



**THE PRESIDENT  
REPUBLIC OF TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO**

Her Excellency Mrs Reema Carmona addresses the KPA School at Siparia Road on the Occasion of the 60<sup>th</sup> Anniversary and Award Ceremony – November 28, 2014

It is indeed a great pleasure to be granted the opportunity to speak at this 60<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebration and Award function, and to address you regarding your role as heroes and exemplars, not only in this community but the society as a whole.

Yes, it is always good to celebrate the hard work and sacrifice that lead to success, but I want to engage you tonight in what leads to true success and what are the pitfalls that we need to guard against on that road to success. There is a whole gamut of human activity in the adult world which does not bode well for our young people. Male parents staggering home, drunk like a proverbial fish, abusing mothers and children, and when sober, demanding that everybody do the right thing.

Hope lives eternal, and we CAN change, and we MUST change, we must change this negative in the way we live and the values we conveniently invokes. We are all here on the same page, in the same book, and we must continue to be dynamos of change. It begins with small things, even small beginnings but small things can have an exceptional impact on solving difficult issues. A true hero, in engaging change always begins with himself or herself.

Bullying has become institutionalized in the adult world. We are therefore in reflex mode. We blame others for our social ills, be they in our homes, in our schools, on the roads or on our jobs. We conveniently do not engage in 'selfie' introspection. We superficially take pictures of ourselves, selfies, (everyone knows about "selfies") without looking at the real picture of ourselves – our personality, our conduct, our respect for others, how we speak to and of each other, how we lie about others and denigrate them, and we expect and demand that our children be different. We blame the schools, the teachers and everyone else, when we fail to appreciate the damage done, to the psyche of our children by the television shows we watch, in their presence, and the radio stations we listen too. We have to instead, save our children by feeding their minds with positive influences. Your parents and teachers did exactly that, and that is why you are here today as persons of substance.

Today, we have become convenient in our stance on human related issues. We dance, we side-step, we engage in foot works, because it is all about "how it looking, how it go look", and we ride that horse called perception. We need to change this dynamic and as part of that change, we have to be wary of social media. You have been on social media, you have seen the language, the scurrilous words and imagery, and you must make sure that your child is not part of that. Have to ask yourself, is that the standard you want your child to live by? If that is not the standard you want your child to live by or aspire towards, then why do you do what YOU do when you enter that world of social media? Simply put, as an adult,

why are we doing what we are doing? You must recognize always, the influential role you must play in your child's life, and by extension, your community.

For example, how are you shaping your children's world view in relation to the environment? We throw things outside of a car, especially the men, they urinate every- and anywhere. Only yesterday, a letter was written to an editor in a newspaper concerning a well-known calypsonian urinating in the middle of the road, and pictures were taken! We curse at the drop of a hat, we jump the queue, and we rush our cars illegally into the traffic. Big Brother might not be watching you, but your child is Watching, Listening, and Learning! We tell our children, by our conduct and our written and spoken word: I have a right to do wrong, and nobody has a right to tell me differently!

Entrenched wrongs have become entrenched rights in this society of ours. It is imperative therefore, for us to aspire to goodness to be and to celebrate our heroes, because good men and women must stop quietly talking about what is right and what is wrong and stand up and not be intimidated by a vociferous minority.

What about our lifestyle? A healthy lifestyle is an imperative. 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 and other lifestyle diseases is increased in obese individuals. Being a hero is about encouraging our women, our men and our children to live healthy, active lifestyles and achieving and maintaining holistic health. We must inspire our young men and women to get an education... in fact, not only to get an education, but to excel! Mediocrity must therefore, not be our philosophy! We must encourage them to gain financial independence and turn oppression into opportunity, and not to be defined by their environment, just like our awardees tonight have done.

To you I say that your very presence here tonight is symptomatic that you have not forgotten where you came from, and you, ladies and gentlemen, have not let the confines of your environment determine the scope and breadth of your ambitions. What has been defining in your life has been your hard work, your sacrifice, your vision, and most of all the calibre of your character. I do not intend to identify the names of all the awardees, but it is pertinent to recognize that graduates of this simple, humble school have excelled in the fields of Engineering, Music, Medicine, Public Service and Chemical Science just to name a few. Traditional value systems are under attack, and in this particular small community, we have been fortified in our endeavours by these very values that have stood the test of time. There is, therefore, no basis for questioning the validity and applicability of these values in our daily lives. We must spread that message that continues to fortify us as individuals.

Very often we speak of peer pressure in the context of our children, but there is a more insidious battle taking place in the form of peer pressure among parents. The traditional values that responsible parents have, are often subject to ridicule and even condemnation by other parents confronted by a technological age that is prepared to not only bend the branch of traditional values, but to cut down and destroy the entire tree that the branches sprout from. How often will you be told "this is 2014, you cannot shelter your child, the child must grow up, that is old time thing" and sometimes, you will be called upon to dig your heels in, because a society will be judged by its positive values and how these positive values are invoked and its corresponding impact on the quality of life lived. You may

sometimes feel that you are Moses in the wilderness, but sometimes, you just have to hold firm in well-grounded belief of what must be done for a better society.

We must always remember that our successes are incomplete if we turn our backs on those coming behind. Any height attained on the ladder of life is inconsequential, if we do not reach back, to lend a helping hand to someone on the rung below. Being a hero is about selfless sacrifice and genuine service, not self-aggrandizement. To use an expression of my husband, His Excellency, we are not and must not become an "occasion person", a person who conveniently fits into an occasion. I want to encourage you not to be an occasion hero, one who revels in the limelight and does nothing to be your brother's keeper. The mandate must be continue to make your positive mark on society but remember always, to be a true hero, you must not hesitate to be your brother's keeper. Continue, ladies and gentlemen, to be that burning light that you are, in your daily lives and in the lives of others. That light of great inspiration. Lives that began many, many years ago in this humble school. Thank You.