



**THE PRESIDENT  
REPUBLIC OF TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO**

**HER EXCELLENCY REEMA CARMONA ADDRESSES THE PINK RIDE WALK FOR HEALTH**

Her Excellency Reema Carmona addresses the participants in the Pink Ride Walk for Health event on October 18, 2014. This event is organised annually to promote Cancer Awareness. Following the address, Her Excellency also participated in the event.

The following is Her Excellency's address:

It is truly an honour to be part of an occasion that celebrates victory in the face of adversity. The battle against cancer has been a long and arduous one, and it continues. Many have been lost, but there are so many of us who are survivors, and this is, in itself, a celebration. Like true warriors, our survivors and supporters are all joined today to stand in firm solidarity for this cause of triggering awareness of the need for early cancer detection, and the links between lifestyle, particularly obesity and cancer.

My family and I know the emotional hardship of the battle against cancer. I saw my father: an independent, strong-willed, decent man battle brain cancer, surgery after surgery, for some five years. As a family we experienced personally the hardship of sourcing appropriate care givers, and we were lucky in that regard, because we were fortunate to have caregivers who were like angels without wings, lovingly caring for him until his death. So I know, yes, I know the daily struggles and the determination that are required of every cancer patient to get up each morning and face the day ahead. We are in this together. Sadly however, there are those who either believe that cancer will never affect them or anyone close to them, so they choose to remain ignorant of the ravages of cancer, hoping that it would not come their way. Cancer hits deep.

In the fight against cancer, ignorance is certainly not bliss and the greatest weapon we can wield in this battle is education and information. Those of you who do not know about breast cancer, you must learn about breast cancer, because breast cancer hits even deeper. This is what this event is, in the main, all about. October is Breast Cancer Awareness Month which is an annual campaign to increase awareness of this disease. While most of us may be aware, many forget to take those crucial and critical steps, to have the foresight to engage in a plan to detect the disease in its early stages and encourage others to do the same. We must not, therefore, be a slave to fear; neither must we engage in a type of groundless hope that it does not come my way. We also need to be our sisters' keeper. We must become proactive, not reactive in the face of what can only be deemed a health crisis.

The World Health Organisation [WHO] has suggested that two main components of early detection have been shown to reduce cancer mortality:

- Education—to help people recognize early signs of cancer and seek prompt medical attention for symptoms.

- Screening programs—to identify early cancer or pre-cancer before signs are recognizable, including mammography for breast cancer.

In this battle against cancer, a healthy lifestyle is an imperative. Healthy lifestyles do not begin in adulthood. Generally, attempts to repair the damage done are often invoked during adulthood, and we must stop that regressive cycle. If we are serious about encouraging and nurturing healthy lifestyles and by extension happier lives, it should be obvious to us all that it must begin with our very young, and it simply means taking control at home and at the primary school level. The home kitchen must be the source and genesis of this revolution that we seek and that we know is vital in the fight against obesity and its maleffects. The bottom line is that we need to ensure that as stated before, we provide lunch kits filled with nutritionally balanced foods, and specifically, healthier drinks. We must further insist that the cafeterias in primary schools must encourage healthy eating habits by the type of fare that they offer. Anyone will tell you, for example, that the sugar content in all our consumable goods is simply too high and does not engage international best practices standards, and through our Parent Teacher Associations, the intervention required can become a reality.

Exercise must work in tandem with healthy eating and must become a routine, a way of life for our young children. We have to be diplomats on the home front. Motivate a child into an activity that he or she likes and enjoys, not one that YOU like and enjoy. Encouraging a child in different sports in early life will inevitably lead that child to a sport that he or she loves into adulthood, and as an adult, exercise would become a fundamental part of everyday living.

Ironically, obesity is quickly overtaking tobacco, as the leading preventable cause of cancer, and although data are still emerging, research suggests that the risk of developing and dying from many common cancers is increased in obese individuals. Obesity is also linked to poorer cancer outcomes, including increased risk of recurrence and of both cancer-specific and overall mortality. An event like this one is critical in the battle against cancer. It is not only about raising and increasing awareness, but about encouraging our women, our men and our children to live healthy, active lifestyles, and achieve and maintain holistic health.

The statistics show that about 1 in 8 women (about 12%) will develop invasive breast cancer over the course of her lifetime. A man's lifetime risk of breast cancer is about 1 in 1,000, so it is not just a female problem. It concerns us all. Worldwide breast cancer is expected to account for 29% of all new cancers diagnosed in women in 2014. Let me be blunt here, as a woman, it is your responsibility to get yourself tested. If not for your sake: for your family's sake. Early detection can save your life.

A woman's breast has traditionally been viewed as integral to her sense of womanhood, and this explains why many women are simply afraid to even approach a clinic. There was a time when the thought of a mastectomy would signal the end of a woman's womanhood, the end of her motherhood, the end of her life. The dark clouds of ignorance were compounded by the stigma of fear and loss. That sense of fear is diminishing with the advent of many well-known actresses, like Angelina Jolie, telling the world, by her defiant stance, that a double mastectomy does not and will not destroy her femininity and womanhood.

All of you here, by your presence today, are in the vanguard of breaking that traditional cycle of doubt and fear. Let the survivors among us cast a penetrating light on the fight against cancer. With our support, our survivors and those who have just begun that arduous journey will be able to walk with pride and recognize that real beauty lies within, and our presence here is a testament to our innate strength and feminine resilience, and great hope for the future.

By riding, running and walking today, we will be sending a signal that hope lives eternal and that we are prepared to demonstrate that a healthy lifestyle is a solution to the health issues that our citizens encounter in their daily lives. We can beat diabetes. We can beat high and low blood pressure. And with the spirit that I see here today, we can beat cancer. We men and women will beat the dreaded scourge of cancer.

Thank you.