I want to begin by saying that there aren’t many occasions more pleasant for me as Chief Justice than those which allow for fellowship with the people who make up the Judiciary of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago. So that for me, both personally and professionally, this evening is extraordinarily special, because it brings the Judiciary family together, and also because of its main purpose: for us collectively to acknowledge and thank so many of our colleagues who, by dint of their hard work, their dedication and their loyalty, have contributed immensely towards the advancement of the Judiciary to what we truly wish it to be: a bastion of our democracy, and an establishment that will become even more worthy of the trust and confidence of all citizens of our beloved Trinidad and Tobago.

Accelerating our march towards the realization of that vision, I must tell you, has been a major pre-occupation of the Management of the Judiciary, especially over the past year. I know that many of you may not have as yet felt any direct or intimate connection with the efforts that we have been making. As alluded earlier by Court Executive Administrator, Ms Michelle Austin, I assure you this evening that that is about to change.

But just as well, from the many discussions and exercises we have been having during the past several months, the Management team has been truly regaled and encouraged by the significant, yet unheralded, contributions by so many of our staff at all levels and locations over the past several years in laying a solid foundation for the high performing, professional organization we wish the Judiciary to be.
These contributions have ranged from the provision of improved physical facilities for both members of staff and members of the public, to establishing processes and procedures to improve, shape and transform the administration of justice in our country.

For instance have simplified and streamlined civil case management by introducing the Civil Procedure Rules in 2005. We have been able to improve our workflows and reduce delays by using Case Management Software and by re-engineering our Court processes. We have established systems and procedures for collecting and publishing court statistics and for measuring performance. As a part of our commitment to accountability we have been producing Annual Reports consistently since 1998.

We have embraced the latest information and communication technology to strengthen court recording, for instance, and also for facilitating hearings via video conferencing in situations where parties, because of distance, are unable to appear before the Court physically, including prisoners whose matters may be just for remand. The Magistracy Pilot Project, through its use of these technologies and implementation of new systems, has shown us the way forward for the modernization of the Judiciary. In addition to benefitting from the speed that comes with the new information technology, many of our stakeholders are now finding it much easier to access our because of the personalized assistance provided them by Court Customer Service Representatives in several Court locations.

Our operation of the Family Court as a pilot has been so successful that the project has become a national priority to be expanded and rolled out from its exiting St George West remit to other locations in the country. And the Judicial Educational Institute has become a leader in the training and development and continuing education of Judicial officers and support staff.
The creation of the Department of Court Administration pre-dates all of these developments. But it stands today as an acknowledgement of what was necessary if we wanted a Judiciary that would be able to respond effectively to the demands of the fast-paced society Trinidad and Tobago had become. This Department remains the driver behind the judicial transformation process, providing a blend of expertise to work towards sustainability of all our efforts in ensuring that cases are managed efficiently and effectively from commencement to disposition.

I can go on and on to cite many other examples to illustrate how far along the Judiciary has progressed in seeking to realize its vision as an accountable court system in which timeliness and efficiency are the hallmarks, while still protecting integrity, equality and accessibility and attracting public trust and confidence. But I pause to reflect on those I have highlighted as accomplishments of which we can all be justly proud, and to identify them as results of the hard work and unswerving commitment of so many, some of whom have left us, but many who are still here and can boast of having been in the service of the Judiciary for two and even three decades and even more.

That is why I was moved in my address at the Ceremonial Opening of the 2010-2011 Law Term back in September, to unreservedly proclaim: "I have the honour to lead an institution populated by an extraordinarily talented and dedicated staff. For the most part when called upon, and some times without being asked, Judicial officers as well as administrative and support staff, are always willing to go the extra mile to ensure that our customers are serviced. I know that everything is not yet as we wish it to be, we are getting there. But along the way I have often made severe demands as I challenge them to embrace and create the new high performance, professional judiciary. They continue to rise to the task."

In reinforcing this statement tonight, I find added inspiration from the 459 of our colleagues we will be honouring shortly, and who I wish to commend as an embodiment of the spirit that will lead us to the attainment of our goal.
I also want to salute those who have left us within the last two years – dear former colleagues such as Justice Carlton Best, Master Ralph Doyle, former Court Executive Administrator, Mr Gary Kelly, who, happily is with us this evening; former Chief Magistrate, Mr Sherman Mc Nichols, who remains in our thoughts and our prayers for improved health, and also all other former staff whose separation was as a result of retirement, or decisions on their part to direct their energies and talents elsewhere. And sadly, some who may have died, like Kitty Rajnauth. We will forever treasure their contributions. I also refer, not for the first time, to the impending retirement later this year of two stalwarts of the Trinidad and Tobago bench, Madame Justice Tewarie Reddy, and Mr Justice Ventour. We will have the opportunity to more appropriately thank them for their service to our establishment and by extension, but I wish to signal in advance how much we appreciate their tenure and how much they will be missed.

By the same token, there are many who have chosen to join us at this most crucial juncture in our establishment. They have come to us since our last Staff Appreciation Ceremony as Judges, Magistrates - and significantly we have a new Chief Magistrate in Mrs Marcia Ayers Caesar and we welcome her specially. We have had new Registrars added to our complement, new personnel in the Department of Court Administration, including Deputy Court Administrator, Cummings, and new staff in almost every department.

We have been seeking to attract the best skills and to enhance competencies in all areas to ensure that the Judiciary is adequately and appropriately resourced to satisfy the perennially increasing demands. But as our staff numbers continue to grow, we become even more seized of our responsibility to ensure a safe, healthy and caring work environment, and one in which we can foster further growth and development of people, not only to promote efficiency in our organization, but to improve those who wish to build a career in the Judiciary.
In furtherance of our commitment in all these areas, we have expanded our Human Resource Division to enable this unit to lead the charge in providing for the welfare of our staff, we now have on board an Occupational Safety and Health Officer, we are taking steps to consolidate our employee assistance programme with the impending recruitment of an Administrator, and we are restructuring the Judicial Educational Institute to more effectively cater for the further training of staff at all levels.

