



ADDRESS BY

THE HONOURABLE CAMILLE ROBINSON-REGIS

Minister of Planning and Development

Address at the EMA's 2018 Schools' Green Leaf Awards

June 5th, 2018

It is a great pleasure to be here with you this morning as we join with the rest of the world in celebrating World Environment Day 2018, and I thank you for your very enthusiastic welcome. This pleasure is doubled this morning as we also grasp the opportunity to celebrate the achievements of all of you young people, whose hard work and dedication remain etched in the many submissions being recognized with Green Leaf Awards.

In addition to your accomplishments, the EMA is also celebrating its twenty-third (23rd) birthday today. But I think in addition to the birthday, we can boast that the EMA was actually established by a unanimous vote of parliament. So the EMA made history by being one of the few things ALL sides of our Parliament could have agree upon! The only other decision in recent times that received unanimous support from both sides of the Parliament, was the decision to appoint Her Excellency Paula Mae

Weekes as this country's sixth and first female President, and today, all of us extend to her our sincerest congratulations.

The theme for this year's World Environment Day celebrations is "Beat Plastic Pollution", and I am certain that many of you gathered here today would have seen heaps of plastic trash piled up at our schools, at the malls you frequent, and unfortunately, even at our homes, where the habits of reducing, reusing, and recycling are not yet entirely ingrained in us.

I am sure you have gone to the various beaches around the country and seen mounds of plastic, either thrown around indiscriminately, or waiting to be collected. It is a scene repeated throughout the country, and becomes even worse especially after long weekends like we have just had. Every year tonnes of garbage are extracted from our beaches by civic minded persons who engage in beach clean-ups, and while it is indeed a wonderful gesture, surely we must be willing to change our attitudes, demonstrate that we are beyond living in a throw-away culture, move instead to reduce our waste, and in so doing grow our communities.

I have noted, with great concern, the public outcry against a particular supermarket chain's decision to discontinue providing free plastic bags to their customers and instead charge a penalty for those who still wish to use them. Today, I wish to

commend them, as well as all the Tobago businesses who have decided to go one step further and make today a “No Styrofoam Day”. Initiatives such as these, though small steps, when sustained, will take us slowly but surely along the road to a zero waste lifestyle.

Additionally, through the work you have done that have earned you these Green Leaf Awards, I remain confident that the children of this generation could teach us the older ones, how to beat plastic pollution. Surely, it must be a tragedy that more than eight million tonnes of plastic waste end up in the world’s oceans. Just yesterday on the news, there was a report of a whale dying because it had ingested 17 plastic bags, and there are several other stories like that.

You will be forgiven, I assure you, if you ask, what is the Government’s response to all of this. The simple answer is “the EMA.” Created 23 years ago, the Environmental Management Authority is the Government agency charged with managing the country’s lived environment. It is part of a compendium of other state agencies, namely the Solid Waste Management Company Limited (SWMCOL), the Community Environmental Protection and Enhancement Programme (CEPEP), and the Regional Corporations, all of whom are charged with the responsibility of either

enforcing the laws governing the protection of the environment or ensuring that the environment is kept clean.

Today, as Minister with responsibility for the EMA, I wish to extend my sincerest congratulations to the Board headed by Chairman Nadra Nathan-Gyan, and the Management headed by Hayden Romano, for the excellent work they have been doing. I know that even now as we gather here to celebrate, there are countless members of the EMA staff either out on the field or in the office, working towards protecting the environment for all of us.

The EMA is currently taking the lead in receiving comments from the public about designating the Scarlet Ibis, one of our National Birds, an Environmentally Sensitive Species. This means that anyone who decides to capture, kill or disturb the habitat of one of our national birds, once charged, will have to pay a hefty fine of \$100,000.00 and spend two years in jail.

As well as the Scarlet Ibis, we can all be proud of the fact that our input has allowed the declaration of Nariva Wetlands, the Matura Forest Reserve and Aripo Savannas as Environmentally Sensitive Areas. Similarly, the five (5) species of Turtle

including the endangered leatherbacks, the White-tailed Sabre-wing Humming Bird, the Golden Tree Frog, the Manatee and the Pawi, are now all Environmentally Sensitive Species.

The Tobago Main Ridge Forest Reserve has also been declared a World Heritage Site affording it all the protections that come with such a designation.

Additionally, very soon, Trinidad and Tobago will have a new National Environmental Policy (NEP), arrived at with input from many of the stakeholders and individuals gathered here today. The new policy acknowledges that, as a country, we are not moving at the pace that is required to adequately deal with the level of environmental degradation clearly evident around us. The new policy therefore makes a number of recommendations to manage our energy resources, manage pollution, and empower communities to protect their environment. I am pleased to report that by the time we gather for the next World Environmental Day, the new National Environmental Policy would have been long approved.

I am also pleased to announce that the Waste Rules are currently being reviewed by my Ministry and will soon be shared with the national community for your opinion. We anticipate as well that if all goes as planned, by World Environment Day 2019,

Trinidad and Tobago will also have new rules which will modernize our waste disposal habits.

Ladies and gentlemen, students, as I close, I think the point is well worth emphasizing that the work of protecting our national environment is not only the EMA's responsibility, but that of every single civic-minded citizen of this great Republic. This is our country. It belongs to you as much as it belongs to the President, and to me and my children. It is a responsibility from which we cannot shirk.

I offer my sincerest congratulations as well to all of you who were successful in receiving Green Leaf Awards today. Your hard work has certainly paid off. And to those who did not win, the task ahead is to make every day an Environmental Day. If we each decide to do something small every day, then certainly the end result will be a huge victory for the environment, and a cleaner, greener, more serene place for all of us who call this little rock, home.

I thank you all for the courtesy of your attention, and pray God's richest blessings upon our nation.