

MINISTER'S OPENING REMARKS
LAUNCH OF