



ANTHONY N. SABGA

AWARDS E-NEWS



THE
ANTHONY N. SABGA
CARIBBEAN AWARDS
FOR EXCELLENCE

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Our Chairman bids 2020 Goodbye

As we prepare to turn the page on this most testing of years, with our families and loved ones close by, I am pleased to look back at some of the points of light in the gloom, and to look forward to the first few rays of a new dawn that seems imminent with the arrival of the Covid vaccines. The pandemic gave humanity a shock test, and for the most part the citizens of the world, and our little part of it, reaffirmed our commitment to each other and our way of life. We stepped up and donated resources and technology to help the less fortunate, and adjusted as necessary.

We at the Anthony N Sabga Caribbean Awards for Excellence changed course from our routine to deliver the honours to our 2020 laureates in small ceremonies in their home territories, rather than the gala to which we have become accustomed. These ceremonies were graced by the Presidents and Governors General of Jamaica, St Lucia, Guyana and Trinidad and Tobago. For the presence of these august personages, adding lustre to our laureates' achievements, we are grateful. We have posted the pictures on our social media pages, and we



Andrew Sabga, Chairman, ANSA McAL Foundation

invite you to share them if you have not already done so.

But the whole machinery of the Caribbean Awards continued to work. The nomination, research, and selection processes continued remotely. We were able to have a virtual selection meeting this year, and our 2021 laureates have been selected and will be revealed to the public early in 2021.

To Sir Shridath Ramphal and the other members of the Regional Eminent Persons Panel, our Country Nominating Committees and our Researchers, I extend our most grateful thanks. You all adapted and

delivered what we needed during this crucial time, and to you we owe a debt of gratitude. Technology aside, our organisation benefitted from a willingness to be flexible and embrace change, which was not always a comfortable process.

The final and most durable part of our awards, though, is comprised of our laureates. Without these exceptional people who work quietly and in obscurity for most of their lives, we would not have a reason for being.

I salute the 2020 laureates, Dr Shirin Haque of Trinidad & Tobago, Dr Olivene Burke of Jamaica, Mr Andrew Mendes of Guyana, and Mr Jallim Eudovic of St Lucia. Each one in his or her way works to make our Caribbean reality more humane, compassionate, smarter, and sustainable.

And this is the message I would like to leave the Caribbean Awards family and community at the end of 2020. Our laureates show us the best of our lives in their achievements. But their work shows us the areas in which we can do a little more to make not only our own, but our fellow citizens' lives a little better, more meaningful, and sometimes more bearable in light of the surprises nature and our own human failings can throw at us.

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Jallim Eudovic St Lucia

had been relegated to the scrap heap of development; young men and women who knew the angst of a colonial St Lucia, who had been chewed up and spat out by an apathetic system.

My father sought them out, went into their enclaves, redeemed them from destitution. He taught them how to breathe life into dead roots and stumps of wood which lay comatose on forest floors awaiting the flowering of the very talent he foresaw. He knew then, as I know now, that if we teach people to transform inanimate objects into statements of beauty and refinement, those same people will find in that process, their own transformative paths.

He believed this, not as some esoteric theory, but as his own life story. You see, he had moved to oil-rich Trinidad at the age of sixteen, and the fortunate apprentice to the famed Trinidadian sculptor, Ricardo Vincente. Eleven years later, he returned home to train young artisans and craftsmen, particularly in the southern community of Choiseul, St Lucia's mecca of traditional art and craft.

He was subsequently contracted by the government of the day to teach young men and women of that community to discover and explore their creativity beyond the utilitarian customs of traditional pottery and straw. He inspired them to make broader, bolder statements of self and identity.

Whether he intended it or not, my father was building an ark that would soon include my mother his life-partner, my siblings and I, the youngest of the Eudovic siblings. He was building an ark to carry his family and his art business across the flat horizon of agriculture into the dawning days of tourism.

