

INTRODUCTORY REMARKS
HER HONOUR DEBORAH THOMAS-FELIX
PRESIDENT, INDUSTRIAL COURT OF
TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO

24, MARCH, 2015

I wish to make special mention of Mr Hamilton Johnson, who served as a Judge of the Industrial Court from 1974 to 1990. He celebrates his 91st birthday this year and we are delighted that he is here to celebrate with us today. Each of you present today is special to the Court and has contributed in some way to its development and achievements over the past fifty (50) years. I welcome you and wish to express my sincere appreciation to you for sharing this historic event with us. Many thanks to:

- The Reverend Fr. Carl Williams
- Brother Harrypersad Maharaj
- The Very Reverend Dr. Knolly Clarke
- the Bishop Anstey High School Choir
- the Shiv Shakti Dancers
- Mr. Gerard Placide
- Ms. Nakita Gadsby from the Lydian Singers
- Johann Chuckaree

who have willingly given of their time to celebrate with us today.

We are very proud to be celebrants of a milestone in the history of our nation. On the 20th March, 1965 when the Industrial Stabilisation Act was proclaimed there was a dramatic change in the practice of labour relations and employment law in Trinidad and Tobago. The Act provided for compulsory arbitration among social partners and the vehicle for this arbitration was the Industrial Court. Trade Unions and workers regarded the Act, and by extension the Court, as Government's tool to advance the interest of the powerful business elite and to trample on workers' rights.

Fifty (50) years later the Industrial Court has survived the distrust and scepticism and its operations have grown exponentially. The complement of staff, the court processes and levels of efficiency have increased over the years. Evidence of this expansion is seen in the establishment of the Court's San Fernando branch ten (10) years ago and efforts are currently underway to open a

Tobago branch of the Court so that there can access to justice for all citizens.

The Court has contributed significantly to national efforts to realise inclusive and equitable economic growth over the past five (5) decades. The practice of good industrial relations, social dialogue and a sound legal framework are at the core of this country's and any country's economic and social development. These practices help to promote better working conditions, better wages as well as to ensure social stability and peace, which ultimately leads to economic growth and a more equitable and just society for all. I am sure you will agree that economic growth will be irrelevant if it does not take into account the betterment of each and every sector of society. Economic growth, in my view, is analogous to one of the fundamental tenets of all religions, that is to say that we are our brother's keeper and that as Paul in (Romans Chapter 14 verse 19), so eloquently stated, we should pursue the things that make for peace and the things by which one may edify another. Martin Luther King Jr. puts it rather succinctly when he said, *"Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere"*.

Today, the Industrial Court is highly regarded as a modern, independent, respectful model for social justice delivery. The Court continues to develop a rich body of jurisprudence in labour relations and social justice delivery in Trinidad and Tobago with emphasis on employers and workers rights, duties and obligations. Moreover, the Court today is a strong pillar and a beacon for social peace, social justice and inclusiveness. As an institution, we remain committed to the promotion and protection of the fundamental principles and rights at work.

As we celebrate our golden anniversary, on behalf of the Industrial Court, I thank each and every member of staff, (we have here today retired members of staff, some of whom have worked at the Court from its inception in 1965) the judges, the social partners, the practitioners and the citizens who have, by reposing confidence in the Court and by dint of their work, contributed to the development of this important national institution. I pay tribute to my predecessors whose exceptional work laid a remarkable foundation on which the Court now stands and in whose steps I have been privileged and honoured to follow.

In much the same way it takes a village to raise a child, it has taken a nation to build a Court of Social Justice, I salute each and every one of you for the sterling contribution you have made and continue to make to the socio-economic development of Trinidad and Tobago. My wish for you is continued peace and productivity as we traverse the social justice landscape of our beloved twin-island republic. I pray that the Almighty God will guide, protect and bless you.

Namaste

Assalamualaikum

Peace be onto you.