



TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO

PERMANENT MISSION OF TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO TO THE UNITED NATIONS
122 East 42nd Street, 39th Floor • New York, N.Y. 10168 • Tel.: (212) 697-7620 • Fax: (212) 682-3580

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

STATEMENT

BY

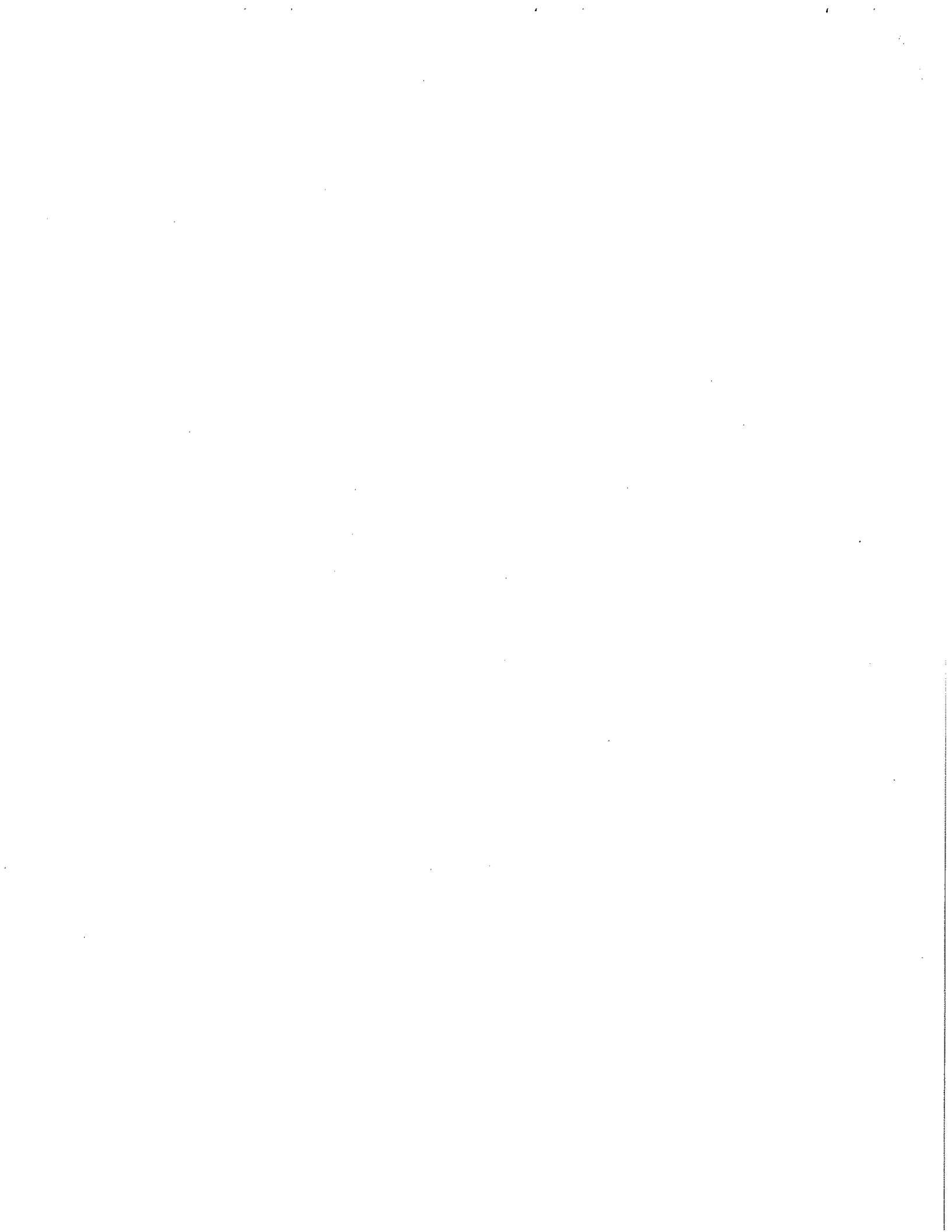
HIS EXCELLENCY MR. RODNEY CHARLES
AMBASSADOR/PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE

OF
THE REPUBLIC OF TRINIDAD
AND TOBAGO
TO THE UNITED NATIONS, NEW YORK

AT THE

HIGH-LEVEL MEETING OF THE UNITED NATIONS
GENERAL ASSEMBLY TO COMMEMORATE THE
TENTH ANNIVERSARY OF THE ADOPTION OF THE
DURBAN DECLARATION AND
PROGRAMME OF ACTION

UNITED NATIONS, NEW YORK,
September 22, 2011



Mr. Chairman

I am deeply honoured to participate in this meeting to commemorate the tenth anniversary of the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action ("the Declaration").

