

**FEATURE ADDRESS DELIVERED BY  
THE HONOURABLE SEAN SOBERS M.P., MINISTER OF  
FOREIGN AND CARICOM AFFAIRS OF THE REPUBLIC OF  
TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO,  
AT THE INSTITUTE OF LAW AND ACADEMIC STUDIES  
ANNUAL GRADUATION AND AWARDS CEREMONY,  
CLASS OF 2025 – 22<sup>ND</sup> FEBRUARY 2026**

Ladies and gentlemen.

It is a profound honour to stand before you in a hall that has witnessed so many milestones in the making of legal minds. Today we celebrate achievement, perseverance and the promise that each of you carries into professional service and hopefully for some of you, public life.

ILAS has long been a bedrock of excellence; its record of world prize winners and distinguished alumni is a testament to the rigour of its teaching and the character of its students.

As an alumnus of this Institute and a practising Attorney before my appointment as Minister, I speak to you with both pride and a deep sense of responsibility.

## **From Study to Service**

The study of law is, at its heart, a vocation of service. Over the course of your studies you have learned to analyse, to reason, and to marshal argument with precision.

Those skills are valuable in themselves; their true worth is realised when they are applied to the needs of others. As you move into vocational training and practice, remember that the law is more than rules on a page: it is the framework by which we protect rights, resolve disputes and order society.

Let the knowledge you have acquired be the instrument by which you improve lives, strengthen institutions and advance justice.

## **The Rule of Law and International Diplomacy**

The rule of law is the bedrock of both domestic justice and international engagement. When states and institutions adhere to law, domestic and international, they create predictability and trust.

That predictability is essential for negotiation, investment and cooperation; it is the environment in which diplomacy can flourish and citizens can plan with confidence.

In his first address after taking the oath of office, **Chief Justice Ronnie Boodoosingh** emphasised a renewed focus on **integrity, access to justice and the development of our jurisprudence.**

Those are not merely judicial aspirations; they are principles that will shape the legal landscape in which you will practise and will strengthen public confidence in our institutions. As future lawyers, you will be called upon to give effect to these principles, whether in courtrooms; in policy offices; or in community settings.

Upholding the rule of law is therefore both a professional duty and a civic responsibility.

### **Trinidad and Tobago: A Place to Give Back**

If the rule of law provides the framework, civic engagement supplies the energy. Where does Trinidad and Tobago stand today? We are a nation rich in human capital, cultural creativity and resilient communities.

Politically and socially, there is space for citizens to contribute meaningfully. That space is found in many places: in pro bono legal clinics that bring justice to the doorstep of the vulnerable; in community advocacy that gives voice to those who are unheard; in public policy that translates ideas into opportunity; and in entrepreneurship that creates livelihoods.

The legal profession has a special role to play in bridging gaps. You can defend the vulnerable, advise small and medium enterprises, and help craft legislation and policy that expands opportunity rather than restricts it.

You can mentor young people, support civic education, and ensure that the law serves as a tool for inclusion.

The training you have received at ILAS equips you to be both counsel and catalyst for positive change. I urge you to seek out those opportunities to give back; the nation needs your energy, your integrity and your expertise.

## **Lifelong Learning: My Example, Your Opportunity**

Graduation marks a milestone, not a terminus. The legal and diplomatic environments in which you will operate are dynamic; new challenges demand new knowledge.

I speak to you as both Minister and fellow student: I am currently pursuing an LLM in Oil and Gas to deepen my understanding of a sector that is central to our national development.

That decision is not merely personal; it is illustrative of a broader truth: that continuous learning sharpens judgement, sustains relevance and enlarges the scope of service.

Make study a habit. Read widely, attend seminars, engage with scholarship and seek practical experience. The law evolves through precedent, legislation and international developments; to serve well you must remain curious and adaptable.

Lifelong learning will keep you effective in practice and credible in public life.

## **Foreign Affairs, Foreign Policy and Everyday Lives**

Foreign policy and international law are not abstract concerns confined to ministries and missions; they have direct, tangible effects on our economy and on citizens' lives.

Consider the CARICOM Single Market and Economy and the **CSME Skills Certificate**. By facilitating the free movement of qualified CARICOM nationals, the Certificate opens pathways for employment, investment and family mobility across the region.

For teachers, nurses, attorneys of course, and other approved categories, the Skills Certificate provides a mechanism to work and settle in participating Member States, thereby expanding opportunities for professional advancement and economic resilience.

This is a clear example of how international arrangements, negotiated and implemented through sound foreign policy, translate into real benefits for our people.

Beyond mobility, principled diplomacy secures trade arrangements, protects our maritime and energy interests, and attracts foreign direct investment that creates jobs at home.

International law underpins agreements that govern shipping, fisheries, energy exploration and intellectual property, areas that directly affect our economy.

When foreign policy is legally grounded and strategically pursued, it becomes a lever for national development and a protector of citizens' opportunities.

As you enter the profession, remember that lawyers contribute to these outcomes.

Your expertise will be needed to draft agreements, to advise on compliance, to represent national interests and to ensure that international commitments are implemented in ways that benefit Trinidad and Tobago.

### **Practical Responsibilities and Ethical Imperatives**

Technical skill alone will not suffice. The practice of law demands ethical clarity. You will encounter pressures: commercial, political and personal that test your principles.

Hold fast to integrity. Be transparent in your dealings, diligent in your preparation, and compassionate in your advocacy.

The public's trust in the legal system depends on the conduct of its practitioners. By modelling professionalism and ethical courage you will strengthen institutions and inspire confidence.

Seek mentorship and, in turn, be a mentor. The profession advances when knowledge is shared and when younger practitioners are guided by those with experience.

Contribute to continuing legal education, participate in bar activities, and engage with civil society. These are the ways in which the law remains connected to the people it serves.

### **A Charge to the Graduands**

Graduands, you enter a profession that demands intellect, integrity and courage. Use your legal training to serve the public interest, to defend the rule of law, and to foster the conditions in which citizens can prosper.

Keep learning; remain open to new ideas; and let service be the measure of your success. In doing so you will honour your families, your teachers and the nation that has invested in you.

Take with you the lessons of ILAS: rigorous study, disciplined argument and a commitment to excellence.

Combine those lessons with humility and compassion. Whether you practise at the bar, join the bench, enter public service, or apply your skills in the private sector, do so with a sense of purpose that extends beyond personal advancement.

On behalf of the Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, I congratulate you, your families and your teachers. May your careers be marked by excellence, your practice by compassion, and your lives by meaningful contribution to Trinidad and Tobago.

Thank you, and congratulations to the **Class of 2025**.