

MINISTRY OF TOURISM

Lions 36th Annual Multiple District Convention

Wednesday 18 May 2016 at Queens Hall, at 7:00PM

Feature Address and declare the convention open

I am honoured this evening and particularly delighted to address you distinguished Lions, ladies and gentlemen at this 36th Multiple District 60 Convention of the International Association of Lions Clubs.

My aunt, who is like a mother to me, is a Lion. So I grew up in and around this extraordinary organization and I am well aware of your selfless service and the magnitude of your works. Tonight I wish to endorse your efforts to give hope to the less privileged and help to those who really need it.

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen, for decades you have taken an active interest in the civic, cultural, social and moral welfare of your communities, with a simple yet powerful platform that is clearly stated by your motto: We Serve.

You do not qualify it. You do not justify it.

You state simply: We Serve.

Albert Schweitzer (1875-1965) *German theologian, philosopher, and physician.*

There is no higher religion than human service. To work for the common good is the greatest creed."

The Lion exemplifies this. The Lion Knows that she is not merely to make a living, but to enable the world to live more amply, with greater vision, with a finer spirit of hope and achievement.

Our service spans an expansive spectrum. From humanitarian projects, to intercultural activities, and educational programs... all designed to improve the quality of life of those who are in need of such an intervention.

It is important to note that Lions Clubs throughout the region are helping to take some of the heavy load of community service and social assistance off the public authorities by undertaking to assist the underprivileged and the vulnerable in our society. A lion in a community is just as useful and works just as hard as the community's social worker.

Such is the impact of her presence, and the relevance of her responsibility, a power broker, an activist, a first responder for the less fortunate in the community. As a member of parliament I must say that this is well appreciated and encouraging indeed.

So I sincerely thank all the Lions here present, individually and collectively for your kind assistance, and your steadfast and unwavering commitment to serving your communities, building your countries and improving the lot for those who are unable to do for themselves.

You are the true champions; you deserve a round of applause.

In **Trinidad and Tobago**, through the endeavours of our Local Lions clubs, we have benefitted tremendously in several areas:

- 1) Health Services – health clinics in partnership with the Regional Health Authorities, eye screening projects, screening for chronic illnesses

- 2) Education Services – scholarships, school quizzes

- 3) Youth Services – career seminars, educational visits/field trips, Peace Poster contest, leadership training
- 4) Environmental Services – beach clean ups, recycling projects, refurbishment of school recreational facilities
- 5) Social Services: provision of meals, toiletries, relief for fire victims, care for the elderly
- 6) Cultural services – Festival of Chorale, parang and calypso competitions

And the list goes on and on.

Lions have changed the lives and touched the hearts of so many in our society. In almost everyone, there is a little piece of Lion. In so many success stories, there is a chapter, a paragraph, a verse, or even a sentence that speaks to the brave heart, the wisdom, and the helping hand of the Lion.

I am a testimony of that.

My journey into politics started in 1999- won essay competition, hosted by United Nations Millennium young people's congress. I won an attended a massive youth conference in Hawaii, geared at preparing youth for leadership in the new millennium. They provided accommodation and other expenses, but I had to cover airplane ticket. I took on short term jobs and I requested assistance from all entities both private and public, Can I tell you that the only body to come forward and respond to that plea was Lions Club in Tobago....

Fast forward to today and I know countless people from all walks of life who would have obtained significant assistance in their time of need and found comfort in the Lions Club

Your reach is extensive, your work is remarkable, you have remained consistent and you've lazed the development trail like no other, over the years. Your contribution ought not to go unrecognised. I commend, congratulate and salute you this evening, for always going the extra mile.

You are women and men who quietly and determinedly get on with the job of providing relief to those less able and advantaged than yourselves.

You contribute your hard earned dollars, your time and your talent. You offer wise counsel and you are a shoulder to lean on. You have been, and continue to be a force for good.

No matter how hard things may get in our world, service remains your fundamental and compelling response. Not many can compare to your passion, your persistence, and your matchless generosity. That generosity is your defining mark; it is indeed the jewel in the Lion's crown.

In speaking to an International Lion's convention 6 years ago, the governor general of Australia alluded to the Lion's generosity in the following words;

Generosity allows connections to be made between the most unexpected people.

It lends itself to small gestures as well as large.

It flies in the face of greed, arrogance and desire, and can undo them all. It does not depend on learning, privilege, status or riches.

