



Address by Senator the Honourable Kevin Ramnarine

Minister of Energy and Energy Affairs

on the occasion of the

Official Opening Ceremony of the

**FORTY-FIRST SPECIAL MEETING OF THE COUNCIL FOR
TRADE AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT (COTED) (ENERGY)**

Friday 01 March, 2013

Hyatt Regency

Good morning, on behalf of Prime Minister the Honourable Kamla Persad-Bissessar and the Government welcome to Trinidad and Tobago.

Almost forty years ago on the 4th of July 1973, Trinidad and Tobago, Barbados, Jamaica and Guyana signed the Treaty of Chaguaramas. By some coincidence that was Independence Day for the United States. The treaty came into force on August 1st 1973 and again by coincidence this day is Emancipation Day. Quite coincidentally and maybe through providence, on the 40th anniversary of the signing of the Treaty of Chaguaramas, Prime Minister Kamla Persad-Bissessar will assume the Chairmanship of CARICOM.

The world was a different place 40 years ago. In a few months after the signing of the Treaty of Chaguaramas, oil prices would quadruple as a consequence of the Yom Kippur war and that would usher Trinidad and Tobago into a period we now call “the oil boom”. This was also the era before globalization, and the ICT revolution.

A lot has changed since 1973. Some things have, however, stayed the same - the University of the West Indies and the West Indies cricket team. Incidentally in a few days we inaugurate the fifth President of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago who will be the first President of this country to have graduated from the University of the West Indies.

The Treaty of Chaguaramas itself is very instructive as it calls on us to optimize the utilization of human and natural resources by the exercise of permanent sovereignty over these resources. Have we in 40 years done this? The might be “yes” but to a limited extent. Oil from Trinidad and Tobago’s refineries has sustained the Caribbean for decades. In fact 20% of the output of our Petrotrin refinery goes to the regional market. In 2003, Venezuela introduced Petro Caribe which has also added to regional energy security.

To date all CARICOM countries continue to purchase from Petrotrin in order to guarantee security of supply. In fact the volumes supplied to the Eastern Caribbean CARICOM market accounts for 55% of their demand. Apart from Petrotrin, Phoenix Park Gas Processors Limited supplies countries in the region with LPG which is removed from natural gas.

On a more recent note, there is an emerging market in the Caribbean for natural gas. Already two companies, Centrica and Gasfin are in different states of preparation for a CNG export project and small scale LNG export project.

The Centrica project aims to supply mainly the Puerto Rican market while the Gasfin project is being geared towards the French department. In Jamaica, successive Government's have grappled with LNG as a solution to that country's high cost of electricity. To date the Jamaican LNG project is yet to materialize.

Thirteen years ago when CARICOM Energy Ministers last met in Port of Spain they resolved to consider a natural gas arrangement as a solution to what was then seen as high oil prices of \$28.50 which had increased from \$17.97 in 1999. The world has certainly changed. This morning Brent North Sea Crude was \$111. How times have changed. I believe that has multiplied the urgency of the year 2000.

When it comes to energy, Trinidad and Tobago sees itself in a leadership role in the CARICOM. Ours is one of the most advanced energy sectors in the world. We are now headed to look for oil and gas in deep waters (>1000 meters).

This may prove up a whole new oil and gas province and guarantee the prosperity of Trinidad and Tobago into the next generation. The recent award of four blocks to BHP Billiton, the sale of Repsol's LNG assets to Shell and the Mitsubishi methanol to DME project are all signals that confidence is at an all-time high in this country's energy sector.

While we always seek to protect and enhance our position at home we have set in place an aggressive vision for expansion into the region and into Africa. The vehicle for this expansion has thus far been the NGC, and its subsidiary the NEC.

The NGC is in talks with Costa Rica and Jamaica with regard to the establishment of re-gasification terminal infrastructure. I remain convinced that natural gas as LNG is the best fit for the Jamaican economy and we are happy with the open minded approach adopted by Minister Phillip Paulwell.

Later this morning, I will sign an MOC with Minister Robert Persaud, Minister of Natural Resources and the Environment of Cooperative Republic of Guyana. This will allow us to collaborate on a Government to Government basis and this will facilitate Trinidad and Tobago assisting Guyana in its search for oil and natural gas. Last year a similar MOC was signed with the Grenadian Government.

We believe that our Block 21 to our North Coast and the adjoining Grenadian acreage could be explored jointly by Trinidad and Tobago and Grenada. If that becomes a reality, it would be a historic event in the move towards economic cooperation.

Renewable Energy features heavily on the agenda of this meeting. I understand that in the technical sessions that preceded this meeting, targets were discussed and set with regard to geothermal, solar and wind resources. The CSERMS was intensively discussed in an attempt to bring together regional policies in line with the agreed goals.

In closing, I have been told that this is already shaping up to be one of the most successful COTED meetings measured by attendance. I believe it shows our commitment to navigating energy related issues in what are uncertain times. I thank the CARICOM Secretariat and my Permanent Secretary, Vishnu Dhanpaul and his team for their efforts to put this event together and I look forward to a successful 41st Special Meeting of COTED.