The Trinidad and Tobago Manufacturers’ Association strongly disagrees with the recent statements made by Independent Senator David Small and other newspaper contributors regarding the state of manufacturing in Trinidad and Tobago.

During Tuesday’s sitting of the Upper House, Senator Small remarked “we have a local manufacturing sector that claims to be innovative, claims to be competitive. I am not too sure about that…” Further, Ms. Mary King alluded to manufacturers being uncompetitive in her submission to the Trinidad and Tobago Newsday printed on Monday 12th January, 2015.

These comments have no basis in fact. The manufacturing sector contributes approximately 9% of our country’s Gross Domestic Product and is one of Trinidad and Tobago’s primary sources of innovation and value addition. Local manufacturers have consistently employed over 60,000 citizens. The manufacturing sector therefore employs significantly more people than any other sector other than the Government in Trinidad and Tobago. Many of our leading manufacturers are net earners of foreign exchange and those who are not still contribute significantly to the preservation of foreign exchange through import substitution.

The manufacturing sector has also demonstrated its sustainability by routinely cementing its position as the number one exporter within the CARICOM region, and several of our members have established manufacturing facilities regionally and internationally - including Latin America, Europe and the Far East. It is simply untrue to imply that the competitiveness of manufacturing in Trinidad and Tobago is as a result of low energy prices and subsidized diesel. Manufacturers have no significant incentive framework relative to other sectors such as energy. For every perceived advantage manufacturers have, there are significant disadvantages, including a challenging institutional framework, small domestic markets and inefficient bureaucracy – these have been completely ignored by Senator Small. Despite these hindrances, local manufacturers have found it possible to compete through hard work, innovation, imagination and branding. Many of our members have achieved the highest quality standards in the world and continue to fly the flag of Trinidad and Tobago proudly.

In this context, our Association distances itself from the statements made by the Honourable Senator, which does nothing to foster confidence in such a key sector in our economy at this critical time. Instead, we call upon the Senator to take the time to understand the sector he speaks about. We wish to assure the general public that the manufacturing sector, as it has done for over three decades in this country, will continue to be a productive and sustainable economic mainstay and engine for national growth and development. As its representative body, the TTMA will continue its fervent advocacy and support services to ensure that the sector continues to move in the right direction.

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