upon them the need for common decency, good morals and values and proper, considerate behaviour towards themselves and others, sadly resulting in a generation of lost youths who have resorted in one way or another to crime and poor societal behaviour.

We cannot and must not continue to turn a blind eye to this and we must recognize that the failings of today’s youth reflect the failings of us as leaders and educators to impart on them these simple principles of proper character development—truth, honesty, consideration, and adherence to the laws of morality and the laws of the land.

In fact, one of the reasons why this project was so rapidly facilitated under my watch as Minister of Education is because of my recognition of this dysfunctionality in the education system and my determination to correct it.

You may remember that on several occasions since entering office over a year ago, I have stated my intent to reintroduce the study of civics and morals and values to the curriculum of the schools, in addition to other non academic activities such as sports and visual and performing arts to achieve the holistic development of our children, and, to this end I have held consultations with all relevant stakeholders on curriculum reform, which is now in the process of being finalized.

So this competition is definitely in keeping with my aims for the moral development of the nation's students, and today I call on all principals and teachers to please commit to its success on every level.

I urge you all to recognize that this project is more than a competition for the students—rather, it is to be regarded as part and package of the very crucial role educators and other leader in our society play in the moral and psychological development of well rounded, civilized, decent, law abiding children.

Remember, as educators and leaders of our society, we need to stress to our young minds that personal integrity is as important as academic successes in our schools, and setting this example has a ripple effect throughout the society.

We need to stress to our children that integrity, essentially, is what we do, what we say, and what we say we do; it is thus the ultimate reflection of true character, and it means doing the right thing when nobody's looking, since the painful truth among youths these days, it would seem, is the belief that the only thing that's right is to get by, and the only thing that's wrong is to get caught.

We need to reinstate in our children's minds that one of the truest principles of education is the fact that, in the words of the English writer Samuel Johnson, integrity without knowledge is weak and useless, and knowledge without integrity is dangerous and dreadful.

Remember, integrity should be an integral part of every person's lifestyle and it is crucial that children recognize, from a very young age, true integrity is crucial to their success in life, since it influences thought processes, decision making, and direction.

To the students, I urge you all to actively participate in this competition, for not only will you have tremendous fun using and developing your many talents in so doing, but you will also take away the very valuable lessons of integrity and the need to be truthful, diligent, considerate and honest in all you do.

So good luck to all intended participants and may you learn so much and impress us all with your final products.

I am truly looking forward to hearing some of the poems, stories, music pieces, slogans, and seeing the artwork and other creative methods you children will find to display integrity and I know that all pieces will be beautiful and successful.

As I close, I wish to express, on behalf of the Government of Trinidad and Tobago and the Ministry of Education, my heartfelt gratitude and appreciation to the Integrity Commission and Tobago House of Assembly for embarking on this crucial project at this time, for, I said before, nothing is of more importance in today's society than imparting upon our young minds, from the earliest age possible, the importance and value of that all encompassing principle of integrity, and you can congratulate yourselves as purveyors of true nation building and development of our country by your investment in the moral instruction of our youths, the only hope for our nation's future success.

Remember, people of integrity, by their mere existence, rekindle the belief that as a people we can live above the level of moral squalor. We need that belief for a cynical community is a corrupt community.

If an improved standard of living is your sole objective as a leader and a citizen, quality of individual and societal life in a nation almost never improves, but if an improved quality of life is your number one objective, your standard of living almost always improves.

And the only way to truly improve the quality of life in a nation is by ensuring that all citizens have integrity, for, as the late great American President, John F Kennedy once said, and I quote:

“When at some future date the high court of history sits in judgment on each of us, recording whether in our brief span of service we fulfilled our responsibilities to our country, our success or failure, in whatever office we hold, will be measured by the answers to four questions: First, were we truly persons of courage... Second, were we truly persons of judgment... Third, were we truly persons of integrity... Finally, were we truly persons of dedication?”

I say today that let us have the answer to the third question –were we truly persons of integrity—be YES..And in so doing, we would have done our duty to our country and to our individual consciences.

I thank you