

STATEMENT
for the Minister of Foreign and CARICOM Affairs
on the occasion of the National Day of the French Republic

Friday 14th July 2017

Good evening.

It is an honour and a privilege for me to join you this evening and to partake in this auspicious occasion, the celebration of the French National Day – Bastille Day. On behalf of my Prime Minister, Dr. the Honourable Keith Rowley, and the Government and People of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, I bring congratulatory greetings to the Government and People of the French Republic on this special occasion.

The significance of the fourteenth (14th) of July 1798 continues to ring true today: the storming of the Bastille two hundred and twenty-eight (228) years ago was a defining moment of the French Revolution, triggering the start of a new democratic era for France. Today, French dynamism remains alive and well and French influence has an extensive reach around the world.

Here in Trinidad and Tobago, our countries' intertwined histories have left traces of French influence in aspects of our culture, our architecture and even linguistically and in the names of different localities throughout our country. French settlers who arrived in our islands during the seventeenth (17th) and eighteenth (18th) century were instrumental in the development of our

agricultural sector, planting and cultivating sugar, coffee and even cocoa, for which Trinidad and Tobago remains world famous today.

Trinidad and Tobago shares exemplary bilateral relations with France since the establishment of diplomatic relations in 1962. We have had the opportunity to collaborate in a wide range of sectors including health, water management, aviation, construction and crime and security. We have witnessed the development and construction of major infrastructural projects in our country under the guidance of French expertise: the Eric Williams Medical Sciences Complex; the Churchill Roosevelt Highway/Uriah Butler Highway Interchange; and the International Waterfront Complex, where my Ministry has made its home.

There has also been significant engagement in the area of education, through various programmes and projects such as the language assistant programme, training courses offered to French teachers and university partnerships, allowing for meaningful exchanges that benefit students, educators and others in both our countries. The *Alliance Française*, too, remains a pillar for French language and culture, offering both classes and a programme of events that bring French film, music and food to the public.

In recent years, our country has made its presence known through a number of ventures, particularly in the creative industries. In July 2014, a local group including fashion designers, soca artistes and entrepreneurs participated in a Carnival Trade Mission, which visited Paris and other European cities and showcased Trinidad and Tobago's creative talents. In April 2015, the local

feature film “Sally’s Way” was screened and awarded at the International Pan American Film Festival; then another local short film entitled “The Creative Soul of Trinidad and Tobago” was screened at the Summer Cannes Film Festival later that year.

We are proud to recognise and celebrate the outstanding contribution of McCartha Linda Sandy Lewis, better known as Calypso Rose, who won the Album of the Year award in the World Music category of the French *Victoires de la Musique* Awards held in Paris in February this year. We salute her on this brilliant achievement!

It is my hope that our countries continue to mutually benefit from the sharing of our rich cultures and move towards deeper collaboration, given the ease of access now facilitated under the Schengen visa waiver agreement, which was signed in 2015. The finalisation of that visa agreement stood out as one of many examples of bilateral cooperation between us in the multilateral arena. In both our interaction with the European Union and at the United Nations, France has been a friend and ally to our country.

On that note, it would be remiss of me not to commend the leading role that France has taken on the global stage in dealing with environmental issues, which are of crucial importance to small island developing states such as our own, and indeed, to the whole planet. Trinidad and Tobago, too, continues to participate in this process as we acknowledge that it is only through concerted efforts that the world can combat the negative effects of global warming and climate change and positively impact the fate of future generations.

Ladies and gentlemen, it may be said that success is measured by one's ability to overcome challenges. In recent times, the Government of Trinidad and Tobago has joined the international community in condemning the perpetration of a number of barbaric attacks carried out on French soil, which infringe on the fundamental rights and freedoms enjoyed in a democratic society. Time and again, France has stood resilient against these incidents and has shown that the inherent *joie de vivre* embodied in the French spirit cannot be dimmed.

Ambassador, at this juncture, on behalf of the Government and People of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago and on my own behalf, I once again extend congratulations and warm wishes for continued success to the Government and People of the French Republic.

My friends, please join me in a toast to prosperity, well-being and *bon accord* between the people of Trinidad and Tobago and the French Republic.