

# The Commissioning of the Trinidad & Tobago Air Guard

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ADDRESS

BY

SENATOR THE HONOURABLE MARTIN JOSEPH  
MINISTER OF NATIONAL SECURITY

ON THE OCCASION OF

THE 4th Anniversary of the Commissioning of the Trinidad & Tobago Air Guard

PLACE:Trinidad and Tobago Air Guard,  
Piarco Air Station, Piarco

DATE:Friday 18th September 2008

TIME: 4:00 p.m.

Minister of State in the Ministry of National Security, the Honourable Donna Cox

Ag. Deputy Permanent Secretary, Ministry of National Security  
Mrs. Desdra Bascombe

Chief of Defence Staff, Trinidad and Tobago Defence Force,  
Mr. Brigadier Edmund Dillion

Acting Commissioner of the Trinidad and Tobago Police  
Mr. James Philbert

Director of the Defence Transformation and Integration Secretariat, Ministry of National Security,  
Commodore Garnet Best

Commanding Officer of Trinidad and Tobago Air Guard, Group Captain Tyrone Rodulfo

Commanding Officer of the Trinidad and Tobago Regiment, Col. Kenrick Maharaj

Commanding Officer of the Trinidad and Tobago Air Guard Coast Guard, Captain Ken Moore

Commanding Officer of the Defence Force Reserves, Lieutenant Colonel Lyle Alexander

Commanding Officer of the Cadet Force, Colonel Edison Isaac

Other Heads of Divisions of the Ministry of National Security

Officers and other Ranks of the Trinidad and Tobago Air Guard

Distinguished Guests

Members of the Media

Thank You ladies and gentlemen

I am indeed honoured to be here this afternoon, to join the Trinidad and Tobago Air Guard in celebrating this fourth anniversary.

Before proceeding further, I wish to congratulate Group Captain Tyrone Rodulfo on his new role as the Commanding Officer of the Trinidad and Tobago Air Guard. Group Captain Rodulfo attended the Britannia Royal Naval College in the UK and is a graduate of the United States Naval War College. He also holds a Masters degree in Human Resource Management.

I have no doubt that you will continue to provide the kind of effective leadership that is needed at this time of transition in the Defence Force.

Before proceeding further, I wish to congratulate Group Captain Tyrone Rodulfo on his new role as the Commanding Officer of the Trinidad and Tobago Air Guard. Group Captain Rodulfo attended the Britannia Royal Naval College in the UK and is a graduate of the United States Naval War College. He also holds a Masters degree in Human Resource Management.

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I want to also thank the outgoing Group Captain Kent Moore, who now holds the portfolio of Commanding Officer of the Trinidad and Tobago Coast Guard for your stewardship of the Air Guard over the past four years.

It was under your leadership that the Trinidad and Tobago Air Guard was created and moulded, from merely being the Air Wing of the Coast Guard to becoming a separate and very important entity, as it relates to aerial security of the country. Thank you for this.

Ladies and Gentlemen, the Air Guard was established on August 1st 2005 following a review of the national security framework at the time. This new formation was as a result of a need to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of the Defence Force.

In other words, the time had come for an autonomous or independent Air Arm of the Defence Force that would be responsible for conducting a range of military air operations in the country and the wider Region.

The role of the Trinidad and Tobago Defence Force continues to take on a greater significance as this country moves towards developed nation status on or before 2020. The fundamental objective of Vision

2020 is the improvement of the quality of life and the standard of living of all of our citizens, towards that of developed societies of the world.

In seeking to achieve this, five development priorities have been identified. These are:

- Nurturing a caring Society
- Developing innovative people
- Governing effectively
- Investing in sound infrastructure and environment
- Facilitating competitive business

The development priority to which the Ministry of National Security has primary responsibility is Governing Effectively. In that sub area, four components are identified. These are:

- Administration of Justice
- Governance and Institutional Structures for Development
- Law Administration and Legal Affairs
- National Security and Public Safety

The Air Guard and indeed the Defence Force and all of law enforcement have the foremost responsibility to ensure the safety and the security of all citizens. It is therefore imperative for the Air Guard to be fully capable of maritime and land surveillance within Trinidad and Tobago's sovereign territory, maritime borders, Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) and regional interests on a 24 hrs basis.

