



**REPUBLIC OF TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO**

**ADDRESS**

**BY**

**SENATOR THE HONOURABLE JENNIFER BAPTISTE-PRIMUS  
MINISTER OF LABOUR AND SMALL ENTERPRISE DEVELOPMENT**

**AT THE**

**FRIENDLY SOCIETIES AND FRATERNAL ORDERS**

**CONVENTION 2018**

**AT THE**

**THE SIGNATURE HALL,**

**LONGDENVILLE, CHAGUANAS**

**ON**

**WEDNESDAY AUGUST 13<sup>TH</sup>, 2018**

**AT**

**10:00 A.M.**

**THE THEME**

**“ REPOSITIONING THE FRIENDLY SOCIETIES MOVEMENT FOR THE YEAR 2020  
AND BEYOND”**

## **SALUTATIONS**

- NATALIE WILLIS, ACTING PERMANENT SECRETARY,  
MINISTRY OF LABOUR AND SMALL ENTERPRISE  
DEVELOPMENT
- ZELICA HAYNES- SOO HON, REGISTRAR OF FRIENDLY  
SOCIETIES AND FRATERNAL ORDERS
- MEMBERS OF THE FRIENDLY SOCIETIES ADVISORY  
COUNCIL
- BROTHERS AND SISTERS OF THE FRIENDLY  
SOCIETIES AND FRATERNAL ORDERS
- OUR SPECIALLY INVITED GUESTS
- MEMBERS OF THE MEDIA
- STAFF OF THE MINISTRY
- LADIES AND GENTLEMEN

Good morning.

A hearty welcome to all present here today at this Friendly Societies and Fraternal Orders Convention 2018 with a special welcome to the Brothers and Sisters of the Friendly Societies and Fraternal Orders, for accepting this invitation. I am very pleased to see that so many of you took the time to attend. The Ministry would have met with you previously when we looked at the Friendly Societies Act. Out of the three consultations held on this Act, we focused on the proposed amendments to the Act and these amendments reflected all comments and concerns you shared with us.

Ladies and Gentlemen, this Convention is a very important and timely one as we seek to forge the way forward under the theme “ Repositioning the Friendly Societies and Fraternal Orders for the year 2020 and beyond.” Your presence here today represents the dedication and commitment and clear understanding that is

required to take this Sector of the Movement forward with this refashioned thinking.

The great Chinese Philosopher Lao Tzu (Lao Cha) once said “ *The journey of a thousand miles begins with one step*” and today my brothers and sisters you all would have taken several steps since 2016 which is needed to reach the status of a repositioned Movement in society. The first step is your presence here, but the subsequent steps will involve the support of your colleagues in the various Societies and our Ministry. Each step, we know would be a challenge, but I am certain, with your determination and commitment you would overcome each challenge and use them as lessons learnt for the future Members of your Society. Granted that this journey may seem tough and never-ending, but if we want to achieve the goals of this vital Friendly Societies Movement, we have to continue to forge on and take those steps.

This Ministry, the Ministry of Labour and Small Enterprise Development, as you know and were apart of, has placed high on its priority listing a thrust to look at the amendments needed to the Legislative Agenda under its purview. In the quest to support this mandate, the Government through this Ministry has given the undertaking to ensure that: legislation are amended; policies are implemented; there is the creation of business clusters within communities; and that there is institutional strengthening of Friendly Societies. I know many of you are aware that when we looked at the Friendly Societies Act, we discussed the antiquated, outdated legislation that currently govern the Movement. While the focus here today is on the Friendly Societies' Movement, and how we can work together to better serve our national community, it would be remiss of me to not highlight that this Ministry over the last thirty months has undertaken 15 consultations. This includes consultations for the review of existing legislation such as the Workmen' s Compensation Act Chap. 88:05; the Co-operative Societies Act, Chap 81:03; the Industrial Relations Act, Chap

88:01; the Occupational Safety and Health Act, Chap. 88:08; the Cipriani College of Labour and Co-operative Studies Act, Chap 39:51; the Retrenchment and Severance Benefits Act, Chap. 88:13; the Friendly Societies Act, Chap. 32:05 and the Private Security Order under the Minimum Wages Act, Chap. 88:04.

Additionally, consultations were held on proposed legislation such as the Basic Terms and Conditions of Work Code and the use of Contract Labour. Most recently, the Ministry met with stakeholders to discuss the draft National Workplace Policy on Sexual Harassment on June 1, 2018 in Trinidad and June 22, 2018 in Tobago and the Trade Union Act on July 27, 2018. We will be hosting another next week on the Employment Standards which will discuss the determination of a proposed policy framework for the establishment and implementation of employment standards within Trinidad and Tobago. You can certainly tell that I have been keeping the Staff and myself very busy.

