

**CLOSING ADDRESS BY HIS EXCELLENCY PATRICK EDWARDS, HIGH COMMISSIONER OF THE REPUBLIC OF TRINIDAD TOBAGO TO THE 2ND EAST AFRICAN LITERARY AND CULTURAL STUDIES CONFERENCE, MAKERERE UNIVERSITY, SATURDAY**

**22ND AUGUST, 2015.**

Thank you Mr. Chairman,

The Deputy Vice Chancellor, and who is also the Ag. Vice Chancellor, Dr. Ernest Okello Ogwang, Professor Edward Kirumira, Dean of the faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Dean, Profession and member of the Academic Community of Makerere, Participant in the 2nd East African Literary and Cultural Studies Conference, practitioners of the Literary Arts, members of the media, Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen.

2. Approximately four months ago, I received a letter inviting me to be the Guest of Honour at the closing ceremony of your Conference. I read the letter and put it down, since the literary arts is not my forte. I am a student and practitioner of other branches of the social and behavioral sciences – in my case Diplomacy. But when I was visited in early June, by my good friend, Dr. Susan Kiguli, accompanied by two of her academic colleagues, in pursuance of a response to her letter of invitation, when they left, I was intoxicated with the idea, as if I had taken good Trinidad and Tobago rum, and accepted the invitation to deliver the closing address.

3. Ladies and gentlemen, I therefore wish to say a sincere thank you to Dr. Kiguli and all who came up with the idea of inviting me to deliver the closing address at your Conference.

4. Ladies and Gentlemen, over the last few days you have been discussing issues pertaining to the development of literature, literary traditions and customs in East Africa. This is a most noteworthy exercise, which I am sure, has shed light on the developments in the East African literary space.

5. Literature and customs, contain within themselves the seeds of a certain universality. There are considerable similarities and linkages in traditions and customs, while simultaneously reflecting dis-similarities. Indeed, it is this twin aspect of our literary landscapes which enjoins us, as children of the diaspora in Trinidad and Tobago and in particular, the wider Caribbean, that enables us to share literary and, to a certain extent, customs and cultural practices, irrespective of whether we trace our ancestry to Africa, Asia or continental Europe. It is this rich tapestry of cultural, linguistic and, in many respects, literary parallels and similarities, that enable us in the Caribbean diaspora to take pride in our African and multifarious heritages.

6. It is what makes us readily identify with many of the famous writers of East Africa, such as Mwalimu Julius Nyerere, Okot p'Bitek, David Rubadiri, Taban Lo Liyong, Timothy Wangusa to mention but a few and particularly, with those of West Africa from where the vast majority of our forefathers came, as reflected in the works of Wole Soyinka, John Pepper Clark, Chunua Achebe, as well as those of Nordine Gordiner and Alan Paton of South Africa; if I should be permitted to be highly selective. These are but a few of the literary giants of Africa, which we in the diaspora are all familiar with and indeed have been on the curriculum for the literature courses, both at our secondary schools and universities.

7. But, before proceeding further, ladies and gentlemen, it may be prudent for me to give a brief history of who we are in the Caribbean, particularly in Trinidad and Tobago, which has given rise to the term coined by the venerable former Archbishop of Cape Town, Desmond Tutu, when he described Trinidad and Tobago as the “rainbow’’ people, since our country comprises of people of all races and cultures reflecting our inter-ethnic and inter cultural diversity.

8. The Caribbean was re-discovered by a Genovese Navigator named Christopher Columbus, between 1492-1506, who claimed the islands in the name of the King and Queen of Spain. From the 15th to the 19th centuries, the cultural, social and political complexion of the region, was shaped by the control exercised by the various European powers namely; the Spanish, French, English, Dutch, Danes and, would you believe, even the Courlanders. Consequently, Pre and Post-colonial Caribbean Literature include all the cultures of the region affected from the period of colonization to the present.

9. If one includes the peoples or cultures of the wider Caribbean regions of Spanish, French, Dutch and the remnants, or fragments of the indigenous inhabitants, it would create a considerable impact on the literary and cultural activities of the region, which in turn enables us to link with the five continents of the world. Caribbean literary works therefore, are the products of our Spanish, French, Dutch and English antecedents, especially the English Speaking Caribbean, since we have no indigenous traditions.

10. The pre-Columbian American Indians, left no indigenous traditions and had few rock carving. The West Africans who replaced them were also without written traditions. Consequently, the literature and whatever miniscule, quantities of literary and cultural works which existed, were reflections of the colonial rulers of the region.