Like my siblings before me, I was hoisted at the age of five onto a high stool at my father's work bench, my short legs barely reaching the highest rung. There I was introduced to sculpture and had to earn the respect of older siblings and a cohort of unrelated apprentices. There was no favor. Under my father's austere tutelage everyone was treated equally. It was a

One of my earliest memories is lying in bed, staring up at the wood-grained patterns of our bedroom ceiling, and being fully immersed in the richness of its abstract forms. For me, that bedroom ceiling was the roof of a world big enough to accommodate two adjoining beds which slept four brothers and two sisters.

That ceiling was my portal to another dimension. A dimension made infinite by the unwritten laws of pure imagination. The other side of that ceiling was the floor of my parent's souvenir shop; one of half-a-dozen structures which constituted our little family village, and the cluster of our fledgling family business.

Years later, I recognized that the ceiling under which I dreamt was the floor on which my parents realized their own dreams. This powerful symbolism, this duality, this irony of ceiling versus foundation, has stuck with me my entire life. Meanwhile, my father, a venerable sculptor, had for years traversed the length and breadth of the St Lucian space, like a messiah, spreading the gospel of art. He had returned complete with Afro and Dashiki, from his pilgrimage to Nigeria, where he studied contemporary and traditional sculpture.

But more significantly, he was charged with an undeniable determination to bring change to his society. He embraced many who



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competitive environment, and we all battled for supremacy.

The studio was also an epicentre for creative masters, and giants like Sir Derek Walcott and Leroy Clarke of Trinidad, when they visited, had a seismic effect on me as a constant reminder of excellence waiting to be attained.

Upon leaving Saint Mary's College, the alma-mater of Nobel Laureates Sir Arthur Lewis and Sir Derek Walcott, and I must add, St Lucia's first Anthony N Sabga Caribbean Awards Laureate, Dr Adrian Augier, I decided that I wanted to become a relevant voice in the art world.

I immediately realized that I had to emerge from my father's shadow, carve out my own path and chart my own course. Seized with that ambition, I did all I could to gain exposure. I took part in local, regional and international exhibitions. I worked tirelessly, burnt the midnight oil and then my candle, at both ends. I needed

to succeed as much as I needed to breathe, and quite often, suffered from headaches and acid reflux.

Thankfully, my efforts did not go unnoticed, and I soon found myself in places as far flung as Africa, Europe, Canada and China. I went on to create monuments for several cities across China, and here at home, I have become something of a sought-after artist. All this, I believe, because I was raised by a village.

Whether we acknowledge it or not, we are all shaped by our early experiences, and by the influence of others in our lives. And, while I am thankful for my journey, I am also painfully aware that too often across the region, the development of our creatives is stymied by a persistent lack of resources and support.

Many less fortunate, do not see any reward in cultivating their creative talents; so, they settle for the mundane, and ultimately deprive society of their gifts. We are all the poorer for that deprivation, such that our region is

afflicted by a maddening mentality which deems things valuable only when their contribution to GDP can be measured in US dollars and EC cents.

Against this myopia, artists are seen as mendicants; charity cases to be humoured and patronized. We have failed in too many ways to create environments conducive to creative thinking and creative expression.

Like the inverse ceiling of my youth, artistic thought, expression and creativity are the true foundations of our collective humanity, the nutrients which feed our souls, and alone have the power to curb the violence of self-deprecation, to redress the social and economic dysfunction which plagues us all.

The power of artists is neither decorative nor superficial. Artists hold the DNA of our spirit, the genome of our race, the mirror of our circumstance. They are transformative guardians at the portal of imagination, staring up at the infinite possibilities beyond wooden ceilings.

All civilization is built on the invaluable contributions of creatives. Everything man-made has been designed. The artist deals with issues of need and necessity as much as identity, self-actualization and self-projection.

The artist documents and celebrates the most important aspects of who we are. Limited only by the scope of our imagination and the breadth of our dreams, we catalyze the renewal of perspective, perception, colour, form, shape and rhythm, so that all may learn to see new possibilities under our private ceilings, beyond our public hindrances.