It is ignorant of nationality, class, colour and gender. It is as vital in the boardroom as in the kindergarten.

It is impossible to manufacture, measure, sell or waste.

In every impulse that restores or celebrates our faith in humanity; there generosity is.

Those words were relevant 6 years ago and they are still relevant today.

They were relevant in 1999 when Lions came to my rescue and they would still be relevant tomorrow as you utilise that same generosity to rescue others, save your communities and rebuild your respective countries one case at a time.

Appeal for focus on youth

As we look around in our respective countries and we examine the challenges that pervade our families and our communities, from violent crime, to unemployment, to narcissism, hopelessness, greed, and persistent poverty. We can all agree that somebody somewhere needs to intervene.

And while others may sit and depend solely on the intervention of the government, we as responsible citizens ought to recognise that we have a critical role to play in our people's advancement.

As we grapple with trying economic circumstances, and a breakdown in ethics, morals and values, the vulnerable now more than ever are looking for somebody to turn to.

Lion, if your people, your community or your country ever needed you, that time is now.

And it is in this light that I wish to appeal on behalf of one of those vulnerable groups, our youth.

Our youth look to you for leadership, guidance, direction, love and support. Your intervention through your generosity and the dedication you your time, resources and talents could and would make a world of difference in the lives of young people who cry out for your help daily.

We must make a deliberate and elaborate effort to improve life outcomes for these young people. Their voices must guide your efforts.

Your intervention can be the difference between staying in school or dropping out, joining a gang, or a community service group, making healthy decisions or engaging in risky behaviours, and realizing one's potential or failing to achieve one's dreams.

Programmes that include mentorship and life skills training can make a profound difference in their lives; and in turn, strengthen our communities, economy, and country.

I was delighted to learn that you have been having programmes for the Leo clubs at which you take time to train young persons to grow up understanding the work of the Lions. And developing the capacity to serve.

You have 10 Leo clubs in Port of Spain who do a great deal of community service. And I applaud you for that. But we need to take our efforts to a new level.

Whatever happened to Lion's Quest, your programme that promotes best practices in the field of youth development?

The Lions Club International Foundation reports that over the years:

“More than 13 million youth have been taught positive life skills through Lions Quest....It further states that Lions Quest unites the home, school and community to cultivate capable and healthy young people through positive youth development programs.

More than 550,000 educators have been trained to implement the programs, which support character development, social and emotional learning, civic values, violence and substance abuse prevention and service-learning.

The program has drawn rave reviews from educators and high ratings from government agencies.

Over the past 25 years, program developers, school districts, universities and independent research firms have conducted program evaluations which indicate that the Lions Quest program improves achievement test scores, changes attitudes and beliefs regarding substance abuse and violence, lowers rates of disciplinary problems, lowers risk of dropping out of school and decreases use of alcohol, tobacco and other drugs.

Continually expanding, Lions Quest is present in more than 90 countries and program materials have been translated into 36 languages.”

Lions you dare not have a programme that boasts of such reach, comprehensives and success, and sit on it. Lion's Quest is tried, tested and true....I implore you, stop sitting on it.

I have been told that in some of the member nations and right here at home, you have made an effort before to revive the programme, but did not gain the traction you expected.

I call on you, on behalf of our youth, Please to try again.

Our youth are our most valuable resource, the fundamental pillars of our development...we are depending on our youth to make the difference and our youth are depending on you...Please Please Please try again.

Concluding Remarks

As Lions, you stand for what is best in all of us.

Internationally, you are more than one million people, organized into more than 45,000 clubs, located in more than 200 countries—and you have chosen to serve together.

You serve, that is what you do.

You harness people's talents; you channel it, so that it makes the greatest possible difference in our families, communities, our region and in our world.

This is what you do.

Who is better positioned, better poised and better prepared to make a difference in today's world than you?

Service is your business, this is what you do!

So as you approach 100 years of selfless service and you celebrate your achievements I join in celebrating this marvellous milestone with you.

But as you reflect I call on you to dig deep and launch a resurgence like never before.

One that doesn't need to be qualified, one that doesn't need to be justified. No matter how hard the circumstances, or complicated the issue....Lion get out there and do what you know how to do....

You serve, you serve, you serve.

Therefore in the joy of your celebrations and looking forward to fruitful deliberations, it gives me great pleasure to declare the Convention open.

I thank you.