

# Coast Guard gets new vessels

National Security Minister Martin Joseph delivered the following address at the commissioning ceremony of the Trinidad and Tobago Coast Guard interim OPV vessels and support infrastructure at Staubles Bay, Chaguaramas on Wednesday 23rd April 2008.

It is a great privilege and an honour to join you this afternoon for the commissioning of the TTS Chacachacare and the TTS Gaspar Grande as operational ships of the Trinidad and Tobago Defence Force, assigned to the Trinidad and Tobago Coast Guard.

This event is of great significance since the Coast Guard's operational capabilities have also been upgraded with the completion of three (3) Jetties and the Coast Guard's Operations Building.

Ladies and Gentlemen, the last time the Trinidad and Tobago Coast Guard commissioned naval assets was back in January 2001, namely the TTS Nelson and the TTS Galera Point. Prior to that, in 1999, the Coast Guard commissioned two fast patrol boats, the TTS Crown Point and the TTS Corozal Point.



So that today's event could not have come at a more appropriate time. It provides tangible evidence of this Government's commitment, to ensure that the Coast Guard is equipped to effectively protect our territorial waters and meet Trinidad and Tobago's obligations in the area of maritime safety and security.

As you may already know, Trinidad and Tobago was assigned a maritime area of responsibility of 68,500 sq. nautical miles by the International Maritime Organization in 1989. This was defined by the Search and Rescue Convention. The Coast Guard's area of responsibility includes Trinidad & Tobago, Barbados, Grenada and St. Vincent and the Grenadines, and is managed out of the Operations Building – the Maritime Rescue Coordination Centre (MRCC) - that has been commissioned today.

If you recall, ladies and gentlemen, it was in April of 2007 that the Government signed a historic contract with the Government of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and Vosper Thornycroft (VT) Shipbuilding International, for the acquisition of military assets for the Trinidad and Tobago Defence Force, to be operated by the Coast Guard.

These assets are three (3) Offshore Patrol Vessels and two interim vessels which will be deployed to provide surveillance and protection capability, including drug interdiction as well as anti-smuggling operations and disaster relief functions within the region.

However, while we are awaiting the three new OPVs, the TTS Chacachacare and the TTS Gaspar Grande, will serve to improve the capability and operational capacity and readiness of the Coast Guard. This is in keeping with Government's stated development agenda.



Ladies and Gentlemen, the Government of Trinidad and Tobago has made bold its intention to make this country a developed society on or before 2020.

Our aim is to improve the quality of life and the standard of living of all our citizens, to levels comparable to what obtains in developed societies.

During this transformation process, all agencies that are involved in law enforcement and the delivery of justice are called upon to assume greater responsibilities to ensure safety and security to the people of our nation.

It is in this vein, that the Trinidad and Tobago Defence Force has been focused on developing and modernizing its operations, shifting its focus from the traditional role of "defending the nation" to the more intricate role of "securing the nation."

We have already seen the Trinidad and Tobago Defence Force Air Wing become an autonomous Air Guard Formation and steps have been taken for the Regiment to become an Army and the Volunteer Defence Force to become a Reserve Component.

The Coast Guard is also being developed into a modern and forward looking organization, which will be able to defend Trinidad and Tobago's maritime interests, as well as meet our regional commitments, obligations and responsibilities.

This most significant role is crucial to successfully reducing the amount of drugs and guns entering our country. If this is successfully executed it will lead to fewer guns on our nation's streets, leading to a reduction in firearm related homicides, thereby improving the quality of life of all citizens in Trinidad and Tobago.



In the context of the new and emerging threats to security at sea, it is imperative that the Coast Guard be suitably equipped with a modern surface fleet with a capability for enhanced surveillance, rapid response, early deployment by highly skilled personnel, and helipad facilities in order to facilitate helicopter operations at sea.

The acquisition of these two vessels represents an interim measure in the overall strategic upgrade and expansion programme of the maritime capability and capacity of our

country.

This overall strategic upgrade consists of the construction of three Off Shore Patrol Vessels, the delivery of these two interim vessels, the acquisition of six fast-patrol craft, six interceptors and four helicopters, which will compliment the new OPVs.

Added to this are the Air Guard's two C26 aircraft, which are currently undergoing an operational electronic upgrade.

Ladies and Gentlemen, the first Offshore Patrol Vessel is expected to arrive by the end of 2009, the second in the latter part of 2010 and the last in February, 2011.

The contract for the purchase of the six fast patrol vessels was signed with AUSTAL Ships PTY Ltd in Henderson, Western Australia at the end of February of this year and is scheduled for delivery by the end of 2009.

We are still in the tendering process for the six Interceptors and the four Helicopters.

Ladies and Gentlemen, by 2011 this impressive fleet is expected to bring the Trinidad and Tobago Coast Guard to a greater degree of operational readiness and will further strengthen the Coast Guard's ability to safeguard our territorial waters and maintain maritime security.

