



15<sup>th</sup> May 2023

## **Illicit Trade in Trinidad and Tobago**

Reflecting on the wins of 2022 and early 2023, the Trinidad and Tobago Manufacturers' Association (TTMA) commends the Anti-Illicit Trade Task Force (AITTF), private sector bodies as well as law enforcement officers on their continued efforts to combat illicit trade in the domestic sector. As the TTMA have highlighted in the past, this type of crime involves counterfeiting, tax evasion, and the smuggling of consumer products. The items that are primarily susceptible to the trade are highly taxable commodities such as tobacco, alcohol, pharmaceuticals, designer apparel and footwear, just to name a few. However, the depth of illicit trade is far-reaching. Research shows that it also has linkages to money laundering, human trafficking, the unscrupulous importation of arms and ammunition and even terrorist financing in some instances.

In this regard, despite the seizures that have happened over the past couple of months, the implications of the crime continue to affect legitimate business operators and the safety and well-being of the citizenry at large. The Association believes that the lack of resources remains a critical hindrance in accelerating the fight against the crime. Law enforcement officers are faced with solving the upsurge in murders, car theft, house-breaking and robberies in addition to organised crime of this kind. Our porous borders accelerate the issue even further, more so with the trafficking of drugs, weapons and people.

Given law enforcement's overwhelming portfolio and limited human capital and infrastructural means to combat illicit trade, the private sector does empathize. Nevertheless, the issue remains a challenge. The trade continues to erode the competitiveness of our local manufacturers, distributors and traders. Many of our members are losing market share which has a direct impact on their long-term profitability. Employment opportunities, business stability and economic growth are also at stake.

It is the hope of the Association that illicit trade is mitigated further in the domestic market. In doing our part, we continue to collaborate with the AITTF spearheaded by the Ministry of Trade and Industry, and various stakeholders including the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service, Customs and Excise Division, Trinidad and Tobago Bureau of Standards, Chemistry Food and Drug Division and Financial Intelligence Unit. The TTMA also intends to continue raising awareness on this imminent matter and will be hosting a high-level anti-illicit trade event in latter 2023.

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