



The Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago

MINISTRY OF EDUCATION

**OPENING CEREMONY OF THE 13th INTERNATIONAL
CONFERENCE OF GIRLS' BRIGADE**

(VIRTUAL EVENT)

Message By

Dr. the Honourable Nyan Gadsby-Dolly

29th January, 2022

SALUTATIONS:

- Ms. Priscilla Penny, International President, The Girl's Brigade
- Quidnell Ferguson, Chair Caribbean and America Chair,
International Vice President Girls' Brigade
- Members of the President's Committee
- Executive and Members
- Other distinguished guests

Introduction

Let me start my brief time with you with a quote from Oprah Winfrey, “The great courageous act that we must all do, is to have the courage to step out of our history and past so that we can live our dreams.” I ask that you hold these words for now and I will get back to them shortly.

I was indeed very pleased to receive an invitation to address you today at the 13th International Conference of Girls’ Brigade. While much has changed in the world, the opportunity to share a few moments at events such as these is a reminder of the stability that organizations such as the Girl’s Brigade bring and that keeps us grounded. As we adapt to life in a pandemic, we first had to adopt measures to survive. Now, we are seeking innovating strategies to thrive and cautiously finding new ways to ‘live’ and to give our lives meaning.

Today, let us not overlook the fact that of current circumstances mean that we are in this virtual space to commemorate an organization that is 129 years old. The Girls’ Brigade has had a long history of weathering other challenges and is still standing and doing so with its feet firmly planted on the ground. It is indeed heartening to see the continued resilience of its leadership and membership, demonstrated by their ability to overcome the challenges posed and power ahead

with the staging of this conference and with the work of this honourable organization.

It is quite fitting that the theme of this event is **Rise in Strength**. In the book of Psalm, chapter 145, verse 14, the Lord reminds us that He not only upholds all that fall, but He raises up all those that have been trodden upon. Yes, times have been hard but it will only strengthen your resolve. And even more importantly for the sustainability of organizations like the Girl's Brigade is the dedication to service, the dedication that each of its members embodies

Importance of Education

According to a World Health Organization (WHO) report entitled **Schooling During COVID-19**, in order to support children's overall well-being, the continuity of education needs to be a top priority. Where disruptions to school systems occurred, negative impacts on the mental health of children were observed.¹

Further to that, in March 2021, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) reported that as a result of disruptions to education brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic, that approximately 11 million girls may not return to school. Girls aged 12-17 were identified as being at a significantly

¹ <https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/342075/WHO-EURO-2021-2151-41906-59077-eng.pdf>

higher risk of dropping out of school in low and lower-income countries when compared with their male counterparts.²

Even before the advent of the pandemic, research provides important information that points to girls being less likely to receive a formal education than boys. A UNICEF report shows that since the Beijing Platform for Action was adopted in 1995, there was an increase in the number of girls accessing formal schooling at the primary education level, with more than two-thirds of countries reaching gender parity. However, while this is good news, in countries that have not reached parity, girls are still less likely to be formally educated than boys.

In Trinidad and Tobago, we have seen the pandemic negatively affect our children's education, some much more than others. To address this, the Ministry of Education (MoE) is conducting ongoing surveys and analysis into the impact of learning loss due to both the absence and the new teaching pedagogies that have had to be instituted of the last two years or so. Our education system is going through its own transformation, possibly never to return to what we knew before. For me and many in the Ministry of Education, this is an opportunity; an opportunity to improve, empower and enrich for the better.

Your vision is "Girls' lives transformed: God's World enriched" and to get there your organization needs to continue to be a "relational,

² <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000379270>

relevant and responsive worldwide movement that is good news for girls and women.” You want girls to develop and “use their gifts and skills and to discover, embrace and live life to the full” , I truly applaud your passion and what you are striving to achieve and as you launch into the discussions for this your 13th International Conference , I am sure your focus will be on resilience and how you make this purpose into a programme under this new paradigm.

Like many organizations across every sector, not only is resilience critical but partnerships. We have learnt this and the Ministry and it has served us well to ensure that everyone in the village became involved in getting our children what they needed. Strength, regardless of sector, does not come from doing it alone, but from shared vision. The shared vision saw over 22 000 girls and boys receiving devices over the last two years through the Adopt-s School Programme. Business, Faith and Civil society shared the vision that they were part of the village that needed to take care of our nation’s children. In the same vein I share with you that changing times and changing circumstances call for changes in strategy. Your vision should never waiver, but your strategies must be adaptable to changing circumstances. They must leverage your strengths, take your weaknesses into consideration, be cognizant of your threats and take full advantage of your opportunities.

I heard a radio announcer describe this year as twenty-twenty-new., and indeed it is. The last two years seem to have blurred into one and as we close the first month of the new year, we must remember how far we have come. The Girls' Brigade has journeyed 129 years; its story has transformed thousands of lives and as you "rise in strength" so will the impact of your work.

As part of the United Nations' (UN) Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), countries worldwide, including ours, have pledged to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all by the year 2030. In keeping with SDG 4, the Ministry of Education aspires to achieve equitable and quality education and access to learning environments that are safe, and accessible for all. To that end, the Ministry of Education has introduced new policies and practices to improve education planning and delivery and in fact over the next of couple weeks we will be engaging the national population in a consultation on the Education Policy for the period 2022-2022.

Conclusion

On the January 17, the United States and many across the world celebrated Martin Luther King Day, a man whose legacy of love, commitment and service lives on through the work of many, decades after his death. I want to share a quote from Dr. Martin Luther King

Jr. with you...."Use me God, Show me how to take who I am, who I want to be, and what I can do , and use it for a purpose greater than myself." As you sit in your personal space, I ask that you repeat this affirmation as you prepare to be of service to others. And as I close, invoke the words of Ms Widfrey that I shared earlier. I challenge you to be courageous, without forgetting the last 129 years, step out of your history, forge ahead, make the changes you need to take your organization forward and live your dreams. I wish you continued strength in your service to the girls of the world.

Thank you, and may God bless you all.