**Caribbean Middle Class:**

11. This doesn’t mean however, that the nascent but very small Caribbean middle class, which very often were reflections of miscegenation, or the unadulterated white ruling class, at least until the mid to late 19th century, were not unconscious (un-aware) of their social and environmental space. **It was just that it was Eurocentric. Caribbean society therefore was legitimised in the cultural, literary and social prisms of the European ruling class**.

**Caribbean Literary Awaking:**

12. Nevertheless, there was a stirring, if not an awakening , of the latent literary consciousness of the Caribbean elites as reflected in the writings of Toussaint L ‘Overture’, who led the slave revolt which resulted in the independence of Haiti, the Cuban/Spanish war of 1898 – and the one or two early writers of the English speaking Caribbean,

**Francophone and Spanish Caribbean**

13. In the context of francophone and Spanish Caribbean, a few of the literary pioneers in these formative years were the notable Puerto Rican poet, Luis Mateos, Nicolás Guillén of Cuba, the Italian writer, Jean Prince Mars and, attaining iconic status in the literary world, was the former Mayor of Martinique, Aimé Césaire. **They were introspective, rather than extro-spective in their writings. They wrote about the life, rhythm and symbolisms of the islands, rather than that of the metropole**. But whereas the French and Spanish speaking Caribbean can trace the nationalistic roots of their literary style to the late 19th century and early stirrings of the 20th century, in the English Speaking Caribbean it came much later.

**Anglophone Caribbean:**

14. In the Anglophone Caribbean, the writings of the late-19th and early 20th centuries, such as JJ Thomas in Trinidad and Tobago (1889 Froudacity) and Jamaican Claude McKay, (Harlem Shadows, a poetry collection of 1922) were virtually unknown in the Caribbean. It was really in the early years of the 20th century, that one begins to see the formation, or chrysalis stage of a distinctive Caribbean literary form.

15. One of the very early writers, if not the earliest, in the English speaking Caribbean was John Jacobs Thomas, a black man who wrote Froudacity in 1889. It was a rebuttal to the conservative British writer, James Anthony Froude, who attacked the British West Indian colonies for wanting to establish self-government. Froude had argued, that if the majority black population was allowed to vote their own leaders, they would choose leaders who would repress the white population. ‘Froudacity’, as his book was called therefore, were a refutation of Froude’s thesis.

16. Dave Lichtenstein, in his chronology of Caribbean literature in 1999, did a good job chronicling Caribbean literature which he saw as beginning from 1913 to the present. However, he failed to mention Thomas’s work “Froudacity”, when he said that before 1913 there was no literary works by any native West Indian.

17. There was also the Jamaican writer Claude Mckay, who produced his first books of poems, ‘Song of Jamaica’ and ‘Constab Ballads’ in 1912. His poems were the first to be published in the Jamaican dialect, a style which was to be popularized much later by Louise Bennett in her ‘Jamaica Kincaid’. In 1922, he produced a poetry collection called ‘Harlem Shadows’ and went on to write eight books between 1912 - 1948.

18. Nevertheless, it would be safe to say that the first truly significant English novel from the Caribbean was by the Jamaican writer E G. De Liser-‘A Story of Jamaica’, followed by quite a few of his works. This was followed in 1929 by, ‘Voice of Summerland’, the first anthology of British West Indian verses.

19. The literary virus, if l should put it that way, attacked Trinidad and Tobago, in 1929-33, with Alfred Mendes and CLR James’, ‘Trinidad Christmas’. These publications presaged an increasing number of Caribbean writers from the various islands. They were largely Jamaicans, Trinidadians, Barbadians and Guyanese. **Many of the early Caribbean writers got their first break with the BBC in London. It provided a spring board for most, if not all the present day Caribbean writers.**

20. The English speaking Caribbean, despite early sporadic indications of an indigenous Caribbean literature, really began to blossom in the post 1945 period. Anglophone Caribbean literary development was initially conservative, working towards an open, rather than an autochthonous, or indigenous expression, such as the works of CLR James (Trinidad and Tobago) the poetry of Derck Walcott (St. Lucia) who also spent most of his life in Trinidad and Tobago and the novels of Wilson Harris in Guyana.

21. In all these works there were both symbolism and surrealism techniques, as also reflected in the poetical work of Edward Brathwaite. It was Edward Brathwaite who pointed out, that the British Caribbean made its own contribution to an indigenous Caribbean literary genre, through the folk dialect novel and its poetry. It constitutes a distinct school and has drawn sustenance from our pre-and post-colonial history. It has helped to shape our contemporary, political, social, cultural and economic links with Africa, Asia and Europe.