As Caribbean people, the next phase of our societal evolution depends heavily on critical and creative thought and practice. American President John Quincy Adams highlighted the importance of this in his memorable words: ***I have to study politics and war, so that my sons can study mathematics, commerce and agriculture, so their sons can study poetry, painting, statuary and music.***

This is why these Anthony N Sabga



His Excellency Sir Neville Cenac, Governor General of St Lucia, and Jallim Endovic



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Caribbean Awards for Excellence, are so important to us all. They represent a huge vote of confidence and commitment otherwise unavailable within our community. They also affirm that excellence will be rewarded and liberate us from the crippling mindset that validation comes from someone other than ourselves.

Our people are majestic. Only a few centuries old, we have contributed beyond our size, to the global past, present and future. So, it is extremely commendable that a Caribbean private sector entity has seen fit to recognize the efforts of exemplary Caribbean citizens.

I am honoured to be considered among that number and take this opportunity to thank the ANSA McAL Foundation for its ongoing commitment to Caribbean development. With its generous monetary prize, this award comes at a most opportune time and will help support our craft development and retail company, aptly named Papa-Bois. This venture aims at developing, marketing and exporting indigenous clay, straw and wood craft items to global markets.

I have decided to focus almost exclusively on dying indigenous art forms from the community of Choiseul, in an effort to rescue

our cottage industry via a series of interventions which share knowledge and restore standards. This will ultimately increase product value and ensure long-term sustainability. Choiseul, by the way, is the very same community to which my father returned in his youth, and as you can tell by now, I am honoured to walk in his footsteps.

I am also working on developing an international art residency in St Lucia, which will receive local regional and international artists. The primary purpose is to give promising and established artists, writers, poets and playwrights a serene space to create their best work. These creatives will also be asked to contribute by way of mentoring and training of our young budding artists.

I have not quite come full circle; not in my work nor in this less than brief address. But, I have grown to realize that the shadow of my father was never really a shadow at all. It was the shade of a generous flamboyant in the middle of a fertile savannah. Clearly, our destinies are entwined, and like him, my future work will also be devoted to impacting the lives of others. As for the shade, I no longer flee from it. I will rest there a while, before pushing on to the next astounding height.



Senator Fortuna Belrose, Joseph Eudovic, Joycelyn Eudovic, Jeannine Giraudy-McIntyre, Jallim Eudovic, and Sir Neville Cenac, Governor General of St Lucia

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Andrew Mendes, Guyana

recognized with this award. It is also tremendously humbling – you see, this award isn't just about me. It is, in large part, a testimony to the decades of effort and support of many others who contributed to the achievements being recognized today – my family, our staff, our community and our partners.

The foundation of our family's business was laid in the early 1960s by my parents, Derek and June Mendes. Their hard work and perseverance sustained a business which has seen its share of ups and downs. Through all of it, they built a company culture based on an ethos that if we take care of our employees, they will take care of our customers and that will take care of us all.

Through decades of economic cycles, we have stayed true to this code, and it has served us well – during the Burnham regime my parents had our most profitable business nationalized and couldn't get foreign exchange or import licenses for our products. Yet still they never laid anyone off and still were able to put three boys through boarding school and university in the UK – to this day I don't know how they did it. I must also honor the role that our Trinidad partners, Esmond and Junior Farfan, played in our journey. During their time with the company, our partnership was one built on mutual respect, honesty and integrity – there were no written agreements, just two parties that worked at maintaining a mutually beneficial and respectful relationship. They left an imprint on the company which endures to this day.

Good afternoon Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, thank you for your kind words. Before I begin, I would like to extend my congratulations to all 2020 Anthony N Sabga Award winners. It is an extraordinary honour to be recognized in such esteemed company.

Standing up here today, I reflect back to how it felt in September of last year, when I received a call informing me I had been nominated for this award. I was both thrilled and surprised. It is extremely gratifying to be seen in the same light as others who have been

This manner of doing business has, in fact, been in part responsible for our company's ability to navigate particularly rough waters this year. I am grateful to be able to stand here in

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front of you and report that during this global pandemic, the oil price crash and an elections nightmare, we, with the commitment and support of our staff and our Canadian Partner Crosbie Group, have lived up to my parents' legacy.

