

**Statement by Senator the Honourable Dennis Moses, Minister of Foreign and
CARICOM Affairs, in observance of Commonwealth Day 2018**

In celebrating Commonwealth Day 2018, the theme *“Towards a Common Future”* inspires optimism and circumspection. What does the future hold for us as a nation and as a member of the Commonwealth family? As we brave the challenges of building a stronger, more united and progressive Trinidad and Tobago and effecting a safer and more harmonious world, our collaboration with and contribution to the Commonwealth of Nations assume tremendous significance.

2. Today, the international community is confronting increasingly complex challenges on several fronts, manifested across the globe in critical threats posed by international conflict; rising unemployment and underemployment, especially in relation to young people; the proliferation and increased intensity of natural disasters and extreme weather events; outbreaks of infectious and resistant diseases; acute social unrest; mass involuntary migration within and beyond international borders; waves of cybercrime, cyberattacks and data breaches; continued inequality towards women; and alarmingly escalating incidents of youth and urban violence.

3. Undoubtedly, such phenomena will impact the survival and survivability of present and future generations. With the determination to address such phenomena, the community of nations must foster collaborative intervention to seek durable solutions in an all-encompassing framework for sustainable development, with the aim of bringing development to people all over the world so that they may enjoy their inalienable rights as human beings and live in dignity, peace and safety. To achieve desired objectives of eradicating poverty and socio-economic marginalisation, and bringing hope, enabling capacity and tangible improvement to multitudes where misery, inequities and exclusion exist, requires cooperation and partnership among a broad coalition of actors, including governments, civil society, the private sector, labour coalitions/representatives, international organisations, academia and the wider development community.

4. In the face of modern-day challenges, the Commonwealth stands as a pillar of strength; an advocate for meaningful, inclusive and sustainable development; a beacon of hope for the underrepresented; a champion of peacebuilding and a catalyst for positive change. As a voluntary association of 53 sovereign states, the Commonwealth has long understood that robust growth and development would be impossible without the engagement of the people and the people's interests, in particular women and youth, at the centre of policy-making.

5. Over the years, successive meetings of the Heads of Government have issued mandates targeted at building societies that are more democratic and transparent, advocating for good governance that respects the rule of law and human rights, promotes harmonious and resilient communities, and elevates the standard of living and welfare of all peoples. With its diverse trans-continental membership, the Commonwealth is an effective international network for dialogue, cooperation and development, functioning by consensus and by forging synergies from the extraordinary richness of its diversity, the breadth of its traditions and cultures, and its shared pool of knowledge and expertise.

6. If indeed we are to shape a future that is bountiful and beneficial for future generations, in accordance with this year's theme "*Towards a Common Future*", the quest for prosperity must necessarily go hand in hand with the pursuit of security, the imperative of sustainability and faithful adherence to principles of fairness, inclusion and equity, as enunciated in the Charter of the Commonwealth.

7. In commemorating Commonwealth Day 2018, Trinidad and Tobago avails itself of the opportunity to extend sincere congratulations and good wishes to the Republic of The Gambia on its recent induction as the 53rd member of the Commonwealth fold.

8. The Commonwealth comprises approximately 2.4 billion people, representing almost a third of the world's population, including several of the largest and smallest economies. The Commonwealth seeks to foster trade and investment that will bolster economic growth and employment and carve a path towards prosperity for its peoples.

Through the Commonwealth Fund for Technical Cooperation, the Commonwealth delivers training and capacity-building programmes to member governments in several key areas to create more facilitative business environments and heightened intra-Commonwealth trade.

9. The work of the Commonwealth, *inter alia*, supports free and fair electoral processes, builds capacity in public institutions and boosts participatory governance by including all actors, in particular civil society, women and young people, in processes that promote good governance, improved accountability and greater transparency.

10. Trinidad and Tobago applauds the efforts of the Commonwealth in leading the way to strategically address underlying issues and mitigate mushrooming violent extremism, terrorism and radicalisation. In this regard, the 2008 Report of the Commonwealth Commission on Respect and Understanding entitled *Civil Paths to Peace* remains an important building block for the Commonwealth in crafting solutions to tackle this scourge in its many manifestations, through dialogue, educational outreach and training. Last year, youth activists from across the Caribbean, including Trinidad and Tobago, benefitted from a regional workshop on countering extremist narratives and propaganda organised by the Commonwealth Secretariat in conjunction with the Commonwealth Youth Peace Ambassadors Network.

