

Monsignor Gregory Ramkissoon

TALK TO THE ANTHONY N. SABGA CARIBBEAN
AWARDS for EXCELLENCE (Tenth Year)

April 11th 2015 - Performing Arts Centre – Port-of-Spain, Trinidad

Dr and Mrs Anthony N Sabga (Dr Anthony N Sabga and Mrs Minerva Sabga)

Directors of the ANSA McAL Foundation

Mr A Norman Sabga and Mrs Alma Sabga

Sir Shridath Ramphal and Lady Ramphal

Members of the Regional Eminent Persons Panel

Members of the Diplomatic Corps

Members of the Country Nominating Committees

Members of the Media

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen

Good evening all.

First of all I would like thank the Ansa Mcal Foundation for allowing me the opportunity to share some thoughts with you on this most auspicious occasion.

Congratulations to our laureates tonight - Dr. Paloma Mohammed of Guyana, Mr. Herbert A Samuel of St. Vincent and the Grenadines, Prof. Suresh Narine of Guyana and Prof. Patrick Hosein of Trinidad and Tobago.

Time certainly flies! This is the tenth Award Ceremony and it seems as though it was just a few years ago I was honoured by the Ansa Mc Cal foundation for our work.

At that time, I wondered about the usefulness of such an award - notwithstanding the monetary benefit, of course! Since then, I have seen the long-term reach and vision of Dr. Anthony Sabga and his team in the foundation. As I understand it, these awards were meant to honour those who have excelled in their varying fields of endeavour and to bolster and support the efforts of the awardees in their respective fields. They are NOT lifetime achievement awards, *per se*, but instead were meant to provide an incentive, both personal and financial to the beneficiary, so that his/her work can continue in full throttle, so to speak, and to encourage others to take-on the passing baton.

I could have done THREE things with the money and the recognition gained by this award. One, I could have taken the award as a personal recognition of the work done thus far and pat myself on the back ...full stop. But where would that have put me? Secondly, I could have seen the award as a springboard to do many other things related to what was already being done. In part, I chose this path....I used the recognition and the money to expand our work in the countries in which we served. Using the money as 'seed' money for project -proposals, and so we started our fourteenth home in Jamaica. We also we started farming Programmes in Zimbabwe. This seed money also helped us to get funds to expand our Christ in the Garbage programs in both Nicaragua and Dominican Republic. So, the idea of the Awards to be given to 'works in progress' was a well needed shot in the proverbial arm!

Lastly, we used some of the funds to train people in Jamaica from Zimbabwe, the Philippines and Kenya, and of course, Jamaica in the methods and principles of

setting up and maintaining Mustard Seed Communities in the countries in which we find ourselves.

In my opinion, Excellence is born internally, nurtured by external factors, and will reach its maturity when it serves the greater good. In my knowledge of these awards, the people chosen have all proven that this concept of excellence can be legitimately proven. I have kept track of some of the men and women who have been chosen over the years and I am here to testify that they have all been portraying excellence in their respective fields. We may wish to remember what Vince Lombardi had to say on the matter..." perfection is not attainable, but if we chase perfection we can catch excellence".

To the Laureates then, this is the right time to start thinking of how this occasion may be used for the advancement of your particular area of interest - be it scientific research, entrepreneurship or the arts. In my humble opinion, the recognition derived from this award can be used in the same ways in which we began.

The Caribbean is going through very challenging times economically, socially and even culturally. We all know of the economic challenges faced by a large proportion of our respective populations. From a social standpoint, we are experiencing, in all our territories the creeping attack of criminal activities and the erosion of our social fabric from all sides. Not so obvious, but just as serious, is the 'invisible' hand of the world wide web that's is also chipping away at our sound cultural practices and creative growth. We have been stopped in our tracks on the way to the structural transformation we started many moons ago. More than ever we need leaders in every field of endeavour to get us back on this track and to continue the journey to

self-determination. We can't put the full responsibility of persistent development solely on the backs of the political elite. We all have to contribute in the creation of engines of growth so that the yawning gap between the elite and the masses can be addressed in a timely manner.

Politics aside, there aren't many institutions in the region that we could look to for help in the business of advancing multiple strategies in the broader developmental agenda. Of course there are institutions that help us get there in many different ways, but the Ansa Mc Cal Foundation "kills two birds with one stone". It both recognises excellence in different fields and at the same time encourages this excellence (through grants and continued follow up) to foster maturity along the same continuum started by the person in their respective areas of interest.

This evening is about the awardees, mentioned above. When I look at the calibre of persons chosen for these awards, not only this year, but since the inception of this event, I am truly amazed at what we have achieved in the English-speaking Caribbean. Dr. Mohammed, with her blending of academics and the arts will no doubt continue to show the way forward for the strengthening of our cultural traditions among our young people. As mentioned earlier our culture is under attack and what better place to start fixing this but to recognise the problem and to take off there! As Joichi Ito puts it: "Most creative work is a process of people passing ideas and inspirations from the past into the future and adding their own creativity along the way".

Mr. Samuel, what good can come from Galilee? In this Easter season, we all recognise the place that was rejected by many has become the central place in Christendom. We may never know but St. Vincent and the Grenadines may in the

future, become the only island in the world totally changed by solar energy and universal alternative energy practices – and becoming that shining example to the rest of the world. We are all behind you when it comes to using alternative energy and cutting the cost to beneficiaries – especially the poor and the vulnerable.

Professor Narine, the many things you have done to advance the cause of applied science and bringing this to the Caribbean is a testament to the great deposit of knowledge and expertise we have in the English-speaking Caribbean. Indeed, we are in a well-placed position to positively affect the world in terms of our discovery and application of new ways of using technology in reference to the physical and chemical sciences. Keep going, Sir.

Finally, Professor Hosein, we continue to need people of competence in the area in which you find yourself, not only for the next few years, but indeed for the next few generations! I hope this honour and the money that comes with it will take you further along the line that you have charted out for yourself and others in our Region. All in all, we have over the years spotted talent in different fields which will not be left to get stale and stunted. With the increasing use of these talents to broaden and widen our social and technical capital, we will be in a good position to make an impact not only Regionally, but increasingly so, on the International level. Indeed, as Mahatma Gandhi once said...“we can be the change we want the world to be”. It was Ralph Waldo Emerson who reminded us that...“what you do speaks so loudly that I cannot hear what you say. Do not go where the path may lead, go instead where there is not path and leave a trail”.

As we honour you here today, and indeed to all present in this room, I recall the words of R L Stevenson... " Don't judge each day by the harvest you reap but by the seeds you plant". I am indeed proud to be in the company of such men and women not only now but for the long haul.

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