



## **Speech – Tribute to President Dumarsais Estimé**

*On the occasion of*

the posthumous award presented to President Dumarsais Estimé

by the AYITI COMMUNITY TRUST

Miami, October 18, 2025

**Honorable Organizers,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

My name is **Marie-Florence Estimé**,  
the third of the four children born to **President Dumarsais Estimé** and his wife  
**Lucienne Heurtelou**.

My two elder brothers, **Jean-Robert and Philippe**,  
sadly left us, in 2025 and 2022 respectively.

Today, I am the eldest of our family,  
and it is on behalf of **my sister Régine**, of our children, our grandchildren and the  
entire Estimé family  
that I am speaking on this occasion — *from afar*,  
as I unfortunately could not be with you in person today.

**I first wish to express my deep gratitude to the Ayiti Community Trust**  
for honoring the memory of my father,  
by posthumously awarding him the **Grandèt Award**.

**This distinction,**

which celebrates the great nation-builders of Haiti, touches us profoundly, for it recognizes the commitment of a man whose entire life was devoted to the service of the Haitian people.

**Born in Verrettes in 1898,**

and of modest origins,

Dumarsais Estimé embodied, from a young age, the conviction that knowledge and work were the instruments of dignity, emancipation, and economic development.

**A lawyer in Saint-Marc,**

elected Deputy in 1930,

President of the Chamber of Deputies in 1935,

then Minister of Education, Agriculture and Labor in 1937,

he was elected President of the Republic on August 16, 1946,

and devoted all his energy to opening the doors of the future to the children of the Haitian people.

**At his inauguration, he humbly declared:**

*“You have chosen, among those who sought your votes, a man who could not claim the brilliance of a great name, nor the prestige of illustrious birth. What the masses have given me today, I pledge to return to them by devoting myself to their cause.”*

**These words reflected his conception of power:**

**to serve above all, with dignity, justice, and respect for the Civil Service**

For him - as Minister of Education and later as President - education became the cornerstone of national development:

the fight against illiteracy,

the construction of schools,

the modernization of the educational system -

the **Dumarsais Estimé Program** carried high his conviction that

knowledge and learning are the keys to freedom and collective progress.

**But his work went far beyond education.**

The record of his reforms remains remarkable:

- He promoted the development of rural areas, the construction of educational and agricultural infrastructures, and the modernization of teaching.
- He enacted a new Labor Code, protecting workers' rights and fostering fairer economic growth.
- **And above all, in July 1947, under his leadership, Haiti achieved what history will remember as “The Financial Liberation”:** the full and final repayment of the **infamous Independence Debt**, that unjust and crushing tribute of **150 million gold francs**, equivalent to approximately **21 billion U.S. dollars today**, imposed by King Charles X of France in 1825, and whose burden — worsened by the foreign loans Haiti was forced to contract, including from American banks, to make those payments — weighed heavily upon the nation throughout the 19th century and the first half of the 20th.

This historic act finally restored to Haiti the plenitude of its economic sovereignty.

- **Finally, in 1949,** the **International Exhibition commemorating the bicentennial of Port-au-Prince** was a brilliant beacon focused on Haiti, and a catalyst for the development of tourism: it revealed to the world the creative genius, vitality and pride of a sovereign Black nation, confident in its ability to shape its own destiny.

**Visionary and profoundly humanist,**

**Dumarsais Estimé** was also the pioneer of a Haitian cultural renaissance, valuing both our national languages, Creole and French, our arts, our traditions, and the deep pride of Haitian identity.

**Today, Haiti is going through the gravest political, economic and social crisis of the past fifty years.**

Its institutions have collapsed, and insecurity reigns.

Armed gangs control vast areas of the country, extort businesses, kidnap citizens from all walks of life and terrorize families, while the State, deprived of both means and will, can no longer guarantee safety or justice.

Political violence has intensified, and poverty continues to rise dramatically. The principles and values that once guided national life have faded: patriotism and national pride have vanished, and individual survival has too often replaced the sense of the common good.

**The country seems to have lost Its path toward a better future.**

**For the first time in its recent history,  
Haiti arouses almost no interest from the rest of the world.**

The international community, preoccupied with other conflicts on other continents, now regards our country as a dead end, a collective failure without remedy.

**Faced with this indifference,**  
it is up to us, Haitians, to rekindle national consciousness and to propose a new way forward.

*The presidency of Dumarsais Estimé, full of promise,  
was brutally interrupted in 1950 by a military coup.  
Forced into exile, my father passed away in New York City, on July 20, 1953.*

**For our part, the Estimé family intends, in its own modest way,**  
to help preserve and transmit the moral, political and cultural legacy of President Dumarsais Estimé, as well as his vision of justice, education, economic and social progress, and national dignity.

**A website dedicated to his memory and his work is now being developed:** it will be a space for sharing, reflection and inspiration, to help confront the challenges of the 21st century and to remind us how relevant and urgent President Estimé's message remains today.

**In closing,**

**I wish to say that my niece, Valérie Estimé-Trouillot,** eldest daughter of **Jean-Robert Estimé,** is among you today in Miami, **and it is SHE** who will receive, on behalf of our entire family, the Grandèt Award presented to our father.

Thank you.

Marie-Florence Estimé