

**Welcome Address by Mr. Mark Ramkerrysingh
Chairman of the Elections and Boundaries Commission
of Trinidad and Tobago at the
2016 Biennial Conference**

Dr. Josephine Ojiambo, Deputy Secretary General of the Commonwealth, Members of the Diplomatic Corps, the outgoing Chair of the Steering Committee Mr Ahmed Issack Hassan and Chairman of the Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission of Kenya, my esteemed colleagues from the various Electoral Management Bodies within Commonwealth, Members of the Elections and Boundaries Commission of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, representatives of the Commonwealth Secretariat, specially invited guests and members of the media.

It is indeed a privilege to welcome all our visiting delegates to Trinidad and Tobago for the 2016 Biennial Commonwealth Electoral Network [CEN] Conference; for us in this twin-island state we are deeply honoured to be hosting such an event, where over the next two days we will engage in dialogue to identify strategies and best practices for strengthening the institutional capacity and the functions of Electoral Management Bodies [EMBs].

As many of us are aware, the Commonwealth Electoral Network (CEN), conceived by the Office of the Commonwealth Secretary-General and launched in 2010, aspires to a 'gold standard' of election management in the Commonwealth. The network promotes good practice in managing elections, facilitates peer-to-peer exchanges of experience and fosters the community of Commonwealth electoral management bodies. Over the next two days we shall be further defining our electoral standards by advancing commonwealth principles for good electoral practice.

Elections by themselves are not sufficient to constitute a truly representative democracy but there can be no truly representative democracy without elections. Genuine and

credible elections are therefore a cornerstone of our various constitutions.

Never forget that the quality of a country's election is, to a large extent, dependent upon the quality of its election management body (EMB). Therefore we should always bear in mind the importance of transparency, accountability and accuracy in electoral administration, as well as the ethical behaviour of key players, which all contribute to gaining, maintaining and enhancing credibility in the electoral process and to the maintenance and enhancement of democracy in our countries. The means to safeguard electoral integrity therefore should be enshrined within the legal framework for elections; implemented through the institutional structure; and administered competently and impartially by election management bodies and other authorities involved in election administration. The official safeguards of electoral integrity in turn are strengthened by an active and educated electorate, effective and responsible political parties and candidates, and objective national and international election observation.

Since its amalgamation in the Republican Constitution in 1976 the Elections and Boundaries Commission has

successfully conducted elections in Trinidad and Tobago with the highest probity and transparency as attested to by several regional and international election observer missions who were invited to monitor our electoral procedures.

An acknowledgement must be given to the Chief Election Officer and staff of the EBC for their continued efforts during those times because they are the backbone of the organisation around which all things revolve.

Ladies and Gentlemen it will be remiss of me if I did not mention and recognize the contribution of the former Chairman of the Elections and Boundaries Commission Dr. Norbert Masson.

Throughout his tenure until his retirement in 2015, Dr. Masson worked tirelessly to implement several policy directives that have improved our electoral processes and which will serve the EBC well in the future.

To my predecessor, the outgoing Chair of the Steering Committee Mr Ahmed Issack Hassan, I extend my

sincerest gratitude to you for your leadership over the last two years and I look forward to working with the other members of the CEN Steering Committee in the furtherance of Commonwealth electoral best practices.

To the Deputy Secretary General, Dr. Josphine Ojiambo, we welcome you and your Secretariat to Trinidad and Tobago.

I take this opportunity to thank and commend commonwealth secretariat, staff of the EBC and all persons who worked behind the scenes to plan and execute this biennial conference.

I sincerely hope that we as EMBs, shall utilise the knowledge gleaned over the upcoming two days, and work tirelessly within our respective countries, to be seen as a force for good and upholders of the highest Commonwealth 'gold standard' in electoral management.

In closing, I wish all participants a productive and most memorable conference. Do enjoy our country's hospitality during your visit.

Thank you ladies and gentlemen.

God bless.