

**STATEMENT BY
THE GOVERNOR FOR TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO
THE HONOURABLE CAMILLE ROBINSON-REGIS, MP**

It is with great pleasure that I welcome Delegates and Observers to this Forth-Ninth Annual Meeting of the Board of Governors of the Caribbean Development Bank (CDB). It is an honour for Trinidad and Tobago to host this meeting and I am deeply humbled by the confidence reposed in me as your Chairman. It is my earnest wish that this meeting, coming at a time of economic anxiety for many, provides member countries with the opportunity to engage in discussions that will further strengthen the Bank's profile in the Region, while simultaneously ensuring that the very persistent and pertinent issues affecting our Region are addressed holistically.

None of the Member Countries gathered here today have been spared the deleterious effects of the external vulnerabilities to which we are prone, by virtue of both our size and our geography. While we have collectively experienced many years of minimal growth in our gross domestic product, it is anticipated that the Region will experience increased economic activity which augers well for our development agendas. Targeted policy interventions have helped to reduce unemployment across the Region, and the Bank will continue to undertake rebuilding efforts geared towards shoring up resilience. This is especially important given the heightened impact of climate change which has resulted in more intense flooding, drought and extreme weather conditions across the Region. Through concerted efforts by regional Governments and Institutions such as CDB, our people are now more conscious about their obligation to assist in preservation and conservation. Indeed, we have a moral obligation to protect our environment and to ensure that we cultivate a planet which is habitable for all species of creation.

A major opportunity for the Region then, lies in seeking to transition towards a sustainable economy by building on our potential for economic growth. Traditional wasteful approaches to our consumption must give way to behaviours that will ensure preservation of the marine environment. Currently, there is tremendous strain on the oceans, from plastic and styrofoam pollution which adversely affects marine life, to sargassum seaweed which impacts our coastlines and affects tourism and local recreation. Thankfully, some countries around the Region have already initiated the process with regard to eliminating the use of these products, while others are following suit. Our global commitments speak to ensuring that we do more to protect our marine life in an inclusive and sustainable manner, especially as we understand that our oceans and economic development are not mutually exclusive, but rather complementary to each other and inextricably linked.

Just as the Bank provides us with a collective economic voice, so too our membership in CARICOM has proven to be an invaluable asset as we seek to present a united voice that speaks to democratic independence, inclusion and sovereign strength, as opposed to the growing global chorus of isolationism and nationalism. Now more than ever, we, as a Region, must be resolute in our defence of democracy and the promotion of regional integration. If we all do more, then the individual effort is lessened. As the words of Trinidad and Tobago's national motto declare, positively *Together we aspire, together we achieve*.

While CDB continues faithfully to serve as a useful, unifying, relevant and key development partner in addressing regional issues, its fiftieth anniversary next year must, of necessity, give rise to a more determined effort to leverage rapidly advancing technology, as it seeks to place digital transformation and innovation at the top of its agenda. The Bank cannot and indeed, has never intended only to be seen as a repository of funding. Throughout the years of its existence, financial and technical assistance have resulted in Member Countries being able to make significant progress in fulfilling their development agendas. It is therefore necessary for us to continue to capitalise on this most critical resource.

This 2019 meeting is aptly themed “*Transformation*”. As a Region, we continue to witness almost daily, several global “disruptors” to our sustainable development, including, but not limited to, the rapid pace of digitisation and technological innovation, as well as migration, all of which pose challenges as well as opportunities. The Region must therefore transform not only what we do, but also how we do business, so that we do not merely adapt, but proactively seize and create avenues for advancement.

Embracing the United Nation’s Sustainable Development Goals as an indicator for transformation is one certain way to complement our national and international development agendas. I therefore urge that we consider the transformations necessary for the diversification of our economies, to build entrepreneurship and innovation, particularly among the youth, to improve our governance structures, and to build our resilience, both individually and collectively.

Our discussions over the course of this Meeting must therefore focus on the interventions required to give life and legs to these critical transformations, especially given that they are fundamental to our survival and prosperity. To this end, I wish successful deliberations to all of the various meetings and seminars to be held. Let us utilise the dynamism and creativity we possess as Caribbean people, together with all our partners in development, as a catalyst for our Region’s advancement and ultimately for an enhanced life for our citizenry.

May your stay in our beautiful isles of Trinidad and Tobago be both enlightening and enjoyable. Our beautiful twin island presents a dual offering which ought not to be missed. Trinidad remains one of the Caribbean’s premiere commercial and entertainment centre, while Tobago, as an ecological destination, offers you adventure and relaxation, in a pristine environment, that is clean, green, safe and serene. I trust that you will be able to eke out some time from your busy schedules to enjoy some of what we have to offer.

Finally, may God bless our deliberations, our countries, and this august institution, CDB, which has served and continues to serve us so well.