



## **Australian High Commission**

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### **Trinidad and Tobago**

**Speech by HE John Pilbeam, Australian High Commissioner  
at the opening of a park bench in Moka, Trinidad and Tobago  
on 22 May 2019**

Counsellor Andy Felicien;  
Neighbours;  
Flying Tree folk;  
High Commission staff;  
Friends all.

I'm very pleased to see this new park bench in position under this lovely old Kapok tree. I'm pleased for three reasons...

The first reason I'm happy is that I feel I've repaid a debt. The Australian High Commission has sometimes disrupted life in this quiet suburb with its parties and the cars they attract.

The old Moka concrete bench died years ago and ever since then, Moka people and their visitors have been looking for somewhere to rest while they wait for the bus or for friends to pick them up. Now they can sit down in this pleasant spot.

The second reason I'm happy is that installing this bench is a way of commemorating Australia's friendship with Trinidad and Tobago.

This year we're celebrating forty-five years of diplomatic relations, but our relationship is much older and deeper than that. This year it's also:

- 68 years since Australia opened its first government office in T&T on South Quay in Port of Spain in 1951;
- 64 years since the first Australian Test team played at Queens Park – the six day test was drawn and Neil Harvey, Everton Weekes and Clyde Walcott made centuries;
- 15 years since our High Commission for the Caribbean moved to Port of Spain;
- 10 years since our then Prime Minister, Kevin Rudd, became the first Australian PM to visit Trinidad and Tobago; and
- perhaps most importantly, 10 years since Brian Lara was invested into Order of Australia.

The third reason I'm happy is that, with this bench of concrete and plastic, we're keeping 10,000 plastic bottles out of harm's way. They've gone to a better place, a concrete bench.

The bench includes bottles that won't flow down the Maraval River to block drains in Port of Spain and flood downtown.

The bench includes bottles that won't mess-up beaches down de islands.

The bench includes bottles that won't choke other creatures.

And the bench includes plastic bottles that won't use up landfill space which is particularly precious on islands.

One estimate is that plastic bottles account for 12 per cent of all the trash that councils move away.

So I'm very proud of the huge number of plastic bottles the staff of the High Commission have taken off the sides of roads, out of streams and away from the waste they put out for collection, and very grateful to Gina, in particular, for organising today's event.

Today alone, from bottles we've all gathered in the last month or so, I think we must be coming close to another park bench.

And I'm also pleased that we've been able to find a group to work with like Flying Tree Environmental Management, and people to work with like Juan and Godfrey – people who can turn something harmful into something useful and perhaps beautiful.

So thank you all and let's hope those ten thousand bottles in this bench stay where they are for a long, long, time.