Through hard work and perseverance, we decided to not waste the crisis. Instead, this uncertain period helped galvanize our team, and inspired us to see the opportunity in front of us to improve our management processes, and ensure our company was in a position to sustain itself throughout this difficult time – this led to us improving our profitability, our cash flow and enabled us to continue my parents' legacy of the 70s and 80s by continuing to honour our commitments to our staff. The lesson in this for all of us, I believe, is the importance of having open, transparent relationships, and acting with integrity. Just like the support my parents got from FT Farfan through many difficult periods, Crosbie Group's offer of support would never have been extended had we not had a relationship built on openness, transparency and integrity.

While this has been a difficult year, our future is bright, very bright. I am excited for Guyana's youth. Mr President, I guess like me you have heard the refrain that you can't find good labour here – that is not my experience. We had one of the world's largest oil and gas training companies come to Guyana to train our people to work on the Liza Destiny. Following completion of the program, the trainers stated categorically that these were the best trainees they had ever trained in terms of their diligence and commitment to learn. I am happy for our young people. They no longer have to leave our shores to find good jobs.

Listening to you last Wednesday, Mr President, speaking about your plans for

Guyana, I am excited about the opportunities that are finally coming Guyana's way. Our youth will rise to the challenge if we train them well, pay them well and treat them well. To quote the adage: "We are not worried that if we train our people well, they will leave; we are worried that if we don't train our people well, they will stay!" We don't find good labour, we just create good workers. Our future is built on our young people. Let's make sure they are prepared to take us there.

Before I conclude, I do want to comment on the importance of giving back to our communities. At Farfan & Mendes, we believe that strong businesses help build strong communities. We must always be aware that we are part of a wider community, and just as we benefit from their custom, we have a role to play in giving back to that wider community, especially those people who eke out a difficult existence in our interior. People in town who have sometimes taken for granted a consistent income, cannot comprehend what this does to an interior

community – at our ranch on the Berbice River, run by my brother Alex, next to Wiruni, we employ up to 140 people, of which 70% are women.

The work is extremely technical, being a seed nursery for corn and soybeans – basically at any one time we can have 100,000 different varieties that have to be tracked through planting, cross pollinating, harvesting, shelling and then shipment to the US. All this technical work is handled almost entirely by people from the community who were trained over time. That we have been able to give them the opportunity of good, well-paying, consistent jobs and give back to a community that I and my brothers spent so much of our childhood in, is something that we are grateful to have been



*His Excellency President Mohamed Irfaan Ali of Guyana
and Mr Andrew Mendes*



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able to do. To see that community brighten up, fresh paint on the houses, lights at night and an outboard on nearly every boat is encouraging to us.

Our company has for years supported young people through sponsorship of the U15 Cricket team of the RHYSTC as well as suicide-prevention, the Caiman Project at Yupukari, the peanut butter school feeding program in Rupununi, along with countless seminars on the safe and effective use of our products in most of our interior communities.

Of late we have been working along with the TVET program providing psychometric testing, training materials for courses and apprenticeship opportunities for their trainees. As our economy moves into unprecedented growth, we risk creating a wider gap between the wealthy and the less fortunate. I would

encourage all businesses that enjoy this growth period to ensure you give back to your communities in meaningful ways.

It is only a short time to recognize the support of so many people that have contributed to this award. My parents, my family, my brothers and their families, our staff, our partners, and our communities have all contributed in significant ways to this recognition I am receiving today.

I would like to thank all the unknown members of the nomination committee, the members of the Eminent persons Committee that found the submissions by my referees so compelling and the referees themselves. Mr President, thank you for hosting myself and my family here and for your kind words on my award.



