

Chargé Diop Remarks: *The Laramie Project* Screening
April 9, 2014
Theater 1, UTT Campus, NAPA, Port of Spain

SALUTATIONS

- ❖ The Honorable Chief Justice, Mr. Justice Ivor Archie, Chief Justice of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago
- ❖ The Honorable Wade Mark, Speaker of the House of Representatives and Mrs. Mark
- ❖ Senator the Honorable Anand Ramlogan S.C., Attorney General and Mrs. Ramlogan
- ❖ Dr. the Honorable Lincoln Douglas, Minister of the Arts and Multiculturalism
- ❖ Ambassadors and High Commissioners
- ❖ The Honorable Justice Tam, High Court Judge of the Judiciary of Trinidad and Tobago

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- ❖ Chief Representatives of Religious Bodies
- ❖ Fellow Colleagues of the Diplomatic Corps
- ❖ Accredited Chief Representatives of International Organizations
- ❖ Permanent Secretaries
- ❖ Mr. Stephen Williams, Acting Commissioner of Police and Miss. Avason
Quinlan
- ❖ Members of the Consular Corps
- ❖ Educators, members of the Non-governmental organizations and
representatives of the human rights community.
- ❖ Staff of the U.S. Embassy
- ❖ Members of the Media
- ❖ Other Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen

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GOOD EVENING- A very special good evening to Judy and Denis

Shepard

THANK YOU for joining us tonight...

Today, we are saddened to learn of the **passing of former President and Prime Minister, Arthur Napoleon Raymond Robinson.**

As a son of this **great nation**, his **distinguished leadership** and **courage** are well known to **everyone here**, but also **extend beyond the borders** of Trinidad and Tobago.

His **commitment to justice** and the **universal protection** of all people against genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity are part of his **great legacy.**

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He will truly be missed by us all.

Please join me in a moment of silence in tribute.

We are honored to welcome Judy and Dennis Shepard to Trinidad and Tobago, as they generously share **their story** and **their message**.

Their message is about **human rights**. It is about **understanding**, **compassion**, and **acceptance** for all, **regardless of sexual orientation**. It is about recognizing that **gay rights** *and* **human rights** are **not** separate and distinct: they are, **in fact**, one and the same.

I *say this*, knowing that my **own country**'s record on human rights for gay people is **far from perfect**. Until 2003, same-sex relationships were still

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a crime in parts of our country. Many Lesbian-Gay-Bisexual-Transgender (LGBT) Americans, *like Matthew Shepard*, have endured **violence** and **harassment** in their own lives, **and for some**, including many young people, **bullying** and **exclusion** are daily experiences. Like **All** nations, we have more work to do to protect human rights at home.

We **know** that this is a sensitive topic for many people, **and we know** that there are debates going on right now about *whether* and *how* to protect the human rights of LGBT citizens.

We **know** that these debates stir deeply held **personal, political, cultural, and religious** beliefs. And....so we come before you today with **respect, understanding, And humility**. **And**, we come to you with the hope

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that the Shepards' story -- and message -- will play a productive role in Trinidad and Tobago's ongoing debate about this human rights concern.

Our two nations share many important **family, cultural, and economic** ties. We are **trade and security** partners. **We are allies**; and we each draw strength from our diverse populations. We also share **a profound commitment** to promoting and protecting human rights.

In the United States, protecting human rights has meant breaking down the barriers that once prevented **certain races and classes** of people from enjoying the **full measure of liberty**.

We have repealed racist laws, abolished legal and social practices that relegated women to second-class status, and secured the ability of religious

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minorities to practice their faith freely. **And in 2009**, President Obama **signed the Matthew Shepard Act into law**, expanding the federal hate-crime law to include **crimes motivated by a victim's sexual orientation**.

In most cases, progress on the road to recognizing human rights **was not easily won**. People organized and campaigned **in public and in private**, *not only to change laws*, but to change **hearts and minds**.

It is important to recognize that **every time a barrier to progress has fallen**, it has taken a cooperative effort from those on **both sides** of the barrier. In the fight for **women's rights**, the support of men remains crucial. The **fight for racial equality** has relied on contributions from people of **all races**.

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The struggle to recognize LGBT rights **does not** *and* **should not** belong **only** to the LGBT community. It is a battle that requires **our full engagement**.

As Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. said: “**In the end**, we will remember **not** the words of our enemies, but the *silence of our friends*. **History will have to record** that the **greatest tragedy** of this period of social transition **was not** the strident clamor of the bad people, but the **appalling silence** of the good people.” In the battle for human rights, **your voices – our voices** - are needed.

Trinidad and Tobago is recognized as a **leader** in the Caribbean, **and leadership**, *by definition*, means being out in front of people **when it is called for**. It means standing up for the dignity of **all** people, **and**

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persuading others to do the same. It means ensuring that **all** citizens, *including LGBT citizens,* are treated **as equals.**

So, I urge **all of you – all of us – here today to be leaders.** Let's join **our voices** with the Shepards', and stand for: **understanding, compassion, and acceptance for all, regardless of sexual orientation. PLEASE, Let's not be silent. (THANK YOU FOR YOUR PRESENCE HERE TONIGHT -- THANK YOU!)**