

SPEECH BY H.M. THE KING
TO THE PARLIAMENT OF TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO

Port-of-Spain 16 February 2009

His Excellency the President of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago
The Honourable President of the Senate,
The Honourable Speaker of the House of Representatives, Honourable
Senators,
Honourable Members of the House of Representatives,

Thank you for your very kind words and warm welcome, which reflect a special interest to develop our bilateral relations.

I am especially grateful for the honour of being able to address the Parliament of the Republic and, through its legitimate representatives, the friendly people of Trinidad and Tobago.

Our presence today in Port-of-Spain is a moment that the Queen and I have long been waiting for. Our two countries are linked by deep-rooted historical ties.

In fact, many families, towns and geographical features in Trinidad and Tobago have Spanish names.

From Christopher Columbus, whose caravels are present in the coat of arms of this Republic, and whose statue dominates one of the squares of this beautiful capital, to José Maria Chacón, the last Governor of the island of Trinidad, our destinies were joined for three centuries.

Personalities arising from the rich ethnic variety of the country's history, such as Henry Alcazar, Captain Cipriani, Uriah Butler, Adrian Cola Rienzi, Albert Gomes and, above all, Doctor Eric Williams, helped your people to achieve its democratic maturity and independence.

Today, Trinidad and Tobago is a dynamic nation, with one of the highest per capita incomes in this hemisphere, enjoying an important economy.

Trinidad and Tobago faces the present worldwide economic and financial crisis from a solid position as regards its currency reserves and external debt, and has a rate of inflation within reasonable limits.

The century we are living in, characterized by interdependence and the need for global responses, increasingly demands multilateral diplomacy of which Trinidad and Tobago has been an active defender.

Excellent proof of this is provided by the fact that, in a few months, your country will host the Fifth Summit of the Americas and, in November 2009, the Twentieth Commonwealth Summit.

We wish you great success in the organization of these major events, which will bare international attention on Trinidad and Tobago.

We also trust that the recent signing, together with the Dominican Republic, in the framework of CARICOM, of the first Economic Partnership Agreement with the European Union, will benefit the entire region.

Trinidad and Tobago has worked with intelligence and resolution to achieve this Partnership Agreement, which will contribute to the progress and welfare of the Trinidadian people.

The regional integration process represented by CARICOM, began in 1973, just a few kilometres from this capital, in Chaguaramas. Thus, it is no coincidence that the CARICOM-Spain Summit was held here, in Port-of-Spain, in 1999.

Since then, there have been four such Summits, the most recent of which took place last July, reinforcing a relationship that has consolidated and expanded our collaboration.

Spain has been working for almost ten years, promoting more effective cooperation with the member countries of this regional Organization, in the political, economic and cultural spheres, as well as in the context of the United Nations and in development aid.

In this respect, let me refer to Haiti, a brother Caribbean country, which Trinidad and Tobago has been assisting in an exemplary way, and to whose development both of our countries are fully committed.

As a country which has made the fight against poverty a guiding principle of its foreign policy, and a fundamental part of its Development Aid, Spain is grateful to Trinidad and Tobago for its participation in the Conference on Food Security and Rural Development in Haiti, which was held last July in Madrid.

Honourable Senators,

Honourable Members of the House of Representatives,

For historical, geographic and economic reasons, Trinidad and Tobago is the country most open to Latin America in the English-speaking Caribbean, and we are aware of its wish to advance in this direction.

This underlies your Government's initiative to actively promote the teaching of the Spanish language, which never disappeared completely from this beloved land. We will back that initiative, within the limits of our possibilities.

In this regard, we also welcome the establishment of the Association of Caribbean States in Port-of-Spain. The ACS, brings together all the States in the Caribbean, whether Spanish, English, French or Dutch speaking.

Spain, as an Observer Country of the ACS, is ready to support it. We trust that Trinidad and Tobago, which provides the headquarters for this Organization, will continue supporting the ACS so that it may develop effectively for the benefit of the entire region.

It is now forty years since our two States established diplomatic relations. This anniversary coincides with the opening of a Spanish resident Embassy in Port-of-Spain, intended to expand our bilateral relations in the future.

Our warm relations have become even closer in recent years, due to your country's stability and legal security. In this framework, significant investments have led to Trinidad and Tobago becoming Spain's fifth largest supplier of natural gas.

However, the economic and trading relations between our two countries need to be rebalanced, in the awareness that Trinidad and Tobago seeks to diversify its economy.

We realise that Trinidad and Tobago wishes to adapt its infrastructure to the current levels of income enjoyed by its population. Spanish companies in this sector have long experience and proven reliability around the world. It is well known that Spain now has one of the most modern transport networks in Europe.

And the same excellence can be recognized in other sectors, in which Spanish companies have shown themselves to be highly skilled, respected and professional - and here, I am referring, particularly, to the tourism industry.

Another positive step towards creating a favourable climate for these possible investments is the Double Taxation Agreement that our Foreign Ministers will sign tomorrow.

Our scope of collaboration also spans other areas.

In this respect, we are grateful for your invitation to the Inaugural Technical Meeting of Senior Military Officers, held in Port-of-Spain last June, a token of growing confidence in Spain's interest for this region.

Honourable President of the Senate,
Honourable Speaker of the House of Representatives,
Honourable Senators,
Honourable Members of the House of Representatives,

Today, I have referred to our shared past, and I have spoken of the realities and challenges of the present, as well as of the possibilities opening up for our bilateral relations in the future.

May I conclude by expressing my hope and wish that we all maintain in our hearts the memory of this important reencounter between Trinidad and Tobago and Spain, so that it may become a symbol, not just of the affection and friendship that unite our two Nations, but also of the great possibilities for cooperation that open up before us.

Thank you very much.