



Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago
Office of the Attorney General and Ministry of Legal Affairs

SENATOR THE HONOURABLE REGINALD T.A. ARMOUR S.C.
ATTORNEY GENERAL & MINISTER OF LEGAL AFFAIRS

**TRIBUTE OF SENATOR THE HONOURABLE REGINALD T.A. ARMOUR S.C.,
ATTORNEY GENERAL AND MINISTER OF LEGAL AFFAIRS TO THE RIGHT
HONOURABLE MR. JUSTICE MICHAEL ANTHONY DE LA BASTIDE T.C.**

Friday 12th April 2024

[All protocols are observed].

It is my privilege and distinct honour to pay tribute to the Right Honourable Mr. Justice Michael Anthony de la Bastide Chief Justice (retired) of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago and Inaugural President of the Caribbean Court of Justice.

The accomplished life that Mr. Justice de la Bastide led is one that can be defined by the one word, “Excellence” and, one that we can hold up, **proudly**, as a **Beacon** of inspiration for generations of Trinbagonians and Caribbean peoples.

That excellence was reflective of his approach to work and his approach to life. If I may be permitted a personal indulgence, I first met him in private practice when in 1980, as a young attorney then in the Chambers of the distinguished Selby Wooding QC, at No. 75 Abercromby Street, Port of Spain I was introduced to him by Selby. **Q.C** Michael de la Bastice (as he then was) was the Head of his own Chambers, next door at No. 77 Abercromby St.

Notwithstanding his busy schedule, I found him always accessible, and willing to lend support, advice and guidance to young attorneys, to discuss challenges which my fledgling practice threw up, **whether I was Junior to him or not** and, I also had the privilege to be his Junior in some notable matters, as well as being against him in others. I had the privilege to maintain a strong relationship with him after he went on to the Bench, first as Chief Justice of Trinidad and Tobago, next as Inaugural President of the Caribbean Court of Justice and, even after his retirement. In April, 2022 I received from him a signed copy of his Memoirs “*Within the Law*” with a personal note of congratulations on my assuming Office as Attorney General.

His Life’s injunction is inscribed in that book: *Be intolerant of incompetence of inefficiency and of inertia. Be as intolerant of these as you are (or should be) of injustice. If intolerance of this kind were to spread, who knows what wonders we might perform.*

The commemoration of his remarkable life, represents a signal occasion for the peoples of this sovereign Republic to reflect on our proud history, our significant achievements to present and to envision the opportunities for the future.

Mr. Justice de la Bastide provided distinguished service to his country as well as to the region and which can only be acknowledged through the lens of his accomplishments. He epitomised the pre-eminent attributes of an exemplary citizen of Trinidad and Tobago in very many ways.

The many and varied achievements of Mr. Justice de la Bastide included judicial and philanthropic service. His appointments as Barrister, King’s Counsel, Independent Senator, Privy Councillor and past President of the Law Association of Trinidad and Tobago, enabled contributions that were unrelenting and unsurpassed. He was uncompromising in the quality of his representation in

advocating his clients' causes and promoting the interest of the legal profession. As a jurist, his hallmark was one of fairness, decency and the strongest of moral principles.

As the Chief Justice of Trinidad and Tobago, he oversaw a transformative period in the quality of the administration of justice, including the then new Civil Proceedings Rules, 1998. **Most notably**, due to the superlative respect which he commanded, he was able to attract to the Bench of the Supreme Court of Trinidad and Tobago a superior quality of lawyers from the private and public Bar, to serve as Judges under his leadership, including, **not least**, our present Chief Justice, Mr. Justice Ivor Archie ORTT, Mr. Justice of Appeal Allan Mendonca and Mr. Justice of Appeal Wendell Kangaloo (deceased).

As the inaugural President of the Caribbean Court of Justice in 2005, Mr. Justice de la Bastide laid a superb foundation for that pre-eminent Caribbean Apex Court.

Mr. Justice de la Bastide was **repeatedly unabashed** in expressing his aspiration of having the Caribbean Court of Justice as our final Appellate Court, for the completion of Trinidad and Tobago's self respect as a Sovereign Republic **and** development of our Caribbean jurisprudence.

In his presentation on "*The Case for a Caribbean Court of Appeal*", delivered on the occasion of the Anthony J. Bland Memorial Lecture, Cave Hill Campus, UWI, Barbados, on 23rd March 1995, he stated and I quote:

"Like most of you, I am sure, I have strong views on these matters and I have never been reluctant to share them with those prepared to listen.

*The fact, however, that we still cling to the skirts of the Privy Council when so many others have let go, must give rise to the disturbing thought that maybe what distinguishes us from the others is a **profound lack of self-confidence**.*

Our training as lawyers should enable us to look at these decisions coolly and objectively and without hysteria or emotion, assess their impact on the case for the establishment by the independent countries of the region of their own final Court of Appeal. Is it not time that we...give our own judges the opportunity to fulfill more effectively the obligation they assumed when they took their oath of office? Is it not time in other words to complete our Independence?"

As recently as 2022, in ***Within the Law***, he dedicated an entire chapter to his dream and among other things said this:

*Surely the quality both of the judgments delivered by the court as well as that of the men and women appointed to the court demonstrates that there is **no substance** in the arguments advanced for non participation in the appellate jurisdiction of the court.*¹

He was speaking there of the Caribbean Court of Justice over which he presided for a decade.”

As we celebrate the life of Mr. Justice de la Bastide, we acknowledge that the flagship of high esteem that is accorded to him is testament to his **Commitment to Excellence**. The legacy of Mr. Justice de la Bastide reverberates among the living and for the hope of our proud future.

¹ Pp. 157-158

In acknowledging his indelible contribution to the quality of this Republic's proud development from its Independence, I again go on record to recommend that the peoples of Trinidad and Tobago can now contribute to completing his dream, by replacing the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council with the Caribbean Court of Justice.

That proud step must not be distracted by "*hysteria or emotion*".

END.