Ariana Mendes, Marie June Mendes, Andrew Mendes and Nicola Slater-Mendes

Laureate Speeches, Public & Civic Contributions



Dr Olivene Burke Jamaica

many persons who have contributed in remarkable ways to this prestigious award that has been bestowed upon me, the Anthony N Sabga Caribbean Award for Excellence in Public and Civic Contributions. I am extremely humbled and still saying aloud *Really! Me?* every time I think about it.

You see, my whole life has been a transformative process both personally and publicly. It wasn't easy but it was worth it. It was just so natural to give of myself without anticipating a reward. That's how my sisters and I were socialized. My rewards over these 35 years lie in the hundreds of youth whose lives have been changed, the powerless women who have been empowered, the at-risk men who are now graduates of tertiary institutions, the hundreds of vulnerable senior

The Most Honourable Sir Patrick Allen, Governor General of Jamaica; Sir Kenneth Hall and Lady Hall; Sir Shridath Ramphal, Chair of the Regional Eminent Persons Panel; Mr A. Norman Sabga, Patron; Mr Morin Seymour, Chair, Jamaica Nominating Committee; fellow laureates, distinguished friends, family, a pleasant good afternoon.

I will begin by singing a few words from Cece Winans: "No it wasn't easy but it was worth it". These words reverberate in my heart as I ascend this podium at this memorable and nostalgic moment. This afternoon, my words of thanks are not enough to express my deep gratitude to the

citizens who were fed and clothed and the babies, my favourites who were secured at least one proper meal per day.

And so it is with a great sense of humility and gratitude that I stand here to express a heartfelt thank you to the many persons who have been instrumental in the transformation of my life's journey, my work, my volunteerism and now achieving this enviable award to continue the process for many years to come.

I begin by thanking the late Dr Anthony N Sabga for conceptualizing our own prestigious Caribbean Awards for Excellence. To Mr A Norman Sabga, the now Patron of the Awards, I feel extra



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privileged today. You see, Sir, you and your team have boldly faced the many challenges brought on by the Covid-19 pandemic since early this year, and have creatively and innovatively devised these ways to bestow the awards on my fellow 2020 laureates and I. Thank you.

To members of the Regional Eminent Persons Selection Panel, and Country Nominating Committees: I know your task had not been easy. I am thankful to you. To Maria Superville-Neilson who carried the wonderful news in such a graceful way. Thank you and your team for recreating me. Did you see my ANSA social media Facebook and Instagram picture how I just popped out of a cell phone? Simply amazing.

I would not be standing here today had it not been for God and my parents. Life in the innercity in the late 70s early 80s was horrible. But my Mama and Papa were a good balance of love, firmness, dedication to family, spirituality and selflessness. So while I am happy to be receiving the award, I am also somewhat sad. The 30th of this month marks the 9th anniversary of the death of my father, one week before I walked across the platform of the UWI to receive my PhD. Now I am receiving the most prestigious Caribbean Award and he

is not here. But I know he is smiling proudly. Thank you, Papa, for the resilience that you passed on to us.

It also makes me sad that my mother is not able to be here because of the Covid 19 pandemic. She lives with my youngest sister in Atlanta. These two beautiful souls made tremendous sacrifices to raise 5 girls successfully in west Kingston. So you see, my work and service to the marginalized

have been moulded by the realities of my background and the knowledge that if you can provide light to, someone without hope, then you would have achieved. The truth of the matter is that I do what I do because I am passionate about it and I enjoy what I do, especially the services that take me outside

of comfort spaces and into the belly of innercity schools and communities to transform the livelihood of the less fortunate and oftentimes hopeless. I would not even recognize the gamut of the work that I do had it not been for those who allowed me to slow down and appreciate the many contributions that so often go unseen, especially in your own space. I am inspired to continue to do what I do best, to fulfil my God-given purpose.

