



## **ADDRESS**

**By**

**The Honourable Maxie Cuffie, MP**

**Minister of Public Administration & Communication**

**Launch of Anti-Scratch Bomb Campaign**

**“Having fun without having a blast”**

**December 9<sup>th</sup>, 2016**

Salutations:

Ms. Joan Mendez, Permanent Secretary, Ministry  
of Public Administration and Communications

Other Senior Officers of the Ministry

Officers of the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service

Members of the media

Ladies and gentlemen

On behalf of the Ministry of Public Administrations and Communications, allow me to add my own thanks to the members of the media for their attendance at this morning's press conference. Because we both have to be in another place very soon, I will ensure that my remarks here are brief.

T'was the night before Christmas, and not a soul was stirring. Granny was tired from all the baking. Mummy was finished with the curtains and was certain the children were asleep. Even the usually noisy dogs were quiet, as if anticipating the excitement of the morning to come.

The still of the night was punctuated by loud explosions, followed by people screaming, the dogs howling and then a loud banging on the newly painted front door. Who could that be at this hour of the night? Hopefully it's not gunshots again.

T'was the night before Independence. T'was the night before Divali. T'was the night before New Year's Day. T'was the evening of the Church bazaar. T'was the seemingly innocent games of children being children. Indeed, ladies and gentlemen, it could be any event, happening at any time, and occurring anywhere. The ubiquitous use of scratch bombs has become the bane of many events, of many otherwise joyful celebrations.

Their indiscriminate and illegal use has resulted in untold damage to property, loss of limbs, loss of hearing, serious injury to pets and other animals, and a plethora of complaints from frustrated citizens, particularly the elderly.

There can be no denial, ladies and gentlemen, that fireworks and scratch bombs are used heavily to celebrate national events such as Divali, Christmas and New Year's.

However, scratch bombs which are defined as illegal fireworks present a real risk to the limbs, lives and livelihoods of citizens. The case of the Talparo grandmother who is now thumb less and severely burnt, the two teachers from the Chaguanas North Secondary injured by exploding scratch bombs and the countless animal owners who deal with distressed pets each year underscore the seriousness of the problem in Trinidad and Tobago. Put another way, scratch bombs are painful, upsetting and costly, particularly to the sick, elderly and animal owners.

We launch this campaign today therefore, to highlight in a very serious way the many dangers associated with, what is for some, an apparently harmless engagement in frivolity. There is an old adage handed down through the ages which says: “What is joke for schoolboy is death for crapaud,” and nowhere is this more telling than in the use of scratchbombs.

Let me be as clear as I possibly can: the importation, sale and use of scratch bombs is illegal in Trinidad and Tobago. The confusion often lies in the terminology being used to describe these explosive devices. The importation and sale of fireworks by persons so authorised to do is not illegal. Fireworks and scratch bombs are two different sets of explosive devices.

This campaign is aimed at those who are engaged in the illegal importation of these explosives under the guise of them being fireworks. It is also aimed at those who purchase them and are therefore engaged in an illegal act, and at those who use them and who, therefore, are also engaged in an illegal activity.

One of our key stakeholders in this campaign is the Police Service and other law enforcement agencies, who will be monitoring more closely, where these contraband items are being sold and to whom they are being sold.

The dilemma facing the law enforcement agencies however is this: although fireworks are banned in most urban areas, unless permission is sought and obtained at least forty-eight (48) hours prior from the Police, the law is silent on its use in most rural areas, which presents a greater challenge for law enforcement seeking to crack down on the illegal use of fireworks and scratch bombs.

I am certain though, ladies and gentlemen, as I am certain you gathered here and the country are aware, the existence of punitive laws has never prevented anyone from committing a crime. And so our appeal today, particularly as this is a matter that touches the day to day lives of the average citizen, is to the hearts and minds of everyone, to do their part to ensure a safer Christmas and New Year. This campaign will be reviewed and revived in time for Independence, Divali, and any

other period in our nation's calendar when we believe that it is appropriate to do so.

Today therefore, I make a special appeal to all our citizens: you can have fun without injuring others. Indeed, we have a special responsibility to ensure that our enjoyment is not at the expense of our neighbours. There are many other ways we can celebrate the joy and merriment of the season, without getting drunk and without injuring others with illegal fireworks.

As we embrace the season, I urge our adults to refrain from engaging in the illegal activity of selling scratch bombs, more so to children. I also encourage our younger population to think carefully about the potential danger in which they are placing themselves and the people around them when they use these illegal scratch bombs. I urge the law enforcement agencies to do their part, fully assured that the whole of Government is supportive of this initiative, though it is being lead by us



here at the Ministry of Public Administration and Communications.

Allow me then to take this opportunity to wish you gathered here and the whole of Trinidad and Tobago a happy, holy and scratch bomb free Christmas and a peace-filled 2017.

May God bless you all, and may God bless our nation.