Trinidad and Tobago has endeavored to implement fully the spirit and intent of this landmark Declaration, which in fact, mirrors some of the very tenets enshrined in our national constitution and other relevant laws.

The convening of this meeting is most timely. It occurs in the same year that the General Assembly has proclaimed as the International Year for People of African Descent. Member States must be commended for marking this occasion with appropriate activities to honour all peoples of African descent who have suffered the indignities of chattel slavery and other forms of discrimination. These activities represent tangible measures to honour the commitments of universal equality, justice and dignity, as mandated under the Declaration.

The Government of Trinidad and Tobago has used the opportunity afforded by this year's observance of the International Year for People of African Descent to re-energize its efforts to support initiatives that tackle all forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance that affect people of African descent, who form a significant part of our population. We are grateful for their contribution to national development in all spheres of activity whether economic, social, cultural or otherwise. At the same time, we are aware that the struggles for freedom of those who were victims of the slave trade and slavery must forever serve as a reminder that intolerance only breathes hatred and results in deprivation and suffering.

In recognition of the International Year for People of African Descent, the Government of Trinidad and Tobago contributed significant financial and other resources to events in celebration of Emancipation Day, a holiday which was first commemorated in 1985 when Trinidad and Tobago became the first country to establish a public holiday in recognition of the abolition of slavery.

Mr. Chairman

As a plural society, with an estimated population of 1.3 million people of many races, Trinidad and Tobago has been steadfast in its determination to build a nation that draws strength from its ethnic and cultural diversity. We have developed a model of racial tolerance and respect which can be emulated by other countries engulfed in conflicts due to racism, xenophobia and other forms of discrimination and intolerance.

We embrace our diversity as a people and have put in place measures aimed at cementing the bonds which exist between us. We have sought to use education and culture as tools to promote a better understanding of our similarities and differences as we continue to build a nation where every creed and race finds an equal place. Accordingly, national holidays are observed to celebrate major religious and other festivals. These include Christmas, Good Friday, Easter, Corpus Christi, Divali and Eid-ul-Fitr, as well as Spiritual Baptist Liberation Day, which commemorates the repeal of colonial laws which prohibited devotees of this faith from practicing the religion of their choice.

Additionally, May 30 is proclaimed as a public holiday in observance of the arrival and contribution to national life of people of East Indian descent who replaced African slaves as the labourers on the plantations after the abolition of slavery.

Other festivals are also observed such as the Santa Rosa Carib Festival which pays tribute to our indigenous population, as well as Double Ten Day, in honour of our local Chinese population.

Mr. Chairman

We are conscious of the need to protect the fundamental rights and freedoms of all segments of our population through the force of law. Our supreme law, the Constitution of Trinidad and Tobago guarantees each citizen, fundamental rights and freedoms, as contained in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Other laws such as the Equal Opportunity Act are instruments to prohibit discrimination in employment, education, housing and the provision of goods and services, regardless of ethnicity, religious affiliation, gender, and origin or disability status. These human rights provisions are reinforced through our obligations under different international human rights treaties to which we are party. These include: The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination; the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights; and, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.

As a progressive country, we have played our part on the international plane to defend and promote the inalienable human rights of peoples globally. For example, prior to the adoption of the Durban Declaration, Trinidad and Tobago played an active role in the international campaign to bring an end to the apartheid system and adhered strictly to the political, economic, military and sporting sanctions imposed by the United Nations and the Commonwealth against South Africa in the 1960's and 1970's. In addition, successive Trinidad and Tobago Permanent Representatives to the United Nations, in their capacity as Vice Chair of the United Nations Special Committee against Apartheid, worked closely for decades with representatives of the African National Congress, the Pan African Congress of Azania and others, in the anti-apartheid struggles. Trinidad and Tobago nationals also participated as observers during the historic general elections of 1994 in South Africa.

Mr. Chairman, at the multilateral level, Trinidad and Tobago has actively supported respect and understanding initiatives employed under the aegis of both the Commonwealth and the United Nations. As a practical demonstration of our commitment to promote tolerance and stamp out discrimination in all its manifestations, the Government of Trinidad and Tobago made a financial contribution towards the Commonwealth Secretariat's Respect and Understanding Project Fund.

Mr. President, in closing, I wish to reiterate our commitment to the elimination of all forms of discrimination and to underscore the support of the Government of Trinidad and Tobago for the Durban Declaration and the Plan of Action.

I thank you.