



**Address**

**On behalf of**

**The Honourable Marlene McDonald, MP**

**Minister of Public Administration**

**at**

**NALIS: Latin Nights II**

**June 11<sup>th</sup>, 2018**

Good Evening

Latin Nights... what a wonderful concept! When the Honourable Marlene McDonald, then Minister of Public Administration and Communications received her invitation to this event, she immediately felt that it necessary to undertake research into this matter.

This research revealed that the inaugural Latin Nights was held last July and sought to showcase the cultures of our Latin neighbours namely Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Cuba, Costa Rica and El Salvador. It is my understanding that the last event attracted a sizable crowd, where members of the public were exposed to various aspects of Latin culture, arts, film and cuisine.

From all indications, Latin Nights II will be more spectacular than its predecessor as we have seen from the advertisement on NALIS's website that this festival now includes Cuba, Dominican Republic, Mexico and Spain.

This initiative, is consistent with Government's thrust to promote Spanish as the First Foreign language programme which is currently being executed through the Ministry of Education.

The Spanish Implementation Secretariat of the Ministry has been in existence since 2005; one of its main thrusts is the facilitation of a new learning environment in Trinidad and Tobago. An environment through which citizens can learn and effectively utilize the Spanish language as their First Foreign Language. Such an environment is needed if we are to promote intercultural dialogue.

Speaking and communicating, particularly in a different language are two different things. Intercultural dialogue has the ability to break barriers and expose the rich cultural diversity of any nation.

It is therefore, the intent of the Implementation Secretariat to position the use of Spanish as a strategic tool. A driver for trade and industry and a vehicle for the promotion of cultural values. In this regard, we see that there are clear similarities, to what NALIS is seeking to do with the Latin Nights programme.

The Minister was further informed that this specific initiative forms part of NALIS strategic thrust aimed at bridging the cultural divide, creating greater synergies among local and international communities and promoting multiculturalism.

We at the Ministry understand that since the launch of Latin Nights, the National Library has become one of the main hubs for cultural activities. This is evidenced by the increased number of both nationals and non-nationals who continue to show up, if just to simply share a common space, test their linguistic skills or to showcase their culture.

Ladies and gentlemen, the government Trinidad and Tobago remains committed to the development of the cultural diversity of this country.

Trinidad and Tobago will not have such a rich historical and cultural background without the influence of the Spanish, Portuguese and the Dutch. In more recent times, we have enjoyed cordial relations

with our Latin counterparts which has continued to play a crucial role in shaping our heritage.

As a member of Cabinet, the Honourable Minister wishes to assure you that emphasis on the development of strong diplomatic relations and the advancement of our diversity remains a priority.

In this global village, in an age where the exponential growth of digital media has drawn us closer together, the world has become increasingly multicultural and full of diversity.

It is important therefore, that we seek to continue to learn about other cultures, and it is through activities such as Latin Nights, that respect for different cultural expressions can be established.

Respect and understanding of “others” is needed in all spheres of life, and on every level and on every stage, as it plays a vital role in the establishment of better societies and should be embraced from the smallest unit, to the largest unit of society.

To the Board of Directors, Management and staff of NALIS, the honourable Minister extends best wishes and success on the staging of Latin Nights II.

I thank you