



**SPEECH FOR MR ROOP CHAN CHADEESINGH
DEPUTY CHAIRMAN, NGC
THE OPENING CEREMONY/COMMISSIONING OF THE
HELENA CHARLES HOME FOR SENIOR CITIZENS
Wednesday 7th December, 2011 at 10:00am**

Mr Felix Logie, Master of Ceremonies and Member of the Board of the Helena Charles Home for Senior Citizens

Honourable Nizam Baksh, Minister of Community Development

Dr the Honourable Glen Ramadharsingh, Minister of the People and Social Development

Mr Fitzgerald Jeffrey, Member of Parliament for La Brea

Dr Jennifer Rouse, Director of Ageing, Ministry of Social Development

Members of the Board of the Helena Charles Home for Senior Citizens

Other distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen, members of the media

Good morning.

I am very pleased to join you today for this long-awaited opening of the Helena Charles Home for Senior Citizens. This project forms part of our corporate social responsibility initiatives, through which the National Gas Company continues to provide opportunities for a better quality of life for its communities. More importantly, this is a major achievement for the community of La Brea and its environs, and a proud moment for the many individuals, ministries, and corporate entities which contributed to its successful completion.

Our Corporate Social Responsibility programme has put NGC among the top corporate citizens in Trinidad and Tobago. By adhering to fixed focus areas and geographic spread, we have been able to make meaningful contributions for the benefit of both local communities and the wider national community. To a large extent, our CSR initiatives mirror our business focus on sustainability as projects such as these are chosen which can shape lives for the long-term. In this regard, we do not see ourselves as benefactors, but as partners who add our resources to those of the recipient in such a way that we can both make a difference.

I believe that the Christmas season is an appropriate time for a happy event such as this, because whatever your beliefs, you cannot deny that Christmas is a time for sharing and giving. Sharing and giving are what the Helena Charles Home has always been about, ever since its inception 79 years ago, when it was known as the La Brea Senior Citizens' Home or La Brea "Poor House." It is one of the earliest institutions of its kind in Trinidad and Tobago, and as a result, is etched indelibly in the social history of La Brea. One of its founding members and Matron with thirty-

two (32) years of unbroken dedicated service, modelled the home into a place of peace and purpose for the residents. That matron was called Helena Charles after whom this facility is named.

The Helena Charles Home for Senior Citizens Inc, as it is now called, is a non-profit, non-governmental organization, registered with the Ministry of the People and Social Development. We at NGC would like to think that it is a model facility and prototype for future senior citizens centres in Trinidad and Tobago.

The project was first brought to our attention by a son of the soil, Dr Vernon Scoon, after the Home's own efforts at raising funds met with little success. Recognising the need for a new facility and the fact that La Brea is one of the valued communities of the NGC group, the company took on the role of negotiator/fund-raiser.

I am pleased to note that this project is a wonderful example of a collaborative effort. Support was forthcoming from ministries in the Trinidad and Tobago Government, namely:

- the Ministry of the People and Social Development and the Ministry of Health which provided the operational guidelines for the design of the facility, funding and part sponsorship of materials;
- Palo Seco Agricultural Enterprises Limited (PSAEL), a subsidiary of PETROTRIN which leased land to the Home;
- Trinidad Offshore Fabricators (TOFCO Engineering) provided administrative services, site supervision and sponsorship;
- Lake Asphalt (1978);
- Foundation for the Enhancement and Enrichment of Life (FEEL);
- The National Lotteries Control Board (NLCB);
- ASCO, along with other corporate sponsors which offered financial contribution and sponsorship of construction materials;
- NGC's support has been both financial and technical, and for the duration of the project, provided project design, project management and engineering services.

Special mention must be made of NGC's Community Relations team - Mr Hasely Crawford who played a significant role in coordinating assistance from various stakeholders and companies, as well as NGC's project coordinator, Mr. Sircliffe Thompson for the invaluable contribution that he has made toward getting the project off the ground, in the face of many challenges and setbacks. Mr. Thompson designed the building from 'scratch' and provided the Technical and Human support. His meticulous foresight, technical expertise, commitment and unwavering dedication to this project were unflinching and unparalleled.

This collaboration is what true community spirit is all about. It is reminiscent of Minister Baksh's message for World Volunteer Day earlier this week about working in partnership to light up our communities for the present and future generations. Today we are also lighting up our valued elders.

Too often, growing technology and individualist thinking have deceived us into believing that if you want something done right, you do it yourself. But our forefathers had something called 'gayap', meaning community co-operation towards a common goal. It worked in the past, and I believe it will work for all time. I can only hope that the spirit of 'gayap' that we showed in achieving what we have here, remains with us, and that we continue to apply it elsewhere. In this way, government, industry, business and the private citizenry can work together on the premise that co-operation is the most effective way to get things done.

We extend our heartfelt appreciation to all the partners in this project for their investment and goodwill.

NGC has had a long and positive relationship with La Brea. Some of our collaborations include the construction and support of the Servol Regional Life Centre, provision of skills training/education in welding and building construction to the youth of La Brea, restoration and expansion of the La Brea presbytery, sponsorship of the Eldwin Noel Games and the La Brea Zonal Games as well as bringing our highly demanded NGC Right On Track and Basketball Coaching Caravan to La Brea. Most recently, NGC sponsored the La Brea Police Youth Club. Despite the delays and difficulties experienced with construction of this facility, today we are celebrating its successful completion.

The Home now has an area of 6,600 sq. ft. placed on 16,218 sq. ft. of land and can accommodate twenty-eight (28) persons. Following today's commissioning, the Home is committed to providing the following services:

- Live-in accommodation for the elderly who are otherwise unable to provide shelter and ongoing care for themselves.
- Meals, laundry and light recreation for residents of the Home.
- Health care for the elderly.
- Meals on a daily basis for the homeless and elderly non-residents.
- Skills practice and training for On-the-Job Trainees (OJTs) from the Geriatric Assistance Partnership Programme (GAPP).
- Programmes in handicraft, story-telling, pot and trough (Grow Box) agriculture and other activities suitable to the aged and physical capabilities of the residents.

As recently articulated by the Division of Ageing, while there are "some interesting ideas about engaging the elderly as communities and as participants in the wider society, . . . the quality of their care must come first."

We congratulate Mr. Pascal, the secretary of the home for his exemplary focus, resilience and perseverance during the reconstruction process.

Today we mark the opening of a fine building. Over the last week, there was increased activity as the building was transformed into a home with people being moved in. Our goal was, with the help of our friends, to achieve this before Christmas. This, ladies and gentlemen, is the kind of thing that can happen when people work together in an atmosphere of mutual respect to achieve a common goal.

Ladies and Gentlemen, I hope that I have adequately expressed NGC's genuine commitment to making a difference to the community of La Brea.

On behalf of everyone at NGC, I once again congratulate the Helena Charles Senior Citizens Home and wish them well in their future endeavours.

Thank you.