

Transcript - Prime Minister Rowley's remarks at the Swearing-In of the Diego Martin Regional Corporation (2016)

Madam Chairman, Chairman of the Diego Martin Corporation, Councillor Susan Hong, outgoing Chairman, Councillor Kathy Christopher, other Councillors, my Cabinet colleagues; Minister of Finance, Mr Colm Imbert, Minister of Local Government and Rural Development, Senator Kazim Hosein, members of the public service, Permanent Secretaries, members of the community of Diego Martin, members of the Cadet Force, members of the protective services, members of the media. I am very happy I didn't see on the program, my name and feature address because I would have had to decline.

I'm sure you're having difficulty hearing me I must apologise for my voice which is just returning after a vacation somewhere. In fact last couple days I didn't have a voice so I'm satisfied that today I can say a few words of greetings to this new Executive of the Diego Martin district.

I want to congratulate all of you particularly the returning Councillors for offering yourselves again and for being elected to serve another term in the Corporation. I would like to specially congratulate the new Councillors for offering yourselves for public service and for being successful, those of you who are elected councillors and for those of you who are aldermen.

Public service is not easy, but as the outgoing Chairman said, if you are dedicated to public service, you would find public service quite rewarding because you are having an involvement in the improvement and the quality of the life not only of your family but of your entire community and the Diego Martin community remains one of the most attractive communities in Trinidad and Tobago.

This community is very diverse. It has some of the best locations in the country, it has some of the best real estate but it does have some of the challenges that you will find elsewhere in the country but by and large virtually anybody from anywhere else in the country would feel satisfied to have the opportunity to live in Diego Martin. Your job as Executive of the corporation is to ensure that the quality of life in Diego Martin and by Diego Martin I mean the entire Corporation within the valleys of the east, central and West, that the quality of life of all the Burgesses whoever they might be, wherever they might be enjoy an improvement in that quality as a result of your stewardship.

It is not just a question of spending more money because as I always say when I speak about public monies and public responsibility is that it is not always about how much you spend it's about what you do with it. At this time in the history of Diego Martin and the history of Trinidad, we having come out of a Local Election where the issue in the campaign is the government's commitment to local government reform, it will take a Corporation like Diego Martin to take up the challenges involved in Local Government Reform and demonstrate that Local Government Reform can work and can work to the benefit of all the burgesses.

You are better organised, your community is better organised and I presume that the quality of your infrastructure makes it relatively easy to let the offerings of Local Government Reform be practised in Diego Martin in such a way that you can be the major beneficiary of some aspects of that reform. For example, one of the major offerings of Local Government Reform Program that is going to be implemented, make no mistake about it, we are setting about to bring about these changes and one of the main noticeable changes that you will see is that you as an executive would be required to collect and keep within your own coffers, the land and building taxes of the Diego Martin area. That being so, it automatically means that you will be much better off than most other Corporations because of the layout and the geography and the physical infrastructure. You will be able to very easily identify these units and to operate a relatively simple program in ensuring that your Burgesses make their contribution by paying their taxes and you collect it on time and then you set about to use it for the benefit, for which the taxes have been levied.

I want to say to you that this period of your service will also be another exciting period for the simple reason that, I can't remember the year but I was there, I was in a PNM government and I was invited by the Minister of Local Government, my friend Ken Valley to a function outside West Mall and when I got there, there was a huge tent and there were people sitting on white chairs and there was music and there was all kinds of things because it was the turning of the sod for the Diego Martin Corporation headquarters. That had to be either 2006 or 2007, but the long and short of it is that I saw the drawing, I didn't see the engineering drawing, I saw the architect's drawings of the building, quite an impressive building but I never saw the building built. The Minister of Finance is here and I can tell you that at the level of the Cabinet we have already taken a decision that the next two head offices to be built will be Penal and Diego Martin.

So in the next few weeks you will see tenders being invited for the head offices of Penal and fir Diego Martin and I trust that that will be the beginning of a construction that will come to pass. So I expect that the next time we are swearing in a Council that it will be in the Corporation's chambers.

I also want to tell you that we have now come out of a Local Government Election which we won because we held out to the people of Trinidad that there are certain developments to come and while we didn't have a lot of public meetings in Diego Martin, there was one in Siparia where I spoke on the expectation of the elevation of the status of the township of Siparia and I also meant Diego Martin where is my expectation that before the end of your term that Diego Martin will rise to the status of borough and similarly we expect that that will happen in Siparia because it is the expectation that as we move towards these Local Government Reform proceedings that one of the ways of getting the best of them is to develop the organisations of the townships of the country to make the units more manageable and to let them benefit more from what is going to come in the Local Government Reform program.

So you as managers of the local corporation here, you are required more to be prepared for that development and maybe in 18 months or so we should be in a position to elevate Diego Martin to the status of borough. That's going to come as soon as you get your proper location. I think we have been very patient in Diego Martin to have run this Corporation out of two old houses for a while and now that the time has come to get a proper corporate headquarters in a very good location, the Minister of Finance has confirmed that the funds will be available for the construction of these two locations.

So you have an incentive to do well, I wish you well and I want to congratulate all of you for offering yourselves and to congratulate Diego Martin for being the only Corporation run by women. It just turned out that way but after all we are in the West and the West is the best.

I heard from the chairman mentioning the word 'clique', I don't want to hear that word again, you are a team, you are to support each other, you have duties, not all of you have the same skills and talent but if all of you put your head together you will move and remove mountains in Diego Martin. You are a team, we have great expectations of you and let us make full use of the experience in the Council, of the youth of the council, of the men in the Council, of the women in the Council because we believe we live in the best part of the country and it falls to us to ensure that we give the youngsters who are coming up the best opportunity to say that Diego Martin is the best part of Trinidad and Tobago.

Thank you very much for serving and I wish you all a very successful term