



FEATURE ADDRESS

BY

THE HONOURABLE MAXIE CUFFIE

MINISTER OF

PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION & COMMUNICATIONS

AT THE LAUNCH OF

PUBLIC SERVICE WEEK 2016

“Innovating for Excellence in Service Delivery”

June 21st, 2016

Salutations:

Dr. Marjorie Thorpe, Chairman, Public Service

Commission

Ms. Lydia Jacobs, Permanent Secretary, Ministry of

Public Administration & Communications

Other Permanent Secretaries

Deputy Permanent Secretaries

Other heads of Public Service Authorities and agencies

Specially Invited guests

Members of the Media

Ladies and Gentlemen

Allow me to begin, ladies and gentlemen, by extending to all present, and by extension the thousands of others you represent, my sincerest congratulations on this annual commemoration of Public Service Week. As you are aware, Cabinet in June 2011 mandated that with effect from 2012, the entire Public Service of Trinidad and Tobago was to observe United Nations Public Service Day on June 23 of each year, and this was to be managed by the Ministry with the responsibility for Public Administration.

Today then, we gather to launch a week of activities designed to showcase the work and wealth of the Public Service and more importantly, its contribution to the national well-being. Simultaneously though, this morning's event, affords me the opportunity to address, for the first time since assuming the lead in the Ministry, all the country's senior public servants, and admittedly, the persons who run the Ministries.

I am especially heartened by the theme that has been chosen for this year's commemoration: "***Innovating for Excellence in Service Delivery***" as it dovetails very nicely with the overall vision of this government for the Public Service. There is no skirting of the fact, ladies and gentlemen, that the Public Service as a whole, has been pilloried by citizens from every walk of life, with many sharing the perception that it is corrupt, overstaffed, ineffective and antiquated.

It has become a pariah in the eyes of many who harken back to the glory days of the public service, when names like Frank Rampersad, Dodderidge Alleyne, Frank Barsoti and Reginald Dumas were household names as Permanent Secretaries. Unfortunately, the names of our current Permanent Secretaries do not enjoy such widespread currency.

It is also a well-known fact that the Public Service is not the preferred place of employment for the many

thousands who continue to benefit annually from state-sponsored education.

Citizens have also expressed their dissatisfaction with the quality of public services currently provided by government agencies. This is evidenced by public opinion data collected by the firm Market Research International (MORI) Caribbean Limited (January 2010) on behalf of the Ministry of Public Administration, where the Public / Civil Service is described, by citizens, as delivering poor service (53%), slow (49%), corrupt (35%), impolite (27%), unsatisfactory (31%) and efficient (11%). The image of Public Officers was similarly negative.

A more recent study done by the Inter-American Development Bank last year found the perception of the public service, to be even poorer.

The IDB study found:

“Trinidad and Tobago exhibits, on average, low levels of citizen satisfaction and quality of transactional services.

However, the gaps with the other countries in

satisfaction are lower than the gap in quality. This means that although management practices are quite below standards, citizens express a level of satisfaction similar to countries where those practices have higher levels.”

In other words, we have grown accustomed to bad service.

I will be the first to admit therefore, that the Ministry of Public Administration and Communications has a major role to play to ensure that the Public Service is modernized and equipped to perform its delivery function to meet the public’s expectation.

The 2016 theme therefore, seeks to project the Public Service as an institution that is seeking to modernize and transform its services and operations in order to meet the evolving needs of citizens. Our vision is that of a Public Service moving towards integrating services through the greater and more efficient use of technology, good

governance, improved processes, and building of the capacity and capability of the Public Service to deliver excellent service to those persons who need it the most and can least afford to pay for it privately.

The Public Service, ladies and gentlemen, must continue its march towards providing more avenues for citizens to engage constructively with government, making information and services easier and more convenient to access, providing timely delivery of services, and ensuring more professionalism and courtesy in engaging with citizens.

One of the ways in which the work of the public service will be highlighted during this coming week, is through a Public Service Open House. The objective of this Open House will be to highlight some of the achievements within the Public Service.

Specifically, each Ministry will be required to showcase one major initiative relating to improvements to services that are delivered to their customers. Some of these

achievements can include a technology driven solution, a new or enhanced service, improved processes, and any innovative approach to enhancing their delivery mechanism. The main purpose of this activity is to acknowledge the recent work and achievements of the Public Service as well as initiatives that are on stream for implementation.

I have no doubt that when these things are highlighted, hundreds of persons will be pleasantly surprised at the scope of the public service's interaction with the wider public and many successes that have been achieved already.

But ladies and gentlemen, I am not at all surprised, because I know the Administration of which I am a part, always had a plan for the transformation of the public service and the manner in which goods and services are delivered to the people of Trinidad and Tobago. It was always intended that a sectoral approach be undertaken

to transform the major institutions within the Public Service to deliver on their core services.

My administration understood very well though, that recruiting the right cadre of human resources and equipping them with the requisite ICT infrastructure would have only taken us part of the way.

The other piece of the puzzle included the provision of suitable accommodation for public officers.

Many tales can be told, and the corridors of the public service teem with anecdotes of the horrible conditions under which public officers have laboured over the years. From asbestos-filled roofs, to broken windows and mouldy walls, leaking air condition units, outdated electrical and plumbing systems, the complaints were many.

It was this call to action that was answered by the construction of the Government Campus Plaza on Richmond Street, the Ministry of Education Tower on St. Vincent Street, and the Immigration Building among

others. Unfortunately, for five and a half years, the politics of spite prevented these buildings from being properly outfitted so as to relieve public officers of their miserable office accommodation.

Today, I wish to pay tribute to the thousands of public officers who endured those conditions during the life of the former administration, especially those who, every day, would have walked past these buildings I have mentioned, and wondered about the pettiness of our politics, that allows tax-payers dollars and dreams to be so easily frittered away, sacrificed on the altar of political immaturity.

Today, I wish to indicate to them and to the general public that, all things being equal, the Government Campus Plaza will be officially opened on Tuesday June 28th, 2016, opening the doors, so to speak to another new dawn in the life of the public service of Trinidad and Tobago.

I wish to urge Public Officers to continue to respond valiantly to the demands placed on all of us by citizens for a more timely, efficient and customer-centric public service delivery. I wish to urge our senior Public Officers to mentor the new recruits, guide them and grow them into productive, ethical and conscientious officers who will put the good of country before personal aggrandisement.

Similarly, I encourage our young professionals in the public service to stand on the shoulders of those elders who understand the public service better than you do. I want to give the assurance to our Permanent Secretaries and Deputy Permanent Secretaries that, unlike in previous years, you now have nothing to fear in the proper exercise of your duties.

You are the Accounting Officers for the Ministries and therefore it is on your shoulders that the task of transforming the Public Service actually lies. Embrace that responsibility as you have never done before.

As we launch Public Service Week 2016, we do so brimming with hope for what the future holds for the Public Service. We do so with gratitude for the many, many good persons who made the public service their career and who contributed immensely to its growth and development. And we do so with immense pride in how far we have travelled and how much we have been able to achieve.

Ladies and gentlemen, it give me great pride to officially launch Public Service Week 2016. God bless you and may God bless our nation.