



Address

By

The Honourable Marlene McDonald, MP

Minister of Public Administration and Communications

At the

NALIS 1st Time Authors' Appreciation Programme

April 25th, 2018

Salutations:

- Madam Chairperson
- Lynette Tyson Noel, Member of the Board of NALIS
- Catherine Romain, Executive Director, NALIS
- Paula Greene, Deputy Executive Director, NALIS
- Members of the Management Team and Staff of NALIS
- Our 45 First Time Authors
- Other Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen
- Members of the Media

“Things fall apart.”

“Far from the Madding Crowd.”

“The evil that men do lives after them...”

“It was the best of times, it was the worst of times.”

“Things are always better in the morning.”

These are all phrases we use every day. But long before these words became great conversation starters or quotes, they were the titles of books and expressions which give life to fictional characters.

Today those words transcend literature and provide real meaning in periods of crisis, situations of confusion, moments of celebration and sources of optimism. That is the power of literature and the importance of books.

Books provide a reservoir of inspiration, they are tools of empowerment, records of history, teaching aides and an escape to new worlds. But even these characterizations do not begin to capture the many other roles literature plays and continues to play in our lives.

Nobel Prize laureate, Ma-la-la You-saf-zai underscored the value of books this way. She said:

“We realize the importance of our voice when we are silenced. In the same way, when we were in Swat, the north of Pakistan, we realized the importance of pens and books when we saw the guns. The wise saying, ‘The pen is mightier than the sword.’ It is true.”

And here’s how Nigerian author, Chi-ma-manda Ngozi A-di-chie summarised the contribution of books:

“Stories have been used to dispossess and to malign, but stories can also be used to empower and to humanize.

Stories can break the dignity of a people, but stories can also repair that broken dignity."

Today these are words worth remembering and embracing as we gather to celebrate forty-five (45) First-Time authors. These quotes are reminders that literature has the power to shape our world, our perspective, our culture, our habits and our thought-patterns.

That is the importance of the work you've created and the work you would hopefully continue long after your first book has been published.

Two days ago, on April 23rd we celebrated "World Book and Copyright Day." According to UNESCO that day is meant to celebrate the magical power of books. UNESCO described the celebrations as a link between the past and the future, and a bridge between generations and across cultures. I want to echo

those sentiments but also to go a step further. I want to thank all of you for not only starting the process of writing, but for persevering, finishing and getting to this point.

We all probably know of someone who started or thought of writing a book but never got it done. You're here today not only because you made the decision to write but you actually finished. That matters! Your voice matters, the stories you've told through your writing, they matter. They are your perspectives and they have the power to change lives and endure long after we are all gone.

For the Government of Trinidad and Tobago the work of local authors is particularly important and will always be encouraged. Why?

The numbers tell us that our economy remains highly dependent on the oil and natural gas sectors and that falling

energy prices and revenues will negatively affect our standard of living if we do not find new revenue earners. But we believe that the creative pulse of our people can be harnessed to provide alternative sources of wealth.

As authors, you are part of that creative sector and can therefore provide a much needed revenue stream for Trinidad and Tobago by unpacking your stories one book at a time. As you would recall, Vision 2030 speaks to 'Putting People First: Nurturing Our Greatest Asset'. That underscores the Government's pledge to pursue information and knowledge as our new form of energy.

Moreover, we believe that books written by locals provide an opportunity to tell the Trinidad and Tobago story like no one else can. It's an outlook on this country which adds validity to our experiences.

Books by local authors provide a source of motivation. There's great pride in identifying with one of Sam Selvon's characters, reading a quotable quote from C.L.R. James or listening to a reading from one of V.S. Naipaul's works.

And while having a wide repertoire is indispensable, equally as empowering is the importance of being exposed to work done by someone who looks and sounds like you. Implicit in that experience is the sense that it has been done and can be accomplished again; that the dream of writing a book is not reserved for someone else other than you, who has resources you do not have. This is exemplified by the authors in this room and the over 300 others whom we've celebrated since the introduction of this programme.

Someone said that no one book is like the other; I believe that to be true! No two experiences are the same and the voice of every author is an authentic one. Put another way, what you've

done here as authors and more so, first time authors, is invaluable.

Now many might question the value of books in a rapidly changing world and that is a valid fear. Technology has affected almost every other thing including books and other forms of media. We've heard of experiments with artificial intelligence or A.I. writing news stories, and we've seen traditional newspapers creating video and crossing content lines; even the traditional book has not been spared.

In some sectors there is a war on publishers, many opt to self-publish and there are those who add features like hyperlinks, videos and games to their books. The idea is to embrace technology and deepen the readers' experience but fundamentally, the essence of a book remains: the telling of authentic stories.

In a world facing turmoil, crisis and challenges to human rights we once took for granted, the stories you tell through your books are needed now more than ever. They are your tools to explore, self-examine, question and add to the global conversation.

In creating World Book and Copyright Day, UNESCO hoped to encourage the joys of reading and quote “gain a renewed respect for the irreplaceable contributions of those, who have furthered the social and cultural progress of humanity,” end quote. Today your presence here has accomplished just that.

This year Athens, Greece has been named the World Book Capital for 2018. If you can get to Greece, fine. But to the authors and everyone else gathered here today, if you cannot make that journey, here’s a challenge and this is not to usurp the work of the UN. I implore you to use your imagination and allow NALIS to become your book capital for 2018. Get yourself a copy of “Immovable”, “A Bit of Splendid Things”, “Nature's

Gift the Caribbean Sea” or “The Other Side Of The Computer.”
These are only four of the books from our 45 First Time authors represented here.

Soak up their work; discover new ones, and get to the books you’ve probably heard about or promised to read. Let’s demonstrate that we mean what we say: that the work of these authors is not only important but it’s much appreciated.

Congratulations to NALIS, the NGC Bocas Lit Festival organizing committee, and all those who made today’s event possible. To all 45 of our First Time authors, all the best in your future writings and we look forward to your next book!

Thank you.