

SENATOR THE HONOURABLE PAULA GOPEE-SCOON  
MINISTER OF TRADE AND INDUSTRY

“TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO MANUFACTURERS ASSOCIATION (TTMA)  
LEADERSHIP DISCUSSION AND NETWORKING EVENT ON TRADE  
AND CONNECTIVITY”

REGENCY BALLROOM, HYATT REGENCY

April 4, 2023

10:15AM

## **SALUTATIONS LIST**

Ms. Ayleen Alleyne-Ovid, Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Trade and Industry

Mr. Roger Roach, President, Trinidad and Tobago Manufacturers' Association

Ms. Tricia Coosal, outgoing President, Trinidad and Tobago Manufacturers' Association

Dr. Mahindra Ramdeen, Chief Executive Officer, Trinidad and Tobago Manufacturers' Association

Mr. Richard Pandhoie, Group Chief Executive Officer, Seprod Group of Companies

Mr. Ashley Taylor, Chief Executive Officer, PLIPDECO

Mr. Shaun Rampersad, Chief Executive Officer, Ramps Logistics Limited

Mr. Dominic Hadeed, Managing Director, Blue Waters Limited

Board of Directors of the Trinidad and Tobago Manufacturers' Association

Specially Invited Guests

Members of the Media

Ladies and Gentlemen

Good Morning All

It is my distinct pleasure to deliver remarks today, at this Leadership Discussion and Networking Event on “Trade and Connectivity”.

Let me start by commending the sterling contribution made by Ms. Tricia Coosal, during her term as President of the TTMA. Ms. Coosal’s commitment to the growth of Trinidad and Tobago’s Manufacturing Sector has been shown through her tremendous efforts, resilience, perseverance and true leadership qualities. Beginning her tenure during the time of the pandemic and successfully taking the sector through and into a new period of growth and development, she has indeed left her mark. For all of your hard work and continued collaboration with the Ministry of Trade and Industry in positioning the manufacturing, sector locally, regionally and internationally at a very difficult time; I thank you.

I would also like to congratulate the new incoming President of the TTMA, Mr. Roger Roach on his appointment, I have great confidence that you will perform excellently in your new role. As we usher in a new chapter for the TTMA today, I trust that the continued collaboration with the Ministry of Trade

and Industry and the momentum for a revitalized local manufacturing base, would be at the center of the existing and new programmes and initiatives under your stead.

Today's theme of Trade and Connectivity is very relevant. Connectivity has a profound and far-ranging impact. The catalytic and enabling role of connectivity for sustainable development is recognized in the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Goal 9 speaks to building resilient infrastructure, promoting sustainable industrialization and fostering innovation. More specifically Goal 9, addresses among other things improved access to ICT, as it is only by being more globally connected that we can accelerate and create a more sustainable world that results in economic growth.

Further in our National Development Strategy of Trinidad and Tobago, Vision 2030, Goals 3 and 4 stress the importance of being inter-connected through a modern, well maintained transport and ICT infrastructure.

Trade is 24/7 business and good performance in trade requires connectivity, that is, connectivity in logistics, data and market intelligence, market access, and e-commerce. This Government recognizes the importance of business, trade, and connectivity to the economy of Trinidad and Tobago.

Data already evidences the significant gains made in trade. According to the Central Statistical Office, in 2022, total exports were estimated at TT\$86.4billion. Energy exports in 2022 were valued at TT\$66.4 billion, while non- energy exports were valued at TT\$16.8 billion; the latter demonstrating a strong performance in the manufacturing sector. There were significant increases from 2021 to 2022 for:

- Iron and Steel (6%);
- Food and Beverage (21%);
- Wood and Wood Related (29%);
- Paper and Paper Related Products (48%);
- Basic Chemicals and Fertilizers (37%); and
- Plastic and Rubber Products (55%).

Ladies and Gentlemen, I also wish to add that both our non- energy and energy exports currently reach over one hundred and forty four (144) countries; a testament to our ability as a small country to trade and be connected to several markets globally. To move the export sector forward, Government is committed to doing its part to facilitate the expansion of the manufacturing sector.

### **Connectivity and Market Access**

Connectivity is integral to market access for small island developing states such as ours; providing access to larger markets for goods and services, contributing to increased exports and foreign exchange earnings.