Professors Gordon Shirley and Ian Boxill, Mrs Chevannes and Mrs Campbell, Professor Ishenkumba Khawa, Mr Henry



His Excellency Sir Patrick Allen, Governor General of Jamaica and Dr Olivene Burke

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and Wilson. I thank you for recommending me. And to you Mr Morin Seymour for presenting the work to the Committee. A very special thanks to you Minna Israel. You are such a motivator. To borrow your words Minna: "You're such a darling". You inspire me. Lady Rheima Hall you hold a very special place in my heart forever. You know that. To Denise Eldemire Shearer, Norma, Marvalyn, Tarik, Shenhaye, Michael, and Vanessa my personal soundboard, thank you.

My dear principal Professor Dale Webber, thank you, Sir, for being there and supporting the continuation of my work. I am honoured and I promise you sir that the university-community engagement will be around for a long while. The seed was firmly planted by the late Barry Chevannes. It has taken on new and expanded dimensions in these last 10 years since his passing and it promises to be around for generations to come.

A special thanks to my MSS staff. Both past and present. But there are really no past staff because they all continue to work as

unpaid staff. The present staff are Horatio, Yanique, Angella and Shatha. Together we work as one family to make things work with the little resources we have.

Finally, my family and friends. My husband Harven and children Kemoi, Kamol and Kaedi I could not have done it without you. You are the wind beneath my wings. I thank you for your many sacrifices to advance my work. You have been the drivers for pick-up of materials and equipment, painters and carriers of boxes and banners. As a med student, Kaedi is part of the medical team on health project sites. You see they do everything with me. Now my sweet granddaughter Sarai and her beautiful mom Mrs Burke, a Registered Nurse, have effortlessly joined the volunteer staff.

My sisters Alice Berry-Gayle who is here today, Charmaine, Albertha and Mavis, my friends of over 30 years; Ingrid, Maxine, Jennifer, and my Lions Club of Mona, thank you for all your contributions in cash, kind and time. You are the loudest fans in the club. Thank you to anyone I may have missed and congratulations to the other laureates who are receiving their awards in a similar fashion.



Harven Burke, Dr Olivene Burke, Kaedi Burke, Kamol Burke, and Alice Berry-Gayle



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Dr Shirin Haque, Trinidad & Tobago

– but in the Caribbean, we had no one. This is home. This is where I could make a difference. This is where we make a stand. There is pitch and there is mud here! What comes to mind? J'ouvert? You feeling to *Dingolay* and *Ramajay*? A little road paving perhaps? Anything but astronomy, right? Well the mud volcanoes and pitch lake in Trinidad holds clues to understanding life in the universe. How mind blowing is that? Decoding life on Mars and Titan? We brought it home to the Caribbean with our natural resources! The dance of two black holes? The historic Rosetta mission of landing a probe on comet? Yes, we did contribute data there too, from our unique vantage point in the Caribbean.

And Trinidad and Tobago shall be forever immortalised among the stars, long after I am gone...with an exoplanet and its host star named by our people, for our people, *Dingolay* and *Ramajay*! Next time you look at the Leo constellation – that's our exo-world out there.

Distinguished guests, what an absolute honour to be here!

Once upon a time, there was a little girl – born in a village, who never went to school till age seven – unable to read English or do Maths. But the darkness of the village skies with its twinkling stars beckoned. She grew up to be told astronomy was certainly not a viable career! And certainly not in the Caribbean. As you have probably guessed, that little girl was me...clearly a little hard headed! There are just about 13,000 astronomers in the entire world and less than 20% of them are women. Against the odds, here I stand before you. I never applied for any astronomy positions at foreign universities – I always felt there were many astronomers abroad who could contribute there

There is nothing that makes one feel overwhelmingly special and completely insignificant at the same time as the Universe can. By the time I am done with my remarks, in a few short minutes – that is how long it took for the fate of the entire 13.7 billion years of the universe to be sealed. Every one of us, the hydrogen that makes us up was only manufactured in those first three minutes. Next time someone asks you how old you are, forget about rounding down, you are 13.7 billion years old!