22. As in the case with the literature of other countries, Caribbean literature shares a concern with identity, ethnicity and language that came out of the region’s historical experience. In the use of the dialect forms of the national languages, which is generally referred to as ‘creole’, with each having a blend that is unique to the country, the authors often switch between what is referred to as ‘broken’, or colloquial English and standard English. It is one of the unique characteristics of Caribbean literature.

23. Listing examples of such works, Brathwaite identified inter-alia, Samuel Selvon's ‘Brighter Sun’ (1952) and ‘Lonely Londoners’ (1956)’; George Lamming’s, “In the Castle of my Skin” (1953), and of course, our very own V.S. Naipaul in his early works, such as the Suffrage of Elvira, Mimic Men and a House for Mr. Biswas. I am sure, some of you may be familiar with these works.

24. Naipaul of course, was a writer in residence at Makerere University in 1968/69, who went on to win the Nobel Prize for literature in 2001. He wrote about two or three books on Africa, with the ‘Masque of Africa’ written in 2009/10, which featured Uganda, and a number of other African countries. In fact, it was Naipaul’s thirtieth book, in which Dr. Kiguli, who is equally a great friend of the Naipauls, and our Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs, Dr. Ernest Ogwang, played a major part in organizing the research for the book, while he was in Uganda.

25. Other notable writers from the region during this period included, John Hearne, Edgar, Mittelholzer, George Lamming and V.S. Naipaul. The writings of all these authors were published in the United Kingdom as a single Caribbean Literature.

26. The second half of the 20th Century was to a large extent, the Golden Age of Caribbean literature. It also saw the flowering of many plays, and theatre workshops. In short, a flowering of the literary arts, with hundreds of writers, publicists and the Department of Literature at the University of the West Indies, presiding, or providing inspiration to the indigenous writers on a variety of themes on Caribbean social and political development.

27. To date, three Caribbean writers have won the Nobel Prize for literature. They are: Saint John Perse in 1960; who was born in the French Caribbean Island of Guadeloupe, Dereck Walcott, 1986 and Sir Vidia Naipaul in 2001. Other equally distinguished names include Earl Lovelace, Orlando Patterson, Andrew Salkey, and Edward Brathwaite. Recently, there have been a rash of relatively new writers from the Caribbean all vying and creating quite a name for themselves in their own literary space.

**Influences on Caribbean Literature**

27. Caribbean literature has been sculptured by many influences including slavery, indentureship, particularly East Indian indentureship in Trinidad and Tobago and Guyana, but to a lesser extent in Jamaica and Suriname, and by migration, as reflected in Mayse Conde’s novel, “Tree of Life”, which discusses working and family life within the Panama canal. It shares similarity, to quite a few of Naipaul’s works such as a ‘House for Mr. Biswas’, Mimic Men, and the Suffrage of Elvira. The same can be said of Earl Lovelace’s, ‘The Dragon can’t Dance ‘and ‘Salt’.

28. However, these were not the only influences on Caribbean literature and culture of the times. Thus for instance, the spirit of Pan Africanism and the Decolonization movement, led to notable writers such as CLR James in two of his Books ‘Black Jacobins’ and ‘Beyond the Boundary’. Black Jacobins was about the Haitian revolution of 1791-1803 which, in the words of James was the only successful slave revolt in history. It discusses the heterogeneity of resistance movement, intellectualism and leadership, the ambitions and complicities of the colonial bourgeoisies. Although James clearly identified the racial heterogeneity of the San Domingo population, he places greater emphasis on the antagonisms of class that provided the socio-economic impetus for the revolution.

29. In his book ‘Beyond the Boundary’, James saw cricket, which was an important art form, as an instrument of social reform. He saw the art of cricket, being re-appropriated as a means of resistance to British colonial rule. He saw cricket in the words of Benjamin Greaves, in an article on ‘Cricket and West Indian Self-Determination’ as “the nexus of colonial rule and class antagonism in the development of Trinidad and Tobago’s national identity”. It looks into the various boundaries that separate culture from politics, race from class and high culture from low culture. West Indian colonialism and decolonization are unthinkable without cricket. The opposition of batsman and bowler writes James, “serves as a metonym for the broader antagonism between colonizer and colonized, leader and led, between competing class and race factions in Trinidad and Tobago. It reflects the inflexibility or simultaneity of culture and politics”.

