



ADDRESS BY

THE HONOURABLE

CAROLYN SEEPERSAD-BACHAN, MP

MINISTER OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

AT THE 1ST CARICOM ALUMNI ASSOCIATION FORUM

HOSTED BY THE INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION AGENCY

IN COLLABORATION WITH THE EMBASSY OF JAPAN

THURSDAY MARCH 22, 2012

HILTON, TRINIDAD

PORT OF SPAIN



Ministry of
Public Administration

Dr the Honourable Surujrattan Rambachan, Minister of Foreign Affairs
and Communication

His Excellency...Ambassador of Japan to Trinidad and Tobago
Mr.

Ambassador of Japan, Antigua and Barbuda
Honourable Liverpool

Chief Representative, JICA Regional Office
Mr. Shoji Ozawa

Representative Trinidad and Tobago JICA Alumni Association
Ms. Stacy Harris

Representative of the various JICA Alumni Association

Members of the Media

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am indeed honoured to address you here this morning on this very significant occasion, of the 1st CARICOM Alumni Association Forum.

As you know, this event is hosted by the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), in collaboration with the Embassy of Japan and I wish to thank both organisations for this successful collaborative effort.

Ladies and gentlemen, this momentous occasion brings the Trinidad and Tobago element of CARICOM into the Network of JICA Alumni Association.

I understand that there are twelve (12) such associations in the CARICOM region and this has increased to thirteen (13) as Trinidad and Tobago is now connected to the network through its newly formed, JICA Alumni Association of Trinidad and Tobago (JAATT).

This is an excellent strategic fit as our nation has been strong allies over a long and fruitful period with Japan through Bilateral Agreements between our countries, and also the other CARICOM countries.

In CARICOM one of its major roles is the provision of Technical Assistance training by Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) which is geared towards global economic stability and sustainable development.

For us in Trinidad and Tobago, through our bilateral agreements, we have been able to benefit from Technical Cooperation Awards in Health, Social Security, Water Resources/Disaster Management, Environmental Management and more recently Natural Resources and Energy, specifically as it relates to Solar Power Generation Technology.

From these training initiatives, our Public Service professionals who participated in the related disciplines, are now more geared than ever before with new skills and competencies.

I want to tell you that this augurs well for both our nations. On the side of Trinidad and Tobago, with steps we are now taking forward to create the 21st Century, performance-drive, citizen centric Public Service, we are being aided in Human Resource capacity building.

We are also benefitting greatly in being able to re-fashion policies which are geared to international best practices and are in sync with our sustainable development thrust articulated in its National Policy Development Plan.

Specifically, this is defined under the Seven Inter-connected Pillars for Sustainable Development which point to:

“A more Diversified knowledge Intensive Economy-Building on the Native Genius of our People” and “Foreign Policy-Securing Our Place in the World”

Ladies and gentlemen, knowledge is already one of the most valuable resources upon which developed economies are relying and upon which we, as an emerging economy will rely on more and more for increased competitiveness in the global economy.

More than simply knowledge, what is absolutely essential is not only its acquisition, but also its application and transfer. Knowledge will benefit no one unless we understand how we must partner and cooperate in applying it and sharing it so that we create the conditions for sustainability.

This is perhaps the most critical element of relevance of the JICA Alumni Associations in CARICOM territories in bolstering the development of knowledge-based societies.

Education and key skills development are seen as being among the more critical success factors impacting sustainable economic growth and national development in our nation, as well as in the CARICOM family of nations.

It is for this reason that scholarships provided by the Government of Japan for tertiary level education makes an invaluable contribution to the creation of robust human capital and the enhancement and expansion of knowledge bases, primarily through research and development.

Also, I am informed that JICA plays a crucial role in development through activities in the Caribbean which include:

- Multilateral Assistance
- Financial Assistance (Aids and grants) for disaster reliefs.
- ODA loans (Official Development Assistance)

Ladies and gentlemen, this therefore presents immediate opportunities for our CARICOM family of nations to access and utilize these forms of assistance to enhance the quality of life of citizens today, as well as ensure that tomorrow's citizens are well provided for.

Moreover, I have paid keen attention to a very laudable initiative of JICA as stated in their reason for this forum. This relates to the development of communities within the regions which ties in well with one of our country's development pillars as it relates to the empowerment of rural communities.

This initiative has been crafted into the objectives in the draft constitution of JICA Alumni Association of Trinidad and Tobago and points to projects and programmes, through JICA, for the development of Trinidad and Tobago.

A representative example of this initiative through JICA was revealed in the case of Dominica in 2011. Activities initiated by the Alumni Association included:

- Special Olympic Day
- Kids fishing
- School projects.
- Beach cleanup
- School environmental debating competition.

Ladies and gentlemen, I would also want to stress that culture and cross-cultural appreciation is one of the most important tools for learning AND sharing in forging lasting relationships based on collaboration and partnership.

These relationships develop with understanding, mutual respect, appreciation of each other's heritage, and shared principles on how and where we can achieve, together.

This is why another objective of the JICA Alumni Association which I have noted is encouraging, and highly commendable. The objective is to provide opportunities for citizens of Trinidad and Tobago to learn about Japan, its people, culture and language and to assist the Embassy of Japan in planning and implementing cultural events in Trinidad and Tobago.

To this end, JICA has pledged financial support not only to Trinidad and Tobago but to all the other CARICOM Alumni Associations in support of these events.

I am certain you will by now know that one of our great performing artistes, Kees Dieffenthaler, held concerts in Japan

last November. This concert raised quite a lot of excitement and was an opportunity to share with Japan the quality and calibre of our entertainment industry.

More than that, what this clearly demonstrated was an evolving cultural relationship between our two countries and indeed our peoples. And I feel that we must not allow this demonstration to slip past us without due recognition.

Ladies and gentlemen, as Minister of Public Administration, I am entrusted with the responsibility for reviewing and approving all overseas training awards offered by foreign Governments and international agencies.

And I remain committed to ensuring that the awards offered by JICA to our nation are administered throughout the Public Service in a manner that provides equal access to opportunities,

and also to ensure that the benefit of such knowledge can be most effectively spread.

As I conclude, I once again applaud JICA and the Embassy of Japan for being the driving forces behind the formation of the thirteen (13) CARICOM Alumni Associations.

I also strongly urge you, the members of the Alumni Associations, to honour the commitments you pledged in your respective mandates and maintain the highest standards as we deepen CARICOM relationships.

For it is only together, in partnership that we can ensure sustainable economic development for all of our nations, in a manner that keeps us in tune and in step with our global partners. I thank you.