

**STATEMENT DELIVERED BY SENATOR THE HONOURABLE DENNIS
MOSES, MINISTER OF FOREIGN AND CARICOM AFFAIRS, AT THE
RECEPTION IN COMMEMORATION OF THE 45TH ANNIVERSARY OF
THE ESTABLISHMENT OF DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS BETWEEN THE
REPUBLIC OF TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO AND THE COMMONWEALTH
OF AUSTRALIA, JULY 18, 2019**

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

Dr. the Honourable Keith Rowley, Prime Minister of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, and Mrs. Sharon Rowley;

The Honourable the Chief Justice of Trinidad and Tobago, Mr. Justice Ivor Archie O.R.T.T.;

Distinguished Cabinet colleagues;

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

Your Worship Alderman Joel Martinez, Mayor of the City of Port of Spain;

Members of Staff of the Australian High Commission;

Specially invited guests;

Ladies and Gentlemen;

A very special evening to you all.

High Commissioner, it is indeed a special occasion to join you, the Honourable Prime Minister and Mrs. Rowley, and all present in celebrating this significant anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between our two countries. The details provided and sentiments expressed on the longstanding close relationship between our two countries are shared and treasured by us in Trinidad and Tobago.

Four and a half decades ago, two countries oceans apart decided to “make it official” – entering a new era of partnership with the formal establishment of ties. Needless to say, it was not the first time that our countries came into contact – Trinidad and Tobago and Australia were informally associated while British colonies through the transfer of officials, landowners and prisoners. This led to the rare, unconventional connection between the two, such as the 1835 publication of Australia’s first daily newspaper, the *True Colonist*, by Trinidad-born Gilbert Robertson in Van Diemen’s Land, now modern-day Tasmania.

Years later, in 1962, Australia stood in support of Trinidad and Tobago, co-sponsoring the resolution at the General Assembly for this country’s entry into the United Nations. This milestone occurred less than a month after Australia joined the celebration of Trinidad and Tobago’s newly-achieved independence, represented by a former Governor of New South Wales.

Trinidad and Tobago and Australia have since expanded into diverse areas of cooperation, ranging from road safety to youth affairs, from climate change to education. Such progress has been spurred on by high-level engagement between our parliamentarians and politicians, the most recent instance being the Working Visit of Prime Minister Rowley to Australia in May of last year.

People-to-people contact has also been maintained, in some measure, through the limited migration between our countries, most notably to Australia over a twenty-year period beginning in 1961. Though subsequently persisting in smaller numbers, those persons and their Caribbean counterparts probably form the membership of the numerous Caribbean Associations in Australia today.

Despite these linkages, it is arguably through sport that the bond between our countries is at its strongest, especially given the competitive matches between our national and regional cricket teams. As High Commissioner Pilbeam mentioned, the tour of Australia by the West Indies cricket team in the early 1960s ended with a fantastic farewell from the new Aussie fans. But who could forget the 1979 Netball Championship held here in Port of Spain, which resulted in a never-repeated three-way tie between Trinidad and Tobago, Australia and New Zealand?

When Australia re-established a presence in Port of Spain in 2004, it was in recognition of Trinidad and Tobago's status as the Caribbean's major industrial home and of growing Australian investment. Thankfully, the trend of healthy commercial ties has continued with Australian energy companies

making a home here and considerable trade in dairy, meat, alcohol and industrial products.

Australian shipbuilders have furnished us here in Trinidad and Tobago with the T&T Express and the T&T Spirit, the vessels that have plied and continue to ply the route between Trinidad and Tobago. Further, the four catamarans that provide the Water Taxi Service were provided by Australia. The Government has again placed its faith in Australian vessels to upgrade the inter-island sea bridge by the end of 2020.

One often-overlooked aspect of our cooperation is in the field of security. Beyond the past and ongoing acquisition of military vessels, the Trinidad and Tobago Coast Guard also benefitted from training at the Royal Australian Naval College. A later visit of the HMAS Ballarat further facilitated consultations on maritime security and border patrols. It is anticipated that both countries will have successful exchanges on countering terrorism, as discussed during the Prime Minister's Working Visit.

Over the years, expertise has been readily offered in both directions in other fields as well. An unending source of pride is the contribution of the late Sir Ellis Clarke, the esteemed first President of Trinidad and Tobago, to Australia's debate in the 1990s on becoming a republic. With regard to other forms of technical cooperation, Trinidad and Tobago has received generous grants and scholarships from the Australian Government in a broad range of fields, including leadership, human rights, poverty alleviation and community activism. Also, the Australian High Commission has donated valuable

resources to its host country, such as its recent gift of a bench made of recycled plastic bottles to the Maraval community.

After forty-five years, much has been accomplished and yet, there is great potential for growth and closer ties and I am confident that there is the commitment to advancing the bilateral relationship. In the spirit of our shared love for cricket, I beg your indulgence with this metaphor – “with someone always at the wicket, guarding the stumps and watching the ball, the innings will never end.”

As I conclude, High Commissioner, I wish to express my gratitude for your yeoman service over the last three and a half years in Trinidad and Tobago. As you embark on a new journey, I wish you and your wife good health and happiness.

May Trinidad and Tobago and Australia continue to enjoy success and prosperity, fuelled, in some small part, by our ongoing collaboration.

Thank you for your attention and do enjoy, with the permission, of course, of our hosts, the rest of the evening.