Since its inception to present, the Air Guard has undergone significant change and has made excellent progress in its organizational structure which is able to cope with the unpredictable and complex security environment that exist today.

The intention is to ensure that the Air Guard is sufficiently capable to play a greater role in the support of civil authorities through the discharge of a range of functions which includes:

1. Counter Terrorist Activities;
2. Anti-Crime operations;
3. Search and Rescue;
4. Tactical air support for maritime and land forces operations of the Defence Force;
5. Medical evacuations;
6. Troop transport for overseas deployment; and
7. Civil Assistance during natural disasters
8. Maritime offshore and inshore patrols
9. Joint operations with local and foreign agencies
10. Special Air Operations

In this regard, the Government intends to pursue a medium to long-term structure for the Air Guard which will lead to the development of a Military Aviation Authority.

In March 2007, the Ministry of National Security requested the support of the Colombian Air Force for the Trinidad and Tobago Air Guard. The Colombian Air Force was asked to make available to us a suitably qualified and experienced military officer (active or retired) for a period of one to two years to

assist in the establishment of the regulatory oversight department. This person will also serve as a flight instructor on multi-engine aircraft and improve the standards of the Air Guard aviation maintenance and logistics operations.

In response to this request, the Minister of National Defence of Colombia confirmed that the Colombian Air Force (FAC) is in a position to provide the Trinidad and Tobago Air Guard with the required expertise.

The International Affairs Unit of the Ministry of National Security is working on developing the process that would allow the engagement of an expert from the Ministry of National Defence of Colombia to visit the Trinidad and Tobago Air Guard to assist in identifying deficiencies to be addressed.

In the interim – that is, until the establishment of the Military Aviation Authority, we have begun the process of meeting the Trinidad and Tobago Civil Aviation Authority regulatory and legislative aspects of the civil-military aviation framework.

We have also been examining means of making the current procurement system and financial regulations more military aviation friendly, and will be presenting recommendations shortly.

Ladies and Gentlemen, without doubt the major challenge facing our society is the fight against crime and its impact on public safety and security. The Government of Trinidad and Tobago sees this as its number one priority. We remain committed to this goal.

I have often stated that the threat to the national security of our country is no longer solely an external one, but one that is very much internally driven. What this now means, is an increased need for cooperation and partnership between the armed forces and the civilian police in the fight against crime and criminal activities.

To achieve this requires a strategic shift by all the arms of the Defence Force from the traditional role of defending the nation to the more specific role of securing the nation, from guns, drugs and other incursions.

Ladies and Gentlemen, Government has invested a significant amount of financial resources to enhance the Air and Maritime assets of the country.

As it pertains to the Air Guard, the Air Guard currently owns and operates two (2) C26B aircraft in both the maritime surveillance roles and the medium transport roles.

- One C26B, AG 215, is currently outfitted to carry as much as fourteen persons with cargo as far north as San Juan, Puerto Rico without refueling.
- The Other C26B, AG 216, has recently undergone an avionics and surveillance suite upgrade at New Foundland, Canada and is capable of day/ night all weather surveillance platform.
- Currently, the National Security Council is considering phasing out the two C26 in about 3 years time to be replaced with more suitable fixed wing aircraft.
- The Acquisition of (4) AW139 Helicopters to compliment the OPVs of the Coast Guard. These helicopters are capable of landing and refueling onboard OPVs. Their role will be to provide surveillance and reconnaissance support, as well as search and rescue, maritime and air interdiction capabilities.
- These Helicopters will be capable of carrying up to fifteen (15) personnel, provide medivac services with full medical staff up to four (4) stretchers and a similar number of ambulatory stations. The helicopters will also be of significant assistance in the area of disaster mitigation

and management as they all have fire fighting capabilities with Bambi Buckets and can even assist with Oil spill dispersal.

- Added to these assets are the 360 Degree Radar System and the air assets of the Special Anti-Crime Unit.
- As you are aware, the new Command and Control Centre, at Chaguaramas, which was commissioned in April, facilitates the fast, accurate and timely decision making processes required in times of Defence Force mobilization.
- These assets will ensure that Trinidad and Tobago's Defence Force provides adequate service to the nation, as well as the Southern Caribbean States as part of its expanded role to reduce the influx of drugs, guns and illegal immigrants into the region.
- The Air Guard was granted three and a half acres of land by the Airport Authority of Trinidad and Tobago following an approval of Cabinet of Airport land use plan.
- The tendering process has begun for new infrastructure at the Air Guard for one new Administration/ Operations Building, Dormitories, new Gallery and Mess Hall.

