

STATEMENT DELIVERED BY
THE HONOURABLE DENNIS MOSES, MINISTER OF FOREIGN
AFFAIRS, ON THE OCCASION OF
THE NATIONAL DAY OF THE KINGDOM OF THE NETHERLANDS

27 APRIL 2018

Good evening. I am honoured to be here with you this evening as the Kingdom of The Netherlands celebrates the 51st birthday of His Majesty King Willem-Alexander of the Netherlands. On behalf of Dr. the Honourable Keith Rowley, Prime Minister, and the Government and People of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, I extend to the Government and People of the Kingdom of the Netherlands warm congratulations and best wishes on King's Day.

Trinidad and Tobago and The Netherlands formally established diplomatic relations in 1962, which has evolved into a much cherished friendship and mutually beneficial alliance based on shared values. We have engaged in numerous mutually beneficial collaborations in areas such as education and technical assistance, culture and cultural conservation, environmental sustainability, energy, tourism, health, security and trade.

The Netherlands can trace the beginning of its relationship with Trinidad and Tobago to the middle of the 17th century and much has been done by both nations to recognise the historic linkages between our countries and the artefacts derived from those interactions. Since the Dutch landed on the island they called Nieuw Walcheren in 1628, the island we now know as Tobago, their influence and the evidence of these encounters can be seen in the names of villages and landmarks around the island such as Auchenskeoch and the remains of Dutch vessels in the

waters of the Scarborough harbour. These vessels were the subject of a collaborative effort between The Netherlands and Trinidad and Tobago to preserve what proved to be the remnants of the Battle of Rockly Bay between the Dutch and the French in 1677. Through the collaborative efforts of the Tobago House of Assembly and the Maritime Programme of the Dutch Cultural Heritage Agency, all artefacts found in the exploration of the vessels have been catalogued and re-submerged until a conservatory is built to preserve the items in the very near future.

Further, The Netherlands has used their international standing not only to promote their own interests, but to be a platform for the promotion and conservation of Trinbagonian culture. The participation of Trinidad and Tobago and its cultural artistes in the annual Rotterdam Carnival and propagation of the gospel of our steelpan through The Netherlands' Annual International Steelband Festival have done much to elevate the international profile of Trinidad and Tobago and its cultural products the world over.

Besides our historic and cultural ties, our nations both share a keen love for football and since it is a World Cup year, it would be remiss of me not to mention that the furthest the Trinidad and Tobago Soca Warriors has ever progressed in World Cup qualifiers was under the leadership of Dutchman, coach Leo Beenhakker. This landmark development that landed Trinidad and Tobago in the Guinness Book of World Records as the smallest nation to qualify for the World Cup, a title which we still hold, and the nation with the smallest population ever to qualify at that time, would not have been possible were it not for a son of Dutch soil. Sadly, Trinidad and Tobago has not qualified to compete for the Cup this year but I'm sure most of you will be out in your bright orange to support The Netherland's bid for the World Cup.

At the regional level, The Netherlands has maintained a presence in the Caribbean through its territories. Indeed, it is this Caribbean identity and all that it encompasses that has laid a synergistic foundation for regional collaboration evidenced by the overtures made by St. Maarten and Curacao for greater interaction with the Caribbean Community (CARICOM). It has also afforded The Netherlands a front row seat to witness what has been called the “front lines of the war on climate change” through the eyes of St. Maarten that was devastated by an extremely active hurricane season in 2017.

The Netherlands commitment to sustainable development has been a hallmark of their foreign policy. Last year, the vulnerability of Small Island Developing States (SIDS) to the impact of climate change was demonstrated by Hurricanes Irma and Maria and the destruction caused in their wake. Partners such as the The Netherlands have long been the vanguard for programmes that seek to promote sustainable development as well as find solutions to the many challenges posed by climate change. In fact, apart from its tangible efforts in the Region whether through funding, technical expertise and educational opportunities relative to sustainable development, The Netherlands’ ratification of the Paris Climate Change Agenda in New York and the greening strides that they have made in their own country in furtherance of keeping global warming below 2°C, are an inspiration to all in the wider international community. Indeed, as a nation built mostly on reclaimed land and whose way of life is protected by dikes, the Dutch need no convincing that climate change and our vulnerability to nature’s whims and fancies is a very real phenomenon that must be taken seriously by every country if the next generation is to inherit a habitable Earth.

The Netherlands has always symbolised progressive thought, freedom, a “live and let live” worldview and a sustainable way of life. It’s the sort of example that the world needs at the moment; a world where, in some quarters, divergent schools of thought, ideologies and inherent differences have led to strife. The Netherlands’ commitment to peace and security and to the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago has gone beyond lip service and into tangible proofs such as their support for our candidatures to the International Criminal Court and our Arms Trade Treaty bid.

It is for all these reasons that Trinidad and Tobago holds our friendship with the Kingdom of The Netherlands in high esteem and remains committed to the strengthening of these bonds. It is in the spirit of this friendship that we are honoured to join you in the celebration of your special day, Kings Day, as we look toward an even brighter future for The Netherlands.

May I now invite you all to raise your glasses and join with me in offering a toast, as we celebrate the life of His Majesty King Willem-Alexander, and as we collectively wish continued success and prosperity to both the Monarch and the Kingdom of the Netherlands and the furtherance of a fruitful bilateral relationship between our countries.

VROLIJK KONINGS DAG (Happy King’s Day)

I THANK YOU