

**Fourth World Conference of Speakers of Parliament
General Debate: Placing democracy at the service of peace and sustainable
development, building the world the people want**

**Hon. Wade Mark, MP, Speaker of the House of Representatives, Parliament of
Trinidad and Tobago
Tuesday September 1, 2015**

Honourable Chairman
Distinguished Speakers
Esteemed President and Secretary General of the Inter-Parliamentary Union
Ladies and Gentlemen
Brothers and Sisters
All

It is my pleasure to contribute to the general debate and bring remarks from the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago. May I take this opportunity from the outset to warmly congratulate the Inter-Parliamentary Union on its excellent relations with the United Nations as that organization celebrates its 70th anniversary.

As the seat of democracy, a Parliament symbolizes the sovereign will of the people. Being the supreme legislative body, the Parliament occupies the centre-stage of activities at any given time. Elected and nominated Parliamentarians occupy Parliamentary chambers to give shape to national policies and programmes.

Senior civil servants frequent the Parliament building, media personnel fill the media gallery and corridors of Parliaments for the latest news, people visit the Parliament building to meet their representatives and to witness the public activities of Parliament all in the interest of promoting better governance.

Parliament makes a vital contribution to democracy at many levels. Within the institutions of government, it is the representative body through which the will of the people finds expression, in which their diversity is manifested, and in which the differences between them are debated and negotiated. At its best, Parliament embodies the distinctive and rich democratic traditions of discussion and compromise, as the means through which the public interest is realised.

I would like to posit three (3) areas for the Conference's consideration from the perspective of the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago.

Firstly, I believe that a Parliament's strategic plan should include initiatives to support and encourage youth participation and make the institution more open and accessible to young people and youth organizations. These initiatives should encourage them to turn away from violence and in the process reconnect the growing disconnect between the politics and the people, especially young people. Hosting of open days, school visits, invitations to attend

committee hearings and plenary sessions as well as the hosting of National Youth Parliaments are positive ways to encourage this re-engagement.

The Strategic Plan of the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago 2013-2018, includes proposals for a weekly “constituency day” and the creation of a constituency development programme to enhance Parliament’s representative role. This programme will enable MPs to decide on the realization of specific development projects through resources administered by an Agency at the executive level.

Secondly, I believe Parliaments require specific legislation and an oversight committee to protect the most vulnerable and marginalized groups. Section 4 of the Constitution of Trinidad and Tobago, recognizes the fundamental human rights and freedoms of all citizens.

In our revised Standing Orders, a Committee on Human Rights, Equality and Diversity was established with a mandate among other things to consider:

- *“Government compliance with national and international human rights instruments to which Trinidad and Tobago is a party; and*
- *the promotion of measures designed to enhance the equalisation of opportunities and improvement in the quality of life and status of all peoples including marginalised groups on the basis of gender, age (elderly, youth, children) disability and the creation of an inclusive and more equitable society through greater social justice and sustainable human development within Trinidad and Tobago.”*

Distinguished colleagues, I believe that Parliaments need to provide opportunities for the publication and debate of policies and legislation related to the fundamental principles of sustainable development. Trinidad and Tobago’s strategy for sustainable development is outlined in the Medium Term Policy Framework which focuses on poverty eradication, human development, community development, environmentally and ecologically sensitive practices.

In conclusion, the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago is committed to strengthening democratic structures and recognises that much more work is needed. To facilitate this process, the Parliament recognises that collaboration at all levels of society is a vital necessity.

We as Speakers at this Fourth World Conference of Speakers of Parliament continue to pledge our commitment to the promotion, maintenance and placement of democracy at the service of humanity in its relentless quest for peace and sustainable development and the building of a world that the people truly want and not one others believe that they desire.

I thank you for your kind attention.