

Address by His Excellency Professor George Maxwell Richards, TC, CMT, Ph.D., President of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago at the Opening Ceremony of the 11th SALISES Conference on Wednesday March 24, 2010 at 9:00 a.m. at the Hyatt Regency Hotel, Dock Road, Port of Spain.

Thank you, Chairman, Professor Andrew Downes, Director, SALISES, Cave Hill Campus

Professor Rhoda Reddock, Deputy Principal, The University of the West Indies, St. Augustine

Professor Robert Barro, Professor of Economics, Harvard University

Dr. Hamid Ghany, Dean Faculty of Social Sciences, UWI, St. Augustine

SALISES Directors, Professor Watson, Professor Meeks and Professor Downes

Conference Participants

My former University colleagues

Representatives of the Media

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen:

I am deeply honoured to have been invited to open this most important and timely Conference on the theme “Turmoil and Turbulence in Small Developing States: Going beyond Survival”. I consider it extremely broad-minded of the Chairman to invite a Ceremonial President like myself to speak, as I have said before our more accustomed role, like Victorian children of yore, is to be seen and not heard. Nonetheless, I will touch briefly on two of the topics on which papers were invited. These are “Innovation and entrepreneurship as developmental platforms” and “Caribbean manufacturing”.

First of all, though, I should like to associate myself with the welcome remarks already made. To our overseas participants, I extend a special welcome to Trinidad and Tobago. I trust that it will be possible for you to see something of the natural beauty of both our islands, to experience some of our culture and in general, have an interesting and enjoyable time in our country.

This 11th Annual Conference of the SALISES is taking place at a time when the world is undergoing various convulsions itself. These include notably, the economic recession, poverty, the spread of HIV/AIDS, the drug trade, violence, war, global warming and natural disasters. In this context, the theme of your conference, Turmoil and Turbulence in Small Developing States: Going beyond Survival, is more than appropriate as it succinctly captures the problems of our time.

Increasingly, the world is being made up of societies in which economic value is derived from knowledge, especially scientific and technical knowledge. We in this region must therefore look for our future economic and social well-being to innovation

and technology rather than solely to reliance on the exploitation of our natural and physical resources, important though this may be in the short and medium terms. The experience of Finland which has transformed its economy from one dependent on natural resources, in her case Forestry, to one at the top of the list of most indices of global competitiveness is instructive.

Given this scenario, we, in the Caribbean, must have the courage to break with traditional approaches and consolidate the role of science, technology and innovation in our development strategies, now and in the future. In Trinidad and Tobago, for example, we need to buttress our recent major investments in higher education, particularly in the areas of science and technology. We must focus on key sources of economic growth, such as an advanced and state-of-the-art manufacturing sector which is founded on the use of new and established scientific and technological knowledge. In this regard, a modern manufacturing sector must also acknowledge the potential role of existing technologies, especially generic technologies such as biotechnology, nanotechnology, new materials and information and communications technology which have broad applications and impacts in the economy. Economic change is largely a process by which knowledge is transformed into goods and services. Creating links between knowledge generation and enterprise development will therefore be one of our greatest challenges.

Along with technological innovation, capital is one of the most critical prerequisites for productivity growth. Both have played critical roles in spurring growth in the industrial countries. However, technological change has so far had only a limited role in national growth in the countries of the region and must now be aggressively fostered.

We must therefore focus on reforming our policies in research, innovation, education and support for entrepreneurship. In particular, entrepreneurship should be enhanced by creating and expanding businesses and industries. In the manufacturing sector, not only is the creation of new knowledge important but perhaps equally significant is the efficient application of existing technologies, a considerable range of which is widely available in the form of machinery, equipment, patents etc.

Banks and other financial institutions can play an important role in fostering technological innovation. But their record in this field has so far been spotty. Reforming themselves might allow them to help promote technological innovation. Venture capitalists must be encouraged to play a role in the creation of small and medium-size enterprises.

In the meantime, in the apparent absence of well-functioning capital markets and sources of venture capital, we must rely on other financial institutions, possibly state-owned, to upgrade technology and promote business activities in science, technology and innovation.

To cite the example of Trinidad and Tobago, we are all aware of the importance – indeed the dominating role – that the energy sector has played and continues to play in the economic development of this country.

Having some background in energy myself, I have witnessed with much satisfaction and pleasure, the exciting growth that has taken place over the past thirty (30) years in this sector. For a small country with relatively limited resources in hydrocarbons to have taken a leadership role in the gas industries – both in the Atlantic and in the Americas - is indeed quite remarkable. This sector now has a life of its own but it could be limited in its growth by the availability of our hydrocarbon resources.

It is therefore timely and appropriate that we begin to focus increased attention on the non-energy sector – and in particular manufacturing - to achieve a level of balance in our economic development and provide needed diversification to our growth.

The manufacturing sector has over the years contributed in no small way to our economic development – particularly in the creation of employment opportunities. The country has vigorously encouraged the growth of this sector through the use of several strategies – fiscal incentives, import substitution, negative listing and the industrial estates and factory shell programmes.

These have had a positive effect and suited the times. Today, however, with the breakdown of trade barriers, the increasing integration of the global economy, the high levels of productivity and effectiveness of marketing in both neighbouring countries and others far away, there is now urgent need for a radically different approach if we are to develop a new manufacturing economy.

The decision by the University of Trinidad and Tobago to include, as one of its core programmes, Innovation and Entrepreneurship with emphasis on manufacturing is one bold step in the required new strategy. Clearly, also, success in manufacturing will be facilitated by the creativity, productivity and skills of our people, which are not in short supply. Speaking for the region, there is no question that we are blessed with creative people who are capable of the highest level of productivity and skills.

For instance, in the case of Trinidad and Tobago, anyone who has had a chance to witness one of our national festivals – Carnival – will be convinced that we are capable of all of these attributes. As the calypsonians perform, as our steelbandmen and women play with the highest level of discipline and skills for the Panorama competition, as the tuners display their combination of art and science in the production of these finely honed instruments, as we witness the design and efficient production of thousands of costumes – those that are original and eye catching – there is abundant and convincing evidence of our capability to achieve the highest levels of creativity, productivity, skills, entrepreneurship, innovation and discipline, all directed towards making the Trinidad and Tobago Carnival the ‘Greatest Show on Earth’. I am therefore confident that we can maintain those levels on a sustainable basis in other areas of national life and contribute to this new thrust in the manufacturing sector. I have no doubt that similar talent and skill reside elsewhere in the Caribbean.

It is in the context of these convictions that I now take great pleasure in formally declaring this SALISES 11th Annual Conference open, expressing the hope that you will

find it not only useful but intellectually stimulating. I wish you all a successful three days of deliberations.

Many thanks, Ladies and Gentlemen, for the courtesy of your attention.