Just last week I was fortunate to get a first hand view of the OPVs and the Agusta Westland Helicopters and to discuss the integrated systems of Air, Land and Sea assets, as well as the issues surrounding the training package.

I did so when I visited the Defence Systems Equipment International Exhibition (DSEi) in the UK, where there was a wide range of naval, military and aerospace equipment presented for the first hand information of Ministers of Defence, National Security, and Senior Military and Naval Officers.

The overall objectives of attending this exhibition was to understand the latest defence and security systems and technology available and how Trinidad and Tobago and the region could utilize such technology in enhancing our approach in the stemming crime.

This Government continues to seek new and more efficient ways to secure and protect the citizens of this country. We are now engaged in an exercise to reshape the country's national security architecture.

It is unfortunate that some people fail to see the link between the acquisitions of these air assets and the reduction of crime and violence in to our communities.

The ability of the Air Guard to spot the guns and drugs traffickers and pass this information to law enforcement on the ground is critical to our success in this fight.

Ladies and Gentlemen, the most important resource of any organization is its people. The projection is that by 2017-2019, the strength of the Air Guard would be 1200 officers and other ranks. The current strength now stands at 196.

A proposed increase in the Air Guard's strength and the approval for the Air Guard's medium to long term structure is being considered. The proposed structure consists of a Headquarters Unit, a Fixed Wing Unit and a Rotary Wing Unit which is further divided into supporting branches (i.e Operations, Engineering, Administration and Logistics).

With increased resources, and in order to effectively meet the concept of operations which have been developed and accepted for the helicopters and fixed wing aircrafts, there is need for the concomitant training of pilots, engineers, technicians, air crew, logistics and administrative personnel.

As such, in August 2009, the first batch of indigenous helicopter pilots returned from their one (1) year military helicopter training in the United States. Currently another group of four (4) commenced training

and will be completed in March 2010. Additionally at the US Air Force Academy there are three (3) Officer Cadets in the various stages of training from Freshman Year to Senior Year.

Also at the Royal Air Force College in England, there is one (1) Officer Cadet (female) undergoing training, with the intention of others attending from January and April 2010.

As you can see, Ladies and Gentlemen, our Air Guard personnel are being exposed to the most advanced state-of-art training in their field.

In all militaries around the world, pilots are unique in that they are required to spend an enormous amount of time behind the throttle of an aircraft. The International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) mandates that the ideal Airmen must seek to strike a balance between the hours spent flying to those spent on the ground. The idea behind this is that the pilot must get a sufficient recuperation period before he or she takes to air again.

A clear understanding of these and similar issues is what is required as we seek to transform our Air Guard

It would be remiss of me not to thank you for the role the Air Guard played in April of this year when this country hosted the Fifth Summit of the Americas (VSOA). I must make mention of the legacy left to us through the working partnerships between this country's Defence Force and our regional and hemispheric partners in staging a successful, world class event.

We were able to demonstrate our ability to coordinate and cooperate multi-national operations with our partners from the US, Canada, Brazil, Barbados, Jamaica and Columbia.

In a little over two months time, you will be called again to perform at your highest potential. I have every confidence in your abilities to protect and serve not just the people of Trinidad and Tobago but the leaders of the 53 nations and their delegations who will be participating in this world class event.

I urge you to continue to be people with the highest levels of morality and honesty, who are committed and dedicated to protecting our sovereign borders. Your role is significant in this national security landscape, and you have to continue to ensure that our security systems are never compromised even in the smallest way.

I urge all Air Guard-Defence Force personnel, to maintain the highest principles of integrity and ethics.

As we move forward, greater demands will be made on you by this Government to protect our Sovereign State from intruders and traffickers and we expect that your efforts will match the challenges that we face.

Members of the Trinidad and Tobago Air Guard, I congratulate you on your 4th Anniversary.

May God continue to bless us all and our Nation.

I thank you.