**STATEMENT DELIVERED BY**

**SENATOR THE HONOURABLE DENNIS MOSES,**

**MINISTER OF FOREIGN AND CARICOM AFFAIRS,**

**AT THE AUSTRALIA DAY RECEPTION, JANUARY 25, 2019**

**(CHECKED AGAINST DELIVERY)**

Your Excellency John Pilbeam, High Commissioner for the Commonwealth of Australia, and Ms. Yvonne Webber;

Distinguished Ministers of Government;

Your Excellencies, Heads of Mission and other members of the Diplomatic and Consular Corps;

Mr. Gary Griffith, Commissioner of Police, and Mrs. Dyer-Griffith;

Your Worship the Mayor of Port of Spain, Alderman Joel Martinez, and Mrs. Martinez;

Members of staff of the Australian High Commission;

Specially invited guests;

Ladies and gentlemen;

Good evening.

On behalf of Dr. the Honourable Keith Rowley, Prime Minister of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, and the Government and People of this country, I extend warm wishes to the Government and People of the Commonwealth of Australia on the occasion of Australia Day.

An acknowledgement of the country’s history, Australia Day recalls the 1788 arrival of the British Navy that heralded the birth of a new colony. Equally significant is that Australia Day commemorates the true nature and values of the country, namely its democracy, freedoms and rights, and the contribution of each Australian to the country’s development.

Over the centuries that have elapsed since the planting of the Union Jack at Sydney Cove, Australia has matured into a culturally diverse, economically competitive and internationally respected continent.

Similarly worthy of homage is the longstanding friendship between Trinidad and Tobago and Australia, characterised by common historical experiences and economic, social and cultural linkages. A new dimension to that relationship has been unveiled over the past twelve months, in large part attributable to Prime Minister Rowley’s Working Visit to Australia in May of last year. High Commissioner, permit me to publicly thank the Government of Australia for extending that most gracious invitation and for the excellent arrangements made on the delegation’s behalf.

Over the course of one week, Prime Minister Rowley visited five cities, as was just mentioned, travelling across Australia to engage senior Government officials and business representatives on issues of security, energy, maritime transport and sport. From emphasising support for BHP’s local operations to discussing strategies for countering violence and extremism, both sides demonstrated the importance of the Trinidad and Tobago/Australia relationship and their commitment to the deepening of this relationship.

As a member of the delegation, I can attest to the significance and to the success of the Working Visit. As the proverb goes, the proof is in the pudding: the Government of Trinidad and Tobago has agreed to acquire two (2) fast ferries for the maritime route between Trinidad and Tobago as well as two (2) patrol vessels, potentially becoming one of the first beneficiaries of the Defence Export Facility offered by the Government of Australia.

Ladies and gentlemen, the past year also marked exciting developments in another field of cooperation – sport. Two local athletes made history on the Gold Coast at the 21st edition of the Commonwealth Games – Michelle Lee-Ahye as the first female sprinter from Trinidad and Tobago to win a gold medal and Dylan Carter, the first swimmer from our country here, Trinidad and Tobago, to mount the podium at these Games. Victory also belonged to Jereem Richards in the men’s 200 metres.

Australians performed creditably, of course, in the Caribbean Premier League (CPL), the reverse being true for the ongoing Big Bash, as I am informed. However, the rivalry between our countries remains fierce – I will not go into any detail about Australia’s match against the West Indies in the semi-finals of the Women’s T20 tournament which was held in the Caribbean last November. Suffice it to say, however, the Aussie women were the eventual champions!

High Commissioner, our countries have also developed intimate people-to-people ties, uniquely illustrated through *The Last Goldfish*. That documentary chronicled the personal quest by a woman of German Jewish heritage and Trinbagonian birth for her family’s history and was brought to local audiences in June last year through the partnership of the Australian High Commission and the National Trust of Trinidad and Tobago.

The new and traditional endeavours jointly pursued by both countries were not at the expense of our collaboration within the multilateral sphere. As an example, Trinidad and Tobago and Australia supported each other’s successful nominees to the Committees on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the Elimination of Discrimination against Women. In addition, critical work to find solutions to the challenges of climate change and those peculiar to Small Island Developing States has never stopped.

High Commissioner, as I conclude, I wish to congratulate you on your efforts and those of the High Commission in strengthening the bonds of friendship between our two countries. Let us continue to work together to make tangible new opportunities that lie on the horizon.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Please join me in a second toast to the Government and People of the Commonwealth of Australia in commemoration of Australia Day 2019.

Thank you.