



**THE PRESIDENT
REPUBLIC OF TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO**

I extend heartfelt greeting and best regards to the many fathers of the nation and the many fathers here today.

Any society whatever its developmental stage must have at its base, its very foundation, responsible and accountable parenting. A crucial component of such parenting is a caring, respectful and responsible father. A firm recognition that fatherhood is a lifetime vocation.

A morally strong male figure at the head of any family would invariably produce and nurture children with an unwavering moral compass. With a deep sense of right and wrong and build capacities to tell the difference and that is so important in a society where some of us believe that we have a right to do wrong.

There are many young men who unfortunately have not been afforded the opportunity to experience paternal love, care and appreciation. The time is now therefore for us men not to abdicate but to take our place in the home as the protector, provider and role model to those who so much yearn for the warmth and love associated with true fatherhood.

I have been privileged to have benefited from the guiding hand of a devoted father. Additionally, I have had many father figures in my life, my uncles the male neighbours in my community, the Imam, the Pundit, the Priest in my community and last but not least the male teachers with whom I spent the greater part of each day growing up. So I did not have far to go to find role models and mentors in my life, my father being my greatest mentor and guide. That is not to say that my mother was not my rock of Gibraltar.

One unforgettable figure in my life is the male teacher who taught me from primary to secondary school. I can remember Mr Bereax from Palo Primary school, Mr Gervais and Mr Robinson from Santa Flora Government Primary school, and Mr Noel, Mr Joseph, Mr Banfield and my principal Brother Jerome Kelly, from Presentation College, San Fernando, just a few that come to mind. They are all now deceased but the standards they invoked continue to guide me.

My cry therefore, for more male teachers in our educational system was not petulant neither was it meant to be sensational. It is rather based on what I have positively experienced.

No one can deny that there are a great number of single parent homes today. These homes are devoid of the paternal figure head and while I commend the efforts of the mothers who rise to the task to providing the authoritative guidance to their sons and daughters, we must admit the success rate among mothers guiding young men is seemingly low and cause for pause.

The current dominance of single parent homes manned by women is only matched by the number of females in the teaching service. This is why I must again echo the need for a concentrated effort to increase the amount of father figures by increasing the number of male teachers in schools. This has gone beyond the stage of dialogue, it must now be seen as a national imperative. The male teacher can become the authoritative figure, role model, mentor and even a personal hero to these young men.

No one can argue that the reaction of a male student when spoken to by a male teacher will be different and more telling to what occurs when spoken to by a female teacher, especially when that authoritative male voice is absent in his home.

There are those who might argue that the vastly more lucrative employment available to educated young men may greatly reduce the appeal the teaching service has. While this may be true, should we accept this view and fold our arms.

No. What we need is affirmative action that will incorporate going to USC, UWI and UTT and speak to male final year students and encourage them about the vocation of teaching. Maybe a policy of allotting two out of every five teaching vacancies to male teachers may well address the imbalance and the ratio that currently exists.

I am in the presence of great men. Men who I have admired all my life. The Mighty Sparrow, Ambassador Hasely Crawford, Ambassador Brian Lara. Unknown to them in a very effective way, I can tell you without contradiction and without reservation that they have inspired, to use the language of young people, "mwah" and they have also inspired our young men in my community and across the Trinidad and Tobago diaspora and the West Indies.

It is this indomitable message we must bring back in our lives as fathers, to inspire our young men. Not only to come up to our level, but to go beyond. It is only then as any teacher will tell you, you can be a true father. A true teacher is one who brings you up to his level in the hope that you will go beyond his level and that is the responsibility of every father, every one of us here today to bring our children, our sons to bring them up to our level with the inspiration for them to go beyond us. This must remain our imperative for the rest of our lives.

Thank you very much.