

**Statement delivered by the Honourable Major General (Ret'd) Edmund Dillon,
Minister of National Security and Acting Minister of Foreign and CARICOM
Affairs, at the Reception in Celebration of the
68th Anniversary of the Founding of the People's Republic of China,
September 26, 2017**

It is a pleasure to address you at this reception to mark the 68th Anniversary of the Founding of the People's Republic of China. On behalf of the Prime Minister of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, Dr. Keith Rowley, and the Government and People of this country, I take the opportunity to congratulate China on its political, economic and social development to date and to extend best wishes for continued prosperity and successes.

Your Excellency, I'm sure you will agree that Trinidad and Tobago and China have formed a resilient friendship, one rooted in the historical links formed through the emigration of Chinese citizens to Trinidad and Tobago over 210 years ago and bolstered by the establishment of diplomatic ties since June 1974. However, as with many relationships, we cannot rely on our history to forge a better future. In this regard, our countries have worked closely over the years to develop a partnership steeped in the tenets of trust, respect and mutual benefit.

One manifestation of this is our bilateral engagement at the highest levels. This year, there have been a number of high-level visits to China, including that of the Honourable Stuart Young, Minister in the Office of the Prime Minister and the Minister of the Office of the Attorney General and Legal Affairs, in May 2017. Additionally, the Honourable Darryl Smith, Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs, visited China in July 2017. Not only did these Ministers participate in prominent global conferences in China, but they also had the opportunity to explore prospects for bilateral cooperation in the fields of financial services, security, infrastructural development and sport, among others. Even as I speak, Your Excellency, Acting Commissioner of Police, Stephen Williams, is participating in the 86th INTERPOL General Assembly in Beijing, China.

Our people-to-people exchanges have not been one-sided for in March 2017, Trinidad and Tobago welcomed to its shores Mrs. Lu Zhongling, Director-General of the Ministry of National Defence of the People's Republic of China, and several other technical delegates and cultural troupes.

Within a broader context, Trinidad and Tobago and China have interfaced in mechanisms such as the CELAC-China Forum, which facilitates collaboration between China and Latin American and the Caribbean. Trinidad and Tobago was represented at a Local Government Cooperation Forum, the Think Tank Forum and Business Summit held in 2016 under the ambit of this grouping.

Your Excellency, in addition to continued interaction, any relationship needs the commitment of both parties in order to survive. In the realm of international affairs, agreements symbolise the intention of each party to work together. While Trinidad and Tobago and China have finalised over sixty agreements thus far, I believe we achieved a major milestone again in August 2017 by signing the Framework Agreement in relation to the Multi-Purpose Patrol Vessel acquired from the Government of the People's Republic of China for use by the Trinidad and Tobago Coast Guard. Your Excellency, I can tell you, that Vessel is making a difference patrolling the waters of Trinidad and Tobago. The Trinidad and Tobago Government will capitalise on existing agreements, some of which involve pledges of funds by the Chinese Government, and to enter into new arrangements, including a proposed Memorandum of Understanding for strengthening cooperation in the fields of medicine and health.

Ladies and Gentlemen, any good partnership thrives on variety; without it, the partnership becomes stale and sometimes dormant. Thankfully, this is not a problem that can be attributed to the Sino-Trinidad and Tobago relationship, in which there is collaboration in many spheres, including technical cooperation, energy, agriculture, education and culture. That being said, both sides have actively sought previously untapped opportunities to work together, such as the export of local fish products to China and Chinese scholarships for local sports students.

While I have identified a few important characteristics for success, every relationship also needs a purpose. In this regard, it is the Government's position that Trinidad and Tobago is well positioned to act as a conduit for Chinese economic activities in the Caribbean region, especially given its inherent advantages in location, size, skill and existing ties. For this reason, we will continue to "court" Chinese enterprises that demonstrate an interest in providing assistance in the achievement of Trinidad and Tobago's development goals.

As I conclude, I can assure you that Trinidad and Tobago and China will continue to enhance our relationship, demonstrate our commitment, seek new opportunities and pursue our objectives as we work toward strengthening our friendship and relationship. At this juncture, Your Excellency, I wish to recognise your tremendous efforts and to reassure you that the Trinidad and Tobago Government is equally eager to realise these aspirations. May you continue to enjoy and celebrate your 68th Anniversary, Your Excellency.

Your Excellency, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Please join with me in raising a toast to celebrate the 68th Anniversary of the Founding of the People's Republic of China and to hail the relationship between our two countries.

To the People's Republic of China!