I am not sure what is more staggering – the Universe around us or the power of human intellect to decipher it with the tools of mathematics and physics and insatiable curiosity. Yet the skills of our students and enjoyment of mathematics are falling – this

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must be addressed! Right now, the world is in a tailspin...who you gonna call? No, not the *Ghostbusters*! It's the science and technology that will save us from the scourge of the coronavirus. Investment in science and technology is a proven path to the economic development of nations. The Caribbean has some of the brightest people in the world who for lack of opportunities have left – we must create a space for them to serve at home.

I never believed that I would see science under attack – I am seeing the rise of the Flat Earthers – I cannot stress enough how troubling it is to see these trends, after the thousands of years humanity took to arrive where we are scientifically and technologically, there is danger of misinformation and dogma more now than ever before. To quote Feynman – *I would rather have questions that can't be answered than answers that can't be questioned.* This mindset took a thousand years to change as did the ability to conceptualize the idea of numbers, and then 500 years more after that to come up with the idea of zero! Ideas are game changers and they can come from anywhere.

So, I want to improve the chances that our Caribbean can be a game changer too by investing in our youth and children and igniting their passion for science. Curiosity is contagious – anyone around a bunch of 5-year olds will know that. I have just launched a YouTube channel for kids, “The Enchanted Forest”, where they send in questions in astronomy and Dr Haque, the astronomer, answers them. What are vampire stars and nebulae? – asked a six-year-old girl. Yet, we kill our greatest enterprise of curiosity and

discovery by traditional schooling with a focus on exams where doctors, lawyers and engineers are still seen to be the only viable careers by our youths.

Carl Sagan inspired a generation – we are that generation. He said: *We live in a society exquisitely dependent on science and technology, in which hardly anyone knows anything about science and technology.* That was over twenty-five years ago and is even more true today!

So, your kindness to me has been overwhelming and empowered by this award, I look forward to establishing a studio for the communication of science from our Caribbean perspective even as my first documentary *Adventures in Discovery* was born out of a pride to show the great science happening in the region. The Centre for Global Peace and Citizenship in the USA took notice and invited me for its screening. Science for peace and development, yes. Astronomy diplomacy for a better world. Girls in science matter. They have always mattered to me. I hope to establish a mentorship programme for young girls in science and expand financial aid where needed.

So, to all of you – my family who are here – Deva and Farishta and those who couldn't be – Jehana and Amaal in the United Kingdom – my mom at home and my father in another realm in this universe, but his lesson in life, coined in just two words, has always been my guiding light – *help humanity* – I say my deepest and heartfelt *Thank You.* To the nominating committee of Trinidad and Tobago, chaired by Ms Helen Drayton who is truly an inspiration! Thank you for taking a chance on me. I am forever humbled, indebted and at your service. You have handed me the torch and it is now my turn more than ever to



Her Excellency President Paula-Mae Weekes, President of Trinidad and Tobago, and Dr Shirin Haque



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light every candle in the darkness towards scientific enlightenment.

I accept this award on behalf of all little starry-eyed girls and women who have been told that girls are not good at mathematics and physics is for engineering and boys and astronomy? You are not getting a job with that! For that, I thank the University of the West Indies who cradled my curiosity from learning to teaching to making astronomy happen enough for the world to sit up and take notice. Something is right, when the National Science Foundation in the USA and American Association of Arts and Sciences, and United Nations Programme on Space Applications reaches out to you in the Caribbean and not you to them.

I share Louis Pasteur's sentiment: *Science knows no country, because knowledge belongs to humanity, and is the torch which illuminates the world. Science is the highest personification of the nation because that nation will remain the first which carries the furthest the works of thought and intelligence.*

ANSA McAL Foundation, you have sent the message loud and clear that women can do science, in outlier fields like astronomy and thrive, be recognised and be rewarded in the Caribbean. What more can one ask for? My deepest thank you. We are on the right path for progress. For fans of Star Trek... Qap'la! (hand motion) Success to all in Klingon! Or rather, I end with the more familiar message in Vulcan... live long and prosper!



Farishta Copilab, Dr Shirin Haque, Deva Sharma



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Merry Christmas and a Happy 2021



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