

*Remarks by the Hon. Dr. Lillian Boyce, Minister of Health and Minister responsible for CARIFTA, at the opening of the 36<sup>th</sup> CARIFTA Games, at the Turks and Caicos National Stadium, Providenciales, Turks and Caicos Islands, on Friday, April 6, 2007.*

Ladies and gentlemen, boys and girls, the moment is finally here. We did it!!! We made it!!!

Permit me to cast modesty aside and declare here and now, that the Turks and Caicos Islands has won the first gold medal of these CARIFTA Games by having the newest and best track in this part of the world, by being the newest country in the region to host the Caribbean Olympics, and by staging what so far has been, and will be, the best CARIFTA Games that the Caribbean has ever seen.

Today will always and forever be registered as one of the most significant and defining moments in the history of the Turks and Caicos Islands.

It was not so long ago that many people were expressing great doubts about our ability to complete this stadium on time and host these games, which are regarded as the Olympics of the Caribbean. But now, the evidence is here and I would truly like to thank God and all of those people, too numerous to mention, who made this possible.

That we in the Turks and Caicos Islands are now able to proudly host these 36<sup>th</sup> CARIFTA Games, is indeed strong evidence of our vision and our determination, and commitment to our people and most certainly, the future of this country.

Since 1972, CARIFTA has always played a significant role in the regional integration movement. But this year it has done that and even more.

Because of CARIFTA, a huge tide of national optimism, national pride and national unity has engulfed these beautiful by nature Turks and Caicos Islands. To be sure, it is difficult, if not impossible; to recall any event or occasion that has brought the people of my country together like these CARIFTA Games.

The love and togetherness that the people of this country have demonstrated to ensure that CARIFTA comes off, is absolutely overwhelming and deeply touching. Despite the initial clouds of uncertainty, people of different nationalities, different political persuasions and different races, have all come together for the good and benefit of these games and the Turks and Caicos Islands. Tonight, on behalf of my government, I tip my hat to all of you.

It is hoped that this CARIFTA Games will serve a springboard to raise our national pride by always uniting and celebrating the best of what our country has to offer.

And so, as we gather to celebrate the opening of this new and impressive facility, I really hope and trust that this coincidence of rich history, great possibility and endless potential, will mark a new phase in the overall development of our country.

It is within this context, then, that I wish to state that the theme of these Games, Capturing the Spirit. Fulfilling the Dream. We are all one, is most profound.

To be sure, when we bid for these Games in Bermuda some four years ago, it was always our intention to capture the rich and dynamic spirit of the CARIFTA Games, to fulfill the dream of constructing a world-class track and joining the distinguished list of Caribbean countries who have hosted these games. And then, as the new kid on the block, so to speak, it was incumbent on us to reinforce the fact that as Caribbean brothers and sisters we are all one! This, I hope, explains the theme for these Games.

Permit me to add therefore, that in an effort to maintain a people-centred concept of development, we in the Government of the Turks and Caicos Islands are committed to improving and transforming sports in this country, as we develop our economy, our infrastructure and our people.

We believe that if our young people are provided with the mantle of opportunity, they can become beacons of hope for the country at large in the future.

To achieve this, their talent must be nurtured and strengthened and I certainly hope that the mere fact that these games are being held in our country, will provide a stimulus, motivation and incentive to our people to take athletics more seriously.

To the athletes that are here, you must be reminded that there is no opportunity greater to the pride and dignity of being a citizen than to represent one's country. So tonight, I am saying to you that regardless of how you perform over the next three days, all of you are winners.

May I also take this opportunity to say, that I am unshakable in the belief that in a few short years to come, our performance at CARIFTA will grow from strength to strength.

This confidence is rooted in the wealth of budding talent that is here, combined with government's mission to construct new facilities, establish new platforms of performance and encourage higher levels of excellence.

I am therefore serving early notice to the other Caribbean countries, that it won't be long before you see the Turks and Caicos Islands athletes coming after you with full force and at full speed, blazing a golden trail at CARIFTA. This is just the beginning.

In closing, I wish to say to local athletes and those throughout the region that this national stadium should serve as an example from which you can draw.

The lesson to be learnt from Turks and Caicos Islands constructing this stadium and hosting these Games, is that perseverance never fails. Keep your eyes on the prize. If you want to win gold or achieve a goal, you must pull out all the stops.

In closing, I am appealing to the people of the Turks and Caicos Islands to embrace our Caribbean brothers and sister with warmth, hospitality and celebration.

Let them know in no uncertain terms that this country is truly a paradise, and treat them so special that they will want to return and encourage others to do so. Thank you, enjoy the Games and may God bless you all.