The new fleet when integrated with the existing law enforcement assets - the air assets of the Special Anti-Crime Unit and the Trinidad and Tobago Air-Guard's C26 aircrafts, working in tandem with our 360 degree Radar System, will provide an imposing security blanket for Trinidad and Tobago.

All of this Ladies and gentlemen, is being done, to reduce the flow of illegal drugs, guns, and more recently increased illegal immigration and piracy, which are taking place in our territorial waters and across the Caribbean Region as a whole.

This is also a further expression of this Government's commitment to put every measure in place to address the present level of criminal violence that is plaguing our country at this time.

Discussions with our international partners indicate that the Southern and Eastern Caribbean could expect to see increased levels of drug transshipment and Trinidad and Tobago's strategic location between the major producers in the south and consuming nations in the north makes this country particularly vulnerable.

This increased drug transshipment, is due to the effects of Plan Colombia, the Merida Initiative of the United States and Mexico and the joint UK-Jamaica programme of anti-trafficking in Jamaica, which are all resulting in increased displacement and redirection of drug trafficking.

Our vulnerability is verified by the reports of the World Bank and the United Nations that indicate the drug trade as the prime driver of crime across the Caribbean. The United Nations Report on Crime, Violence and Development: Trends, Costs and Policy Options in the Caribbean dated March 2007, indicates that the strongest explanation for the relatively high rates of crime and violence in the region – and their apparent rise in recent years – is narcotics trafficking.

This report was the subject of discussion by the Caricom Council of Ministers of National Security and Law Enforcement, which was held in Port of Spain earlier this month. It was further endorsed by the Caricom Heads of Government, at the Crime Summit, when they met to fully ventilate the crime and security issues facing the Caribbean Region.

Our region and indeed Trinidad and Tobago will not be complacent about this issue. The entire Caribbean must now stand together and work towards eradicating these plagues on our respective societies.

It is with this in mind, that coming out of the Crime Summit, Heads of Government of the Caribbean Community agreed on a Strategic Plan of Action to stem the rising tide of violent criminality that now pervades the region.

Heads of Government decided that, building on the legacy of the success of the Security Co-operation arrangements put in place for the Cricket World Cup 2007; most, if not all, of the elements would be upgraded and expanded on a permanent basis.

In the area of curbing illegal trafficking, Heads of Government agreed to the following measures:

- To increase the capability and coordination among law enforcement agencies to develop intelligence to conduct operations and to enhance the enforcement of laws;
- To maximize the use of available technology in detection, deterrence and seizure of illegal drugs entering and transiting the Region;
- To engage international partners, (especially the United States), with respect to the implications for the Region of their anti-narcotics efforts in Central America and the Pacific Coast; and
- To ensure the implementation of systems, procedures, intelligence and training with a view to enhance border security.

It is therefore vitally important that the Trinidad and Tobago Defence Force, including the Coast Guard have the equipment and resources needed to meet the increasing demands placed on their shoulders.

Along with the vessels, the Coast Guard's operational readiness has also been upgraded with the completion of three (3) Jetties and the Coast Guard's Operations Building. The new Jetties will be able to accommodate the offshore patrol vessels once they arrive at

Staubles Bay.

The Operations Building will house the Operations Room and all those departments and personnel directly required to support the Maritime and Naval Operations.

In conjunction with the National Coastal Surveillance Radar Centre and the upgrade in Naval Patrol Craft, the Operations Building will act as a nexus for the tactical deployment of Coast Guard vessels and the tracking and early detection of marine craft engaged in illicit activities. This will ultimately result in successful execution of Naval Operations.

Ladies and Gentlemen, these assets and infrastructure represent a major investment by the Government of taxpayers' monies. It is our hope that we will achieve maximum returns through sound leadership and the resolve and determination of highly trained and committed professionals, who can exploit the full range of capabilities offered by these new complex combat systems and technologies.

Over the past 46 years, the Commanding Officers and members of the Coast Guard have protected Trinidad and Tobago with dedication and commitment. I would like to convey the sincere thanks and appreciation of the Prime Minister, this Government and citizens of Trinidad and Tobago, for your valiant effort.

We will continue to make demands on you 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 Defence Force, I want to make it abundantly clear that the best technologies by themselves will not solve the country's crime challenges. Our men and women in uniform must be people with the highest levels of integrity and ethics, who are fully committed and dedicated to protecting our sovereign borders.

We cannot improve our ability to stem the inflow of drugs and guns if our security systems are compromised in anyway.

Be mindful of the fact that you are always under the eye of the population you serve, whether you are in or out of your service uniform. Your family, friends, and national community perceive you as protectors of our nation; therefore, I wish to emphasize, that whatever you do, you must always uphold the virtues of integrity, ethics and discipline.

As I close, let me extend my congratulations to the Commanding Officer and members of the Trinidad and Tobago Coast Guard on the commissioning of your ships.

The entry of these vessels into operational service ushers in a new level of capability and capacity for the Coast Guard. I urge you, therefore to add to these, your individual competencies, for which you are already well regarded. Work hard, work smart, work together. Stand ready, always to defend our Land.