At this time, there is a continued thrust to pursue market access opportunities for our goods and services, through the negotiation of new agreements with Chile and Curacao and the maximising of existing trade agreements such as the CARIFORUM- EU Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA), the CARIFORUM-UK EPA, the Caribbean Basin Initiative (CBI) and our other bilateral and multilateral Trade Agreements with Panama, Cuba, Colombia, Costa Rica and the Dominican Republic.

Under our well- known Export Booster Initiative (EBI), connecting businesses to markets is key to support the growth of the Manufacturing sector. I am very pleased that Eleven (11) Trade Missions were conducted in 2022 benefitting over one hundred and forty (140) Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs). During 2023, eleven (11) physical Trade Missions are planned including the Dominican Republic, Guyana, Miami, Colombia, China, Cuba, Panama and the United Kingdom with the Curaçao and Grenada missions already completed.

### **Connectivity and Market Intelligence**

Another area which has a significant impact on trade is Market Intelligence which provides the insights necessary to make informed business decisions in connecting to new markets. The Government of Trinidad and Tobago is making it easier for businesses to access market intelligence through the establishment of Commercial Offices and Commercial Attachés in various Diplomatic Missions, and the appointment of Commercial Officers and Deputy Commercial Officers in the following countries:-

- The Embassy in Panama;

- The High Commission for the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland; and
- The Consulate General in Miami, USA

and the appointment of Commercial Attachés in the following countries:

- The High Commission of Republic of Trinidad and Tobago in Pretoria, South Africa;
- The High Commission of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago in Guyana;
- The High Commission of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago in Jamaica; and
- The Embassy of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago in Beijing, China

Placement will begin as early as June 2023, providing that added resource to connect our manufacturers with international markets.

To further build on Market Intelligence, this Government launched in May 2022, a Trade and Business Information Portal for Trinidad and Tobago. A single source of all regulatory information, to provide comprehensive, accurate and up-to-date information, this mechanism will result in tangible benefits in terms of trade and business facilitation. The Trinidad and Tobago

Trade and Business Information Portal is live and available for public use, in fact, the Portal has had over 134,056 unique visitors and 369,000 total visits from persons across 84 countries in 6 continents to date.

## **Connectivity and Logistics**

As regards logistics, in January 2023, the Government agreed to the implementation of a Port Community System (PCS) in Trinidad and Tobago and a consultant is onboard.

This PCS is intended to connect the IT systems used by various stakeholders in the supply chain to enable the intelligent and secure exchange of information and will benefit stakeholders from across various industries, inclusive of exporters, custom brokers, persons involved in port operations, cargo handling and those agencies mandated with the responsibility for such. The benefits include:

- Improved efficiency and increased transparency of port operations;
- Enhanced security and improved data management by providing real-time information and streamlining port processes, and
- Reduced costs and customer satisfaction.

What is more, is that it would facilitate interconnectivity with the national Single Electronic Window (TTBizLink), ASYCUDA system of the Customs and Excise Division (CED) and the NAVIS terminal operating system used by the Port of Port of Spain (PPOS) and the Port of Pt. Lisas (PLIPDECO).

I am sure many in this audience are very familiar with our TTBizLink platform. At this time, the TTBiz Link platform is currently undergoing an enhancement of its application software which involves improving the existing services and launching new- e services in order to realize significant improvements in cost efficiency, agility and innovation that will benefit the TTBizLink stakeholder. The implementation of this enhancement is expected to be fully completed during this quarter.

### **Connectivity and Regional Value Chains**

The pandemic has taught us the importance of nearshoring and really boosting our domestic and regional capabilities. In this regard, two studies are being done on Regional Value Chains for the Trinidad and Tobago Manufacturing Sector and on Strengthening Sectoral Linkages. Both studies are expected to be completed in August 2023 and will assist our local firms

and service providers to be fully integrated into value chains; providing opportunities for diversified goods and services.

Ladies and Gentlemen, as I close, I once again would like to congratulate Mr Roach on his appointment. A lot has been done but there still remains much to do. I want to assure you that the Government will continue to boost trade and connectivity and work with the TTMA to grow the manufacturing sector, a critical sector for our economy. I wish you a successful and thought provoking event.

I thank you.