

ADDRESS BY HER EXCELLENCY
DAME SANDRA PRUNELLA MASON, G.C.M.G., D.A., Q.C.
ON THE OCCASION OF HER EXCELLENCY'S INSTALLATION AS
GOVERNOR-GENERAL OF BARBADOS
ON MONDAY, 8TH JANUARY, 2018 AT 4:00 P.M.

RIGHT HONOURABLE PRIME MINISTER

MY LORD CHIEF JUSTICE

MADAM PRESIDENT OF THE SENATE

MR. SPEAKER OF THE HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY

MEMBERS OF THE PRIVY COUNCIL

MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT

MEMBERS OF THE DIPLOMATIC CORPS

MEMBERS OF THE JUDICIARY

DISTINGUISHED GUESTS

As a person who grew up in an era when we were implored to be gracious, I have been guided by St. Paul's first letter to the Thessalonians where he instructs the new converts to Christianity that "In everything, we must give thanks".

And it is with this in mind, that I, as the newly appointed Governor-General for our dear land, wish to commence this evening by acknowledging and thanking the Right Honourable Prime Minister, the Government and people of Barbados for considering me worthy of this most distinguished honour.

Ascension to the highest office in the country brings with it an admixture of emotions: humility, euphoria, responsibility and regret.

In words reminiscent of Sonia Sotomayor when nominated by President Barack Obama for a seat on the Supreme Court of the United States of America, I consider myself to be "an ordinary person who has been blessed with extraordinary opportunities and experiences."

When I started my career in teaching, becoming the Governor General of Barbados was not in my contemplation. I simply wanted to make a modest contribution to the advancement of the people of my country and the country of my birth.

In my later years, whether it was in banking, on the bench or by way of my involvement in organisations at the wider community level, this compelling need to give back to Barbados grew stronger and has remained with me throughout my life.

This perhaps may be attributed to the fact that coming from the East, "behind God's back" (to use Bajan parlance) and without electricity, in the close-knit, St. Philip-based Mason household where I was raised, patriotism was inculcated from a very early age.

It was born largely out of the understanding that free education, granted to Barbadian citizens in the 1960s, was the only way out of sure poverty, particularly for large families such as ours. It is unfortunate that today we seem to take for granted and no longer appear to appreciate the possibilities afforded by our educational system.

The euphoria I feel at this afternoon's event is proudly shared by my eight siblings as well as my nieces and nephews, who have all played a significant role in the person whom I have become today. Their steadfast support has provided me with an effective bulwark against some of life's cruel vagaries.

While my siblings and their children taught me strength, it is my son whom I credit with teaching me the virtue of patience. I am immensely proud and fortunate, despite a hectic professional schedule, to have managed to raise a respectful, intelligent and empathetic young man who, with the parental advice that his father and I have sought to provide, will hopefully make some worthwhile contribution to our country.

The enthusiastic and unabashed outpourings of advice, well wishes, and kind words received via telephone calls, e-mails and handwritten letters in the last few days have been both humbling and uplifting. Yesterday, the Clergy and my fellow parishioners at St Jude Anglican Church, where I worship, fortified me with their prayers. I shall forever treasure these memories and it is my sincere hope that you Barbadians will continue to keep me in your thoughts and prayers during my tenure in office.

It would be remiss of me to sit here without publicly admitting that the journey to today's ceremony has been somewhat clouded by a few twinges of sadness. From the banal, "Will I be able to attend the gym on mornings?" or "Am I still going to be able to watch Q in the Community on Saturday

nights?” to bitter-sweet musings regarding what my parents would say, if they were here to see me right now, having moulded, shaped and laid the foundation for the person sitting here before you. My beloved mother would have been ninety-eight years old and my father would have been one hundred and four years. And even as I recognize that the law of averages dictates that their presence at an occasion such as this would have been unlikely, the regret I feel due to their absence is no less poignant.

Concomitant with this high honour accorded to me today, comes significant responsibility. I am sensitive to the fact that I sit here representing a female, Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II, but I also sit here in large part as a beneficiary of the struggles and commitment of those proud and courageous women across our region and worldwide, who have made significant contributions to society, but have remained largely unheralded. However, it is important to emphasize that I do not view my tasks in this role as simply revolving around my ‘being a woman’. I am fully cognizant that in this office, it is my duty to serve all who constitute Barbadian society: its men, its women and its children.

As we are all acutely aware, our country is facing a challenging period, both locally and in the global context. But as anxious as these challenges may make us, they have nevertheless provided us with opportunities to devise and implement major legislative, regulatory, fiscal and operational reforms. How we emerge will hinge on our ability to re-group and draw on our collective strengths as a people to ensure that we are able to march proudly and gallantly into the future.

We must not only plan strategically, but we must also be willing to boldly restructure and streamline our operations and resource capabilities; to ensure that our country and by extension our region, will be well-placed to weather the most difficult periods ahead.

We must be visionary, but pragmatic, so that our contributions to this dynamic, technologically-driven world are relevant, robust and sustainable. We also ought to expect no less than the highest commitment to the preservation and protection of these ideals and values, which we as Barbadians hold dear.

Even as we continue to engage in vigorous discussions, debate key issues, share new ideas and find solutions to address those matters which concern us all, let us ensure that Barbados does not become a house divided against itself.

Let us remember that the rights of all, regardless of personal, political or religious persuasion, are enshrined in and guaranteed by our Constitution and at all times they must be respected and upheld.

There are significant opportunities ahead for our country and for our people. As strict guardians of our heritage and firm craftsmen of our fate, it is our duty to create for future generations of Barbadians, an enduring legacy of which they can all be proud.

It is incumbent upon us therefore, to encourage and support our youth remembering the words of former President of the United States of America, Abraham Lincoln: “We stand here today, where our children will stand tomorrow”.

I am troubled that what appears to be creeping into the Barbadian culture are attitudes of selfishness and a general lack of sympathy and concern towards our neighbours. It seems that as long as a matter is not directly impacting on us, there is an indifference to the predicament which is being suffered. We can bear witness to this also in the nonchalance displayed with regard to caring for our surroundings. These attitudes must be rooted out without hesitation.

It is important, nay mandatory, to understand that each of us has a responsibility to ensure that our every action contributes to the betterment of our society.

But wishing for a thing however, does not make it so.

The time has come for us to re-double our efforts to create that truly sustainable future; one that can only be achieved when we balance our economic development with environmental responsibility, our care for each other and determined cultivation of the great potential that resides in all of us. This is non-negotiable if we are to safeguard the future of our island and the well-being of our citizens.

Our celebrated novelist, George Lamming noted that "the architecture of our future is unfinished". Let us therefore build the scaffolding that will ensure that we can craft a Barbados of which we can all be proud.

I pledge to you this evening that I will seek to perform my duties in much the same way as I have sought to serve the judiciary of this country, the judiciary of the CARICOM region and the Commonwealth, that is, with dignity, honesty, integrity and impartiality.

Right Honourable Prime Minister, My Lord Chief Justice, Madam President of the Senate, Mr. Speaker of the House of Assembly, Members of the Privy Council, Members of Parliament, Members of the Diplomatic Corps, Members of the Judiciary, Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen, it is with a sense of humility and pride that I wish to reiterate my thanks to the entire nation for the honour which has been bestowed on me.

May God bless you all and may God bless our country Barbados.