



The National Gas Company of Trinidad and Tobago Limited

Media Launch of NGC Bocas Lit Fest 2016

March 16, 2016

Remarks by Maria Thorne | President, NGC (Ag.)



Mrs. Joanne Deoraj, Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Planning and Development

Mr. Jason Julien, Deputy CEO, Business Generation, First Citizens

Mr. Gregory Camejo, Group Executive, Corporate Services, One Caribbean Media Limited

Ms. Grace Anthony, Director, Heritage Library, The National Library and Information System Authority

Ms. Marina Salandy-Brown, Festival Founder and Director, NGC Bocas Lit Fest

Representatives from the National Gas Company of Trinidad and Tobago Limited, NGC, First Citizens Group, One Caribbean Media and the National Library

Festival Organizers

Members of the Media

Authors, Writers, Poets, Artists

Ladies and Gentlemen

Good morning,

Since its inception, The National Gas Company of Trinidad and Tobago Limited (NGC) has consistently delivered on its mandate to ensure that the wealth derived from our

country's natural gas development profits the nation as a whole. Beyond making direct contributions to Government revenues, the Company, and the larger NGC Group to which it belongs, has an extensive Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) portfolio. Subsumed under our Group's CSR initiatives are NGC initiatives in sport, youth and community development, the arts and culture, environmental preservation and education. For the past four years, the NGC Bocas Lit Fest has been one of our flagship investments, and in 2016, we are happy to stand once again as title sponsors of this Festival.

The NGC Group, like all our industry peers, is challenged by precarious commodity prices, and even as we try to contain costs, we need to ensure that where we *do* spend, our investments are solid and worthwhile. NGC's continued support of the Bocas Lit Fest stems from an appreciation of its altruistic ethic, its patriotism, and its stunning growth and achievements over the past few years. The NGC Bocas Lit Fest has turned the page for many of our local and regional authors by aggressively marketing our Caribbean literature to both domestic and international audiences with great success. This festival is about celebrating our stories, cultivating our talent and inspiring our people to imagine in ink. But its work also resonates on a different level.

If UNESCO statistics are to be believed, Trinidad and Tobago's population aged fifteen and above has a literacy rate of almost 99%. By dictionary definitions, that means that nearly everyone over fifteen can read and write, which would be a point of pride for any nation. However, UNESCO qualifies its definition of literacy to designate the ability to read and write, with understanding, *a short, simple statement on one's everyday life*. By so meagre a metric, a 99% literacy rate suddenly becomes significantly less impressive.

Literacy is something so fundamental to our existence that we take it for granted, but the truth is that in Trinidad and Tobago, there are thousands- children and adults alike- who struggle to read and write, and without due diligence, the numbers could climb. Our children are being schooled in language on social media platforms, where the need for brevity has reduced communication to strings of acronyms and emoticons, and rendered proper spelling and grammar optional. English inaptitude goes undetected on too many signs, ads, and graphics on vehicle windscreens parading misplaced apostrophes, misspelled words, mismatched subjects and verbs.

There is an urgent need to ignite a love of reading and writing among all sectors of our population, not just for the sake of leisure, but because exposure to literature will raise the *standard* of literacy in our country. In that context, the NGC Bocas Lit Fest is more than just a festival of stories and words. It is a targeted intervention with implications for our human development, and we at NGC are fully supportive of that purpose.

NGC is thrilled to play such an important role in an event that excites and inspires thousands of readers and writers alike. The rewards for the writers and artists are not just creative but financial, as the Festival provides valuable business opportunities for members of the creative sector.

In closing, I reiterate our pride in partnering with the Bocas Lit Fest for what promises to be another year of stellar literary showcases, captivating performances and critical explorations of Caribbean literature. We wish the Festival's organizers every success, and thank them for their tireless efforts in service of literacy and Caribbean authorship.

Thank you.