Specifically to the Movement, as part of our drive to strengthen the Friendly Societies Movement, two consultations were held with the Division' s key stakeholders with an aim of amending the Friendly Societies Act. At those Consultations, discussions were held with you – one of our valued stakeholders on the issues and challenges encountered within the Societies and Orders. Those discussions subsequently led to the development of the appropriate policy framework within which the Societies and Orders can more effectively position itself strategically at a national, regional and international level.

Well, I have been recently accused of only consulting, consulting, consulting, but I am pleased to inform you that a Draft Policy on the amendment on the Friendly Societies Act has been completed and submitted to the Law Reform Commission for review. When these comments are received from the Law Reform Commission the Draft Policy, will then be submitted to Cabinet for approval. Ladies and Gentlemen, as you can see, we are well poised to

attain the repositioning of the Movement within the 2020 timeframe. There are currently four position papers before the Cabinet on the Industrial Relations Act and Retrenchment and Severance Benefits Act which were referred to the National Tripartite Advisory Council, the Workmen's Compensation Act and the Cipriani College of Labour and Co-operative Studies Act

To further bolster the Friendly Societies Movement, the Friendly Societies Advisory Council in collaboration with the Friendly Societies Division hosted this Convention for the Societies and Orders, together with a week of activities which began on Monday 13<sup>th</sup> August and culminates today. On Monday 13<sup>th</sup> there was a discussion with members of the Friendly Societies and Orders which took place on TV6' s Morning Edition where members were able to share information on the operations of the Friendly Societies and Orders so our citizenry could become more informed about the workings of the Movement. Creating public awareness through various mechanisms is crucial to the survival

and continuity of the Movement. And I must say that this segment was a very productive and successful interview and compelled me to be here today to deliver this Address to you.

Following this TV interview, I understand that a successful Training session was conducted at the Duke Street Office where approximately 60 persons were in attendance which included some of you who are here today. This training enhanced the Members' knowledge and capacity when preparing their bond forms and annual returns before submitting to the Office of the Registrar on a timely basis. As you are aware, this is in accordance with the Friendly Societies Act, members are required to submit annual returns and bond forms to the Office of the Registrar of Friendly Societies; and failure to submit same would lead to a breach of the Friendly Societies Act.

Brothers and Sisters, I urge you to continue to support this Movement and continue to be your brothers' keepers, engage in

meaningful discussions because it is through this you will be able to move from strength to strength in taking the Movement forward.

Today's Convention not only focuses on repositioning the Friendly Societies and Fraternal Orders but more significantly, to honour and acknowledge our Societies and Orders that have been in existence for more than 100 years. I was informed that 14 Societies/Orders have celebrated more than 100 years. This is certainly a milestone that needs to be commended. This is the only Movement that can boast of having some of the longest surviving institutions in Trinidad and Tobago, which surely deserves a round of applause as this is a reflection of your hard work and continued dedication.

Let us look at the core of what this Movement was established to do and hold true to the essence of what makes a Friendly Society and Fraternal Order as your institutions were founded on the principles of social integration, self-reliance among its members

and has as its watchwords: Love... Brotherhood... Truth..Friendship , Honour,and Fraternity and pass this along to future generations.

The focus on the future is critical as there has been a decline from approximately 252 registered Lodges in Trinidad and Tobago in 1950 to approximately **forty nine** (49) Friendly Societies and Fraternal Orders registered under the Friendly Societies Act with a membership of approximately 7,000 and an asset base of approximately **\$ 70,000,000 million**.

Ladies and Gentlemen, the decline in the number of registered Societies and Orders is a signal that this Sector needs put at its forefront the ideas for repositioning, restructuring and a vision for the future. I do have an understanding of the challenges being faced such as: an ageing membership, limited succession planning; poor administration; outdated legislation, and strong competition from more viable financial institutions offering many of the same services as Societies. But this should not prevent us

from doing what we have to do and to continue to take those steps to reach where you have to go.

Today we have four new groups of persons that are willing to register as Friendly Societies namely:

- St. Matthew Friendly Society
- Pine Hill Conservation Friendly Society
- First National Friendly Society
- Eco Green Friendly Society

This augurs well, as we see there is still interest which needs to be harnessed by established Members of the Movement.

Perspectives need to be assessed and a review of the past should be done clinically and critically to analyse the Movement.

With new information, new ideas and new visions that is to be generated, that is why we are all here today. I always tell people that I love to be surrounded by young persons, because they not

only keep you young but bring a totally different view of how things can be done. I challenge you to engage young persons as they would certainly bring you to be more techno savvy.

In closing, I advise that we, as the key stakeholders have to be the drivers and engines for what we want to see in this Movement. We need to look at innovative and creative ways to attract new members and to embrace technology in the operationalizing of our daily tasks.

Let us be positive, creative and innovative in our deliberations as we seek to chart the way forward.

May God richly bless the Prime Minister of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, the Government Ministers and Senators, the Leader of the Opposition and may God continue to bless this nation as a whole and protect and guide the citizens of this country.

I pray travelling mercies for all of you who attend today' s  
Convention and urge you to continue to be productive in your  
endeavours.

I thank you.