30. There were other writers who have helped to shape or influence the decolonization movement, such as Franz Fanon’s ‘Wretched of the Earth’, which dealt with the psychological elements in post-colonial struggles. It had a profound influence on Caribbean radical thought. Similarly, Walter Rodney’s, ‘Groundings with my Brothers’ and “How Europe Underdeveloped Africa”, all had the effect of radicalizing Caribbean political thought.

31. The literature of the Caribbean therefore, is an ideal meeting point, where in the words of Luigi Sampietro, a literary critic on Caribbean literature, “the assorted cultures of two boundless continents and the ghosts of four colonial empires came together. A crossroads for an unspecified number of ethnic identities, religious rites and ideologies, which traces their origins to the old worlds of Africa, or Asia and, are all involved in the continuous process of creolization”, Sampietro goes on to say, “it is the meeting place, or confluence of two opposed notions of time and history, one linear and sequential, in which the past is conceived as the cause determining the present; and the other circular, in which the mind of man is viewed as inhabited by forces and patterns which perpetuate simultaneously, the imprint of memory and the blue prints of his future fate”.

32. Dereck Walcott, one of our Noble Laureates, has pointed out that the major writers of the Caribbean have succeeded in breaking free from the determinism of their respective histories. Therefore, he concludes, it is impossible to talk about Cesaire without making allusions to the French surrealist; the problem of negritude, or the poetry of Léopold Sédar Senghor, the Senegalese poet; one cannot hear the poetry of Brathwaite, without acknowledging its links with African sonorities or with Jazz; neither can we read the poetry of Walcott and fail to recognize the importance of the classics in the colonial schools of the former British Empire, nor , for that matter, of Naipaul, another Caribbean Nobel Laureate, without identifying the similarities of Indians in the Caribbean as indentured workers in the sugar plantations, with that of their fore bearers from India.

33. There is no doubt, Ladies and Gentlemen, that the differences and the linguistic divisions with its creole variants of Spanish, French, English and Dutch, make the Caribbean an excellent sounding for work of a comparative nature. **The people of the Caribbean work and speak of the former colonial world and of the contemporary world in the voices of its great writers.** The world of Caribbean literature is not only Caribbean in content. It has a special aesthetic character of its own, and as Sampietro, who has an excellent grasp of Caribbean Society and literature observed. “It is vibrant and youthful; it is provincial and universal, insular and cosmic, it is at the same time hybrid, composite and elusive”.

34. Caribbean literature therefore, mirrors a historical and cultural tapestry of the Caribbean, reflecting through its multi-faceted prisms, the colonial socio/cultural antecedents, providing intellectual grise for the anti-colonial independence struggle of the de-colonization movement and the early sterring of nationalistic fervour. It is, in a sense, a social and cultural identification of who we are as a diasporic people, who though geographically separated from our continental genealogical moorings, have nevertheless forged our own international identity within the comity of nations.

35. It is this literary linkage with the land of our fore fathers from the diverse continents of the world, that has enabled us to play a seminal and central role in the Pan African Movement; in the struggle for decolonization and in the first successful slave revolt of the new world. It has enabled us to join with you in Africa, Asia, Europe and the Americas, in the ever widening concentric circles of literary interaction, assimilation and integration. We, children of many diasporas, have been able to create in the Caribbean an oasis of peace and a new dawn of literary inter-change and exchange.

36. In concluding Ladies and Gentlemen, members of the literary community, of Makerere University and those from far and wide who have provided over the past two days, stimulation, cogitation and in a sense, literary liberation; I have sought to provide a brief glimpse of who we are in our Caribbean literary environment, from whence we came and what we hope to achieve.

37. It is therefore with considerable optimism, that I invite the organizers of the Third East African Literary Conference, to extend to us the honour and privilege of hosting the Conference in Trinidad and Tobago, and in so doing, to help rekindle the ties that bind us together. I stand ready to assist in bringing this objective to reality in seeking to forge the links between the literary families of East Africa and those in the Caribbean.

38. Madam Chairwoman and convener of this conference, you have bestowed on me the signal honour of closing your conference, I do so with considerable enthusiasm, alacrity, and with the inextinguishable hope, that we in the Caribbean would have the privilege of joining with you to host the Third/Fourth East African/Caribbean Literary Conference in Trinidad and Tobago.

39. Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen, by the powers vested in me by the conveners of this conference, I hereby formally declare the 2nd East African Literary and Cultural Studies Conference to be duly and legally closed!

40. And so it has been said, so let it be done.

I thank you!