



# **Senator, the Honourable Donna Cox**

**Minister of Social Development and Family Services**

**PRESENTATION ON THE NATIONAL EMBLEMS OF TRINIDAD AND  
TOBAGO (AMENDMENT) BILL, 2025**

**January 21, 2025**

**1:30 p.m.**

Mr. President, I thank you for the opportunity to contribute to this ground breaking Bill which, when assented to, will embed, once and for all, what I believe is the single most recognizable feature of our Trinbagonianess, on that iconic symbol which represents all of us, our national Coat of Arms.

Mr. President, Almighty God has blessed me with many gifts, and such is my pride today, that I would of loved to belt out a verse of the Mighty Sniper's Portrait of Trinidad, and I would have encouraged my friend from across the aisle, Senator Francis to bring out his guitar so we could sing in unison:

**“Trinidad is my land, and of it I am proud and glad  
But I can't understand why some people does talk it bad  
But I know, all of dem wey running dey mouth  
Don't know wey dey talkin' 'bout  
They would paint here black here every day  
And the right things they would never say.”**

Mr. President, among “the right things they would never say” is that the steelpan has been one of the single most unifying forces in this country. The history of the steelpan, reflects a symbol of resilience, resistance, and the boundless creativity that abides in our country.

This history of our beloved instrument is intricately woven and speaks to the presence and involvement of Trinidad and Tobago nationals of all races and colours from its birthplace “behind the bridge” to even the hallowed halls of Carnegie and Buckingham Palace. David Rudder could not have been more correct when he sang: “Out of a muddy pond, ten thousand flowers bloom,” from a perfect song of praise to our dedicated pannists.

The steelpan has captivated the world’s imagination, proving that innovation knows no boundaries. It is not only a symbol of Trinidad and Tobago’s musical prowess, but also a representation of resilience and creativity. The steelpan is the heartbeat of Trinidad and Tobago, transforming struggle into song and oppression into opportunity.

It emerged principally from the ingenuity of persons who transformed discarded oil drums into a new musical instrument that has since achieved international acclaim. In fact it cannot be denied that in this cosmopolitan multi ethnic country all our communities have played major or minor roles in the development of this instrument.

Mr. President, as we celebrate the steelpan's global acclaim, it is worth recognizing the achievements of individuals like Joshua Regrello, whose artistry and dedication is taking our national pride to new heights.

His recent ambitious attempt to secure a place in the Guinness Book of World Records underscores the boundless talent of our people, serving as an inspiration for future generations to reach for greatness...

This same spirit is what prompted an entire community, as it were, to ensure that the steelpan is as developed as an instrument as it is today.

This brings into remembrance great pan men, arrangers, and innovators some of whom are sadly no longer with us today. Others continue to mesmerize us with their talents the list includes

- Robert Greenidge
- Ellie Manette
- Liam Teague
- Ray Holman
- Winston Spree Simon
- Tony Slater
- Vanessa Headley
- Jit Samaroo
- Kareem Browne
- Keisha Codrington
- Bobby Mohammed
- Bertie Marshall
- Len Boogsie Sharpe
- Pelham Goddard
- Alwin Chow Lin On one of the founders of Cordettes Steel Orchestra formed in the backyard of his home. He was also a former President of Pan Trinbago
- Duvonne Stuart
- Avis Bruce
- Anise Hadeed
- Clive Bradley
- Michelle Huggins-Watts

- Orthello Mollineau
- Steve Achaiba
- Pat Bishop
- Ken Professor Philmore
- Amrit Samaroo
- Kim Loy Wong who started Highlanders Steel Orchestra.

A cursory glance through the multitudes now on pilgrimage from pan yard to pan yard for the Panorama judging of the single and small band categories, will reveal the true essence of the steelpan as a unifying force. Persons from every creed, race, and socio economic background, stand side by side, as they listen to the magical notes being played on those instruments, by an equally diverse array of players and musicians.

And there is no atmosphere as exciting and exhilarating as on Carnival Saturday night when the Panorama finals are held. Magic, artistry, camaraderie and old rivalries interweave, as the best of Trinidad and Tobago is on display between the equally iconic North Stand and Grand Stand.

Mr. President, I have had the distinct privilege of representing the Constituency of Laventille East/Morvant, from where a number of our country's most famous steelbands emerged. Bands like Solo Harmonites, for example, which for years made their home in that constituency, provided both a meeting ground and melting pot where all could gather, regardless of race, religion, age, gender, class or political affiliation.

Not forgetting Unistars Steel Orchestra, Ebonites, Music Royal Stars, Highlanders. Laventille Pashphonics, Laventille Serenaders, Courts Sound Specialists, and there were earlier bands like Armed Forces, Kentuckians and Chase Manhattan Savoys.

Mr. President, the Coat of Arms of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago has long been a symbol of the nation's identity, reflecting its rich history and cultural heritage.

This change in its depiction, at Clause 4 of the Bill with the removal of the historically inaccurate Nina, Pinta, and Santa Maria, not only represents a shift in national pride, but also a broader movement towards decolonization and cultural affirmation. I hasten to add, this decision, taken by a courageous Government led by an even more intrepid Prime Minister, is also a sign of our own growth in maturity and the development of a stronger sense of our own identity.

Make no mistake Mr. President, this inclusion of the steelpan on our country's coat of arms, is emblematic of a reclaiming of our national identity and pride. With this amendment, we replace symbols of colonial conquest with an emblem of cultural resilience, ensuring our coat of arms truly reflects the soul of our nation.

The change aligns well enough with a global movement towards decolonization, where former colonies like ours, are re-evaluating and often rejecting negative symbols of their colonial past, in favour of those that represent their own histories, achievements and aspirations.



Mr. President, if I may return to the lyrics of the Mighty Sniper, I will undoubtedly discover several other “right things they would never say.” One of those, is that we are replacing three ships that accidentally landed here, with something that is truly indigenous, the steelpan. This represents another significant and tangible demonstration of this Government being true to its word, in its commitment to correcting the injustices done to the indigenous peoples of Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. President, I am certain this country will recall that it was this Government which, in October 2017, granted the first official national public holiday to the First Peoples of Trinidad and Tobago.

It was also this Government which, almost one year later, in August 2018, took another significant step and granted a deed for 25 acres of land to the Santa Rosa First Peoples Community, for the construction of the First Peoples Heritage and Living Museum.

That deed was handed over to Chief Ricardo Bharath, proclaiming for all to see, that delivery beats the 'ole talk' of promises made to that community in 2013 by the administration we replaced.

As we take another step towards decolonization, let us unite in celebrating our shared identity, ensuring that the steelpan continues to inspire future generations as a symbol of our strength, patriotism, and boundless creativity.

I will close simply by stating that the replacement of Columbus' three ships with the steelpan on the Coat of Arms of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, is a powerful statement of this country's cultural affirmation.

This move is indicative of our country's journey towards embracing our own identity, and honouring the creativity, resilience and exemplary togetherness of our people. As we continue our evolution as a nation, the steelpan today stands as a proud symbol of our rich cultural heritage, and a commitment to forging a future that is true to our own values and history, and there is no better place for it to be displayed than on our national Coat of Arms.

For those who may have difficulty with this particular decision, I urge them simply to pay heed to the advice contained in the lyrics of our own Senator Helon Francis: "Doh dis we country."

Mr. President, I thank you.

May God Bless you.