11. People lie at the heart of the Charter of the Commonwealth and the future of the Commonwealth rests on the unwavering commitment and contribution of young persons to promoting development, peace, democracy and other core Commonwealth values and principles, despite the challenges which pervade the rapidly changing global environment and the economic disparities witnessed across the world. The weight of this demographic in relation to the total world population of 7.5 billion means that every effort must be made to enable young people to become the drivers of sustainable development, to become empowered and capable change agents, and to fearlessly face the future and all that it promises. It is fitting, therefore, to recall the Magampura Commitment to Young People, adopted by Commonwealth Heads of Government in 2013 and to celebrate the efforts of the Commonwealth Youth Council and the initiatives of the Commonwealth Youth

Programme, the Commonwealth Youth Peace Ambassadors Network and the Commonwealth Youth Sport for Development and Peace Working Group (CYSDP), mechanisms through which Trinidad and Tobago continues to play an active role in influencing youth development.

12. As we contemplate our common future, a future currently imperilled by the impact of climate change and phenomena such as sea level rise, coral bleaching, ocean acidification and desertification, the Commonwealth must be commended for its astute leadership in recognising the primacy of sustainability as the *sine qua non* for alleviating poverty, displacement and human suffering and preventing 100 million more people from falling into hardship by 2030. Of particular importance is the Commonwealth's focus on safeguarding and supporting the 39 small and vulnerable states which constitute two-thirds of its membership and the Commonwealth's commitment to enhancing capacity and increasing resilience among fragile states.

13. The Commonwealth has been at the forefront of exploring climate change reversal and sustainable management of oceanic resources through its landmark research into the Blue Economy. Moreover, the Commonwealth, as an institution in the vanguard of the global movement to address climate change, propelled the discussions that culminated in the Paris Agreement being adopted in December 2015. It bears noting that the Agreement was preceded by the Commonwealth Heads of Government Statement on Climate Action of November 2015, which referenced the '1989 Langkawi Declaration on the Environment' and the '2009 Port of Spain Climate Change Consensus: The Commonwealth Climate Change Declaration'.

14. Therefore, whether we speak of the hurricanes which devastated our Caribbean neighbours in 2017, monsoons in Asia or cyclones in the Pacific, the Commonwealth estimates that natural disasters affect some 28 million people and result in economic losses to the tune of billions of dollars each year. In 2017 alone, the economic costs of climate-related disasters worldwide were estimated to be almost USD 400 billion dollars, with the highest number of disasters recorded in a single year since 2011. The importance

of the Commonwealth's efforts, through the Climate Finance Access Hub, to address the capacity constraints which prevent small and vulnerable states from accessing climate finance and to enable the provision of technical assistance and knowledge creation and transfer, cannot be underestimated.

15. In keeping with Trinidad and Tobago's National Development Strategy: Vision 2030, which commits to "*Placing the environment at the centre of social and economic development*", Trinidad and Tobago took the decisive step to ratify the Paris Agreement on February 22, 2018, turning its longstanding commitment to sustainability into affirmative action. Trinidad and Tobago has joined The Queen's Commonwealth Canopy initiative, a forestry conservation project for Commonwealth member states. The Arena Forest Reserve Project, a local ecological treasure, is featured as part of this noteworthy Commonwealth initiative. Efforts are underway to have the Main Ridge in Tobago included soon, since it is the oldest recorded legally protected forest reserve and dedicated conservation site in the history of environmental preservation. Its ecosystem is also the habitat of a variety of flora and fauna, including unique species of wildlife found only in Trinidad and Tobago.

16. In some parts of the world, people are waking up to find that their taps are dry and there is no water for cooking and drinking. In other parts of the world and even here at home, persons are discovering that their backyards have been reclaimed by the sea and their homes are crumbling from the intrusion of seawater. And in other parts of the world, families and young women are huddling in fear from the attacks of extremist militias that plunder and kidnap at will. We need not look far to realise the urgency of the present situation with recent coastal erosion and landslips occurring on our own soil.

17. With the Commonwealth at the helm and the next Heads of Government Meeting approaching in April 2018, it is hoped that member states will coalesce around common objectives and priorities and frontally address the ills that threaten our peoples, to ensure that the future of this generation and generations to come is assured. As the Commonwealth navigates ways and means of unleashing creative, innovative, equitable

and sustainable solutions to global concerns, Trinidad and Tobago stands ready to contribute towards making this institution a dynamic and potent force for good. In sum, the future that we want and envisage will be determined by our collective actions and decisions today and the extent of our resolve, ambition and unity of purpose in delivering a future that is truly fairer, more prosperous, more secure and more sustainable - a benefit to the living and a legacy to the unborn.

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