



FEATURE ADDRESS

BY

THE HONOURABLE MAXIE CUFFIE

**MINISTER OF
PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION & COMMUNICATIONS**

TO THE FORMAL HANDOVER

OF THE

MINISTRY OF EDUCATION TOWER

ST. VINCENT STREET

PORT OF SPAIN

JUNE 28th, 2016

Salutations

- Dr. the Honourable Keith Rowley MP, Prime Minister of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago;
- The Honourable Anthony Garcia MP, Minister of Education;
- The Honourable Randall Mitchell MP, Minister of Housing and Urban Development and line Minister for UDeCOTT;
- Dr. the Honourable Lovell Francis, MP, Minister in the Ministry of Education;
- My Cabinet Colleagues;
- Other Members of Parliament;
- Ms. Sandra Jones, Permanent Secretary to the Prime Minister and Head of the Public Service
- Other Permanent Secretaries and Deputy Permanent Secretaries
- His Worship, Councillor Keron Valentine, Mayor of the City of Port of Spain;
- Mr. Noel Garcia, Chairman of UDeCOTT, Members of the Board and Management of UDeCOTT;
- Chairmen and Directors of our state agencies;
- Captains of Industry and Commerce;

- Labour Leaders;
- Other Specially Invited Guests;
- Members of the Media;
- Ladies and Gentlemen;

Welcome to the new Ministry of Education. Welcome to the the new face of the public service in Trinidad and Tobago. Today's ceremony marks not just the formal hand-over of a new building but ushers in a new era that ends the old concept of the delivery of public services.

It is a fitting way to end the observance of Public Service Week which was celebrated all over the world last Wednesday. The new Public Service is not just about new buildings, it represents a new way of serving the public.

Over the past week, you have been seeing glimpses of this, for example in the Gentax initiative of the Board of Inland Revenue which allows you to stay at home, and with your own computer, file your income tax form and quickly get a return.

You have seen it in the many services which are now being offered online, and you will be seeing it in the reduced time it will now take to do business with the government.

Admittedly it has taken us a long time to see the fruits of public service reform from the seeds which we began to plant since 1991 when the Ministry of Public Administration was first conceptualised.

The Ministry of Education Tower and the neighboring Government Campus Plaza were all designed in 2006 to transform the delivery of public services. Today's handover of the Ministry of Education Tower, comprising 272,790 square feet, forms part of a wider vision.

As Minister with line responsibility for public administration, I am especially convinced that the Public Service is pivotal to the achievement of any Government vision, whether articulated as Vision 2020 or now as Vision 2030. As the largest group of employees in the country, the Public Service must continue to be the primary mechanism driving national development on the one hand and enabling private sector growth on the other.

And if the two buildings being formally handed over today, housing as I have noted, the offices of the Ministry of Education and in the adjacent five-storey annex, it's Finance Division, we would have made it considerably easier to transact business in an area that is key to our aspirations for developing our society and our economy.

I am convinced that the public service of Trinidad and Tobago, has at its core, a large number of technically competent, hardworking and loyal staff.

What we need is to fashion the right environment so that they can unleash their full potential. Today's ceremony is an important step in that direction.

Even as I say that, however, I am constantly reminded by those who think otherwise, and who concentrate on the serious deficiencies in human resources and organizational capacity that also plague the Public Service.

While new buildings do not automatically translate into new attitudes and behaviours, I expect that the reality of not having to ingest mould and bacteria, for example, or run from rats, as the staff of the Ministry of Education has

had to do, would ultimately lead to a new paradigm in terms of the delivery of services to the public.

Today, I want to enlist the support of the Public Services Association, the Trinidad and Tobago Unified Teachers Association and the National Union of Government and Federated Workers who claim membership amongst those who would occupy these buildings.

As your members will now occupy these new premises, I urge your support in encouraging them to take care of it, as if it were their very own, because in a very real sense, it is. I am advised by Udecott that the buildings have passed the required air quality tests, and are OSH Act compliant.

I urge your support in encouraging them to work even harder than they did in the buildings they previously occupied, now that those deficiencies no longer detain

them. I urge your support in leading them to properly manage these buildings, not only for themselves now, but for the next generation of public officers.

The plan to modernize the public service architecture may have taken a decade to realize but it is here. Since assuming office, I have had the privilege of opening the Rio Claro and Couva Public Libraries.

We believe, ladies and gentlemen, that by assisting in the transformation of the public service, across the country through enhancing the quality of their accommodation, we can create a large pool of highly-skilled human resources who can adapt more easily to changing work environments. These new buildings, new attitudes to work, and the adoption of new levels of customer-centric service will also

be enhanced with the rapid deployment of the Government's ICT plan.

There is no doubt in my mind that as the transformation of the public service continues and with the significant technological modernization of its processes, the proliferation of broadband infrastructure throughout the length and breadth of Trinidad and Tobago, and the increased access to ICT services by the rest of the population, Trinidad and Tobago will be propelled even faster to achieve the kind of society to which we all aspire.

Today is an important day in the history of the Public Service of Trinidad and Tobago.

It is my fervent hope that these two buildings, and particularly their outer surroundings, will become oases of peace in the midst of our bustling and re-energised city,

that those who come to do business here will leave happier than when they arrived, and those who work here will arrive excited to do their part, to build Trinidad and Tobago.

I wish conclude by thanking the staff of Udecott who literally worked night and day to make this event possible. You have demonstrated the spirit of the new Public Service which I am sure will be emulated by the staff of the new occupiers to this building.

I thank you.