

CHAIRMAN'S PRE-ELECTION SPEECH
ON OCCASION OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ELECTION TO BE HELD
ON MONDAY 21ST OCTOBER, 2013

My dear fellow citizens, ladies and gentlemen, good evening! I wish to address you on this the eve of the country's Local Government Election 2013; our third election for the year. One more to go!

Tomorrow's election embraces 136 Electoral Districts in 14 electoral areas comprising 2 Cities, 3 Boroughs and 9 Regional Corporations and an electorate of a little over one million and thirty-six thousand. Associated infrastructure includes two thousand and eighty Polling Stations. Human resources: fifty-three Returning Officers and nearly eleven thousand Poll Day staff, not to mention all the supporting staff of the EBC's Department headed by the Chief Election Officer and also members of the Commission! National elections, be they Parliamentary, Local Government or Tobago House of Assembly, are undoubtedly the largest logistical exercises the country undertakes at any time. In a sense, a Local Government Election is the most complicated of all, since the number of electoral districts and consequently the number of Returning Officers invariably exceed to a significant degree the corresponding numbers for Parliamentary and Tobago House of Assembly Elections.

Tomorrow's election is an historic one in that for the first time in any national election in Trinidad and Tobago, a system of proportional representation (List-PR system, for short), is being introduced – specifically in this case for the selection of Aldermen to City Councils, Borough Councils and the Councils of Regional Corporations. Previously Aldermen were chosen by Councillors. Councillors shall however be elected on the First-past-the-Post system as in the past. The rationale of PR Systems lies in an attempt to reduce the disparity or inequality if you like, between a Party's share of the total votes cast and its share of the number of Aldermanic seats in a Council. Thus, if a Party wins, say, 60% of the vote, the premise is that it should receive approximately 60% of the seats. Similarly, if another Party gains 30% of the vote, then

that Party should get approximately 30% of the seats – and so on. Each Council of which there are 14 altogether is, according to the legislation, entitled to an allotment of four (4) Aldermen. There are different varieties of PR systems. If you would like to learn more about them you may wish to consult the book *Electoral System Design* published by the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA).

Let me pose this question: Why should anyone vote in a Local Government Election? There are many answers but a good one is that it is because Local Government bodies: the Councils and Corporations provide certain essential goods and services to our localized institutions and communities. There is thus a direct relationship or connection between the level of supply and the standard of efficiency at which these goods and services are delivered and hence the quality of life we enjoy in our communities.

When you go to the polls tomorrow to elect a Council be it in a City such as Port of Spain or San Fernando or in a Borough such as Arima, Point Fortin or Chaguanas or in a Regional Corporation such as Mayaro/Rio Claro or Couva/Tabaquite/Talparo, you shall be doing so in order to select the individuals in whom shall be vested the responsibility of governing, in partnership with Chief Executive Officers who are the top management of each Council, the provision of the essential goods and services in the communities to which I have just referred.

Local government Councils are authorities that determine and execute measures within the boundaries of a City, Borough or Municipal Corporation. Their importance to the communities they serve should not be underestimated. The Municipal Corporations Act which is the legislation dealing with the structure and responsibilities of these bodies has provisions relating to, among others, such matters as building regulations, financing of the Corporations, taxes, land drainage, roads and bridges, street lighting and so on. Did you know that the Act also provides for each Council, Borough or Regional Corporation to have a Municipal Police Service comprising police officers of the rank of Superintendent, Assistant Superintendent, Inspector and Constables appointed by the Statutory Authorities Service Commission? Seen any such officers in your district lately? Perhaps burgesses would also be very interested in that part of the Act which makes reference to what are termed Miscellaneous functions, included in which

are: distribution of truck-borne water, construction and maintenance of drains, maintenance of water courses including cleaning of rivers, maintenance of State property such as police stations, health centres and other government buildings, disposal of garbage from public and private property, development and maintenance of sanitary landfills, chemical treatment for insect and vector control, abatement of public nuisances and dissemination of information for primary health care.

I referred to these functions of Councils – there are many others – just to give you a bird’s eye view, as it were, of the relationship of the Councils’ responsibilities to matters that impinge directly on the quality of life we experience in our communities. It is therefore reasonable to conclude that it would be quite unwise to dismiss Local Government Elections as not worth the time and effort as many seem to have done in the past, as reflected in the poor turn-out at Local-Government polls in comparison with, say, Parliamentary elections. If you are serious about the way your community is governed and managed then you must exercise your right to vote tomorrow.