But I want to go a step further this evening as I acknowledge the presence of three Ministers of Government, the Director of Public Prosecutions, the Commissioner of Police, and the Commissioner of Prisons, whose respective portfolios and duties are intimately connected with the administration of justice in our country.

While we are of the view that within the Judiciary there is the competence, commitment, and given the right resources, the capacity for enabling and accomplishing the necessary reforms, we recognize that the transformation process can only be successful if a strategy, based on partnership with other justice sector agencies is implemented. Dramatic changes in our society and in our more immediate environment which have affected and will continue to affect us as employees of the Judiciary personally and institutionally dictate that it cannot be business as usual.

So that while we welcome these officials and are honoured that they accepted to be our special guests this evening, their presence is also reflective in part of the new approach we must adopt. We wish to emphasise the degree to which we value our partnership with them and our conviction that it is only through collaboration that we will reap the benefits we seek. Accordingly, in the coming weeks you will be hearing more and more about our collaboration with the institutions they represent as we seek to deepen our exchanges and to close any gaps in the processes within our respective remit that could impede our common goal: the effective administration of justice in Trinidad and Tobago.
Dear colleagues and friends, it is my view that in our efforts to respond to the societal and environmental changes before us, we must be forever focused on why the Judiciary exists in the first place. The Chief Justice of the Federal Court of Appeal in Canada, the Honourable John D Richard dealt with this issue quite succinctly when he stated: *The role of the judiciary is to interpret and apply the law and the Constitution, and to provide impartial adjudication of disputes between individuals; between the state and the individual; and, between different levels of government within the state. Unlike the other two branches, the judiciary is not accountable to any electorate or government for its decisions. Instead, the primary obligation of judges is to the law which is designed to protect all citizens.*

It is fair to conclude therefore that at the heart of all that we do and all the responses we make, is service to all citizens of Trinidad and Tobago. The quality of that service is also crucial. This evening we salute service and we promote the value of professionalism which impact one way or the other on the quality of the service provided. And I ask myself the question, why do we feel it incumbent upon us to emphasise these two words – service and professionalism – in the same breath as anchors of our function this evening.

In his inimitable play on words, when he was able to vociferously and incisively express himself, Muhammad Ali, generally known as “the Greatest, defined *service to others* as *the rent you pay for your room here on earth.*

Mohandas Ghandi’s related view was: *the best way to find yourself is to lose yourself in the service of others.*

And in a more contemporaneous suggestion, John Calvin Coolidge, 30th President of the United States noted: *No enterprise can exist for itself alone. It ministers to some great need, it performs some great service, not for itself, but for others; or failing therein, it ceases to be profitable and ceases to exist.*
Taking these eminent thoughts into consideration, and reflecting on our performance as the stewards of the administration of justice in Trinidad and Tobago, should we fear eviction because we have not been doing enough by way of providing service to others, and therefore failing to pay our rent for our room here on earth? Do we now have to find our way because we have been so immersed and lost in the provision of service to others? Or is our existence as an institution threatened because we have been failing to perform that great service, not to ourselves but to others, that is at the core of our remit as the Judiciary of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago?

And what of the QUALITY of that service we have been providing, assuming that we have been providing service at all? Has it been service given with *meticulous adherence to undeviating courtesy, honesty, and responsibility in one's dealings with customers and associates, plus a level of excellence that goes over and above the commercial considerations and legal requirements*, which incidentally is one definition of professionalism? Can we say further that in our consideration of professionalism, we have been *focused in our approach: we have pride in what we are doing; we are confident, competent, motivated towards a particular goal, committed to accountability; we show respect to people irrespective of their rank, status, ethnicity or gender; we are responsible, we are committed to word and deed, and always in control of our emotions.*

Whatever our conclusions, my appeal is that we do not become lost in the importance of buildings, of technology, of processes, rules, procedures. While crucial in any transformation, they all lose their significance if we do not put PEOPLES FIRST, at the forefront of the mix, and consider all people, including ourselves, as CUSTOMERS. Our mantra has to be that we exist to provide service to our customers, and we must accept this against an understanding that in this modern society in which information travels faster than the speed of light, today’s customers want service, HERE, they want it NOW, and they want it WITH EASE. Satisfying this is what defines QUALITY SERVICE. Living it is what instills a CULTURE OF SERVICE, and that is what we intend for the Judiciary of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago.
At the level of the management, these are some of the issues we have been addressing, and like Winston Churchill, have been discovering that all the great things are simple and many can be expressed in a single word: freedom, justice, honour, duty, mercy, hope, to add to some I have already outlined this evening, and to complement the many that your Management team has identified in seeking to determine the core values that should characterize and single out the people who serve at the Judiciary.

What is complex, however, is how do we realign the culture of our institution to effectively deal with the changes that have been taking place in our society, and to become a high performing, professional organization? That is the challenge we have decided to accept and over the next few weeks, as intimated by Ms Austin earlier this evening, we intend to engage all staff of the Judiciary in all locations, beginning in Tobago early next month to assist us in shaping our response to and understanding our respective roles in the new and sometimes most intimidating national environment.

For the moment, however, let us salute service… let us promote professionalism. Let us regard this as a precursor to a high performing, professional Judiciary, and more than anything else, let us celebrate our colleagues tonight as shining examples of these attributes. Let us enjoy the night. I thank you.