Ladies and gentlemen, and this includes the many candidates who have been nominated to represent you, and those named by political parties on the **List of Aldermen**, I must make this appeal to your better sense and judgment as you once again exercise your civic duty through the ballot. Incidentally, the names of the Aldermen in the **List** of such persons presented to the Elections and Boundaries Commission will not be shown on any ballot paper. However, it should be noted that a Party submitting a **List of Aldermen** shall apply the Party’s symbol to its list. It is on the basis of an arithmetical procedure described and illustrated in the amended Municipal Corporations Act that the apportioning of Aldermen shall be determined, based on the election results.

Please indulge me, if you will, as I here and now seek your cooperation by asking you to have a care tomorrow, Election Day. Dress appropriately and in good taste. Do not be the source of influence or coercion to other electors. It is against the law and there are consequences. Care also about your standard of conduct particularly in the Polling Stations and its environs. I ask you to obey the instructions and the advice of Polling Day personnel at your Polling Station;

heed the instructions of the Police Officer on duty; remember that cellular phones should not be taken into the voting booth, and that the use of such devices, including the taking of photographs, is not allowed in the Polling Station; avoid assembling or “liming” in a Polling Station or within the precincts of a Polling Station after casting your vote.

My fellow citizens, in the same way that the majority of us are aware that there is a tremendous amount of remedial work still to be undertaken in scores of areas in several communities across the nation, so too, in the same way, concerned citizens are acutely aware of the tremendous amount of work still to be done in modernising our electoral laws, for example, in such areas as political party financing and political campaign financing. As concerns the latter particularly, to have effective legislation drafted, debated and enacted to eradicate or at least to control this seemingly unstoppable phenomenon. This is an important area in which every elector and every Civil Society group can play a part in getting the “powers that be” to get serious about beefing up the provisions of the Representation of the People Act or by other legislation so as to control, by plausible and practical means, the juggernaut of uncontrolled campaign financing. You may recall that His Excellency, Anthony Thomas Aquinas Carmona, President of our Republic referred to this matter when he addressed the Ceremonial Opening of the Fourth Session of the 10th Parliament on Friday 2nd August this year. Another area in which we seek your support is in respect of the enactment of legislation for the registration of political parties. Such legislation would eliminate the seemingly perennial problems surrounding the nomination of candidates. The Elections and Boundaries Commission can only do so much with the limited resources at its disposal. The rest is up to you.

To all persons who are going to the polls for the very first time, I exhort you to take your right to vote very seriously, since, in essence, for the first time you are giving another person the awesome responsibility in directing or delivering goods, services and amenities that will greatly affect the quality of life you experience after the polls close. Fear no one. To all electors, go to the polling station with your Poll Card. If you did not receive one in the mail, one will be prepared for you at the polling station.

My own wish is for a good turn-out of voters in every Electoral District. No one must arrogate unto himself or herself a posture designed to coerce another or to encourage or discourage another to vote or not to vote for a candidate or a Party contesting these elections.

Because current electioneering activities for the 4th November by-election straddle the period from midnight tonight until 6:00 p.m. tomorrow, a time when electioneering for tomorrow's election ceases, the Commission is making the appeal to radio, television and press companies to not carry political campaign ads during the day tomorrow, especially in order not to be an influence to the voting public. This is not an admonishment, just an appeal for level-headedness and restraint as far as broadcasting material of a political nature is concerned on the morrow.

So, without further ado, as Chairman of the Elections and Boundaries Commission, on behalf of all the other Members of the Commission, the Chief Election Officer and all members of staff of Registration Area Offices throughout all Electoral Districts, and all Polling Day Staff, I wish to assure the national population, and here I include Tobago as well, that the Commission has done all in its power, legally, to ensure a safe and secure environment in the exercise that is going to be upon us in a few short hours' time. You should all take pride in the fact that, come tomorrow, you embark on your journey to your assigned polling stations, where you shall cast your vote in October 2013's Local Government Election. Let each one proceed peacefully and proudly to the task at hand. Eschew confrontation and violence. Vote wisely and well!

May God bless our nation and each and every one of you and grant us peace now, tomorrow and always.

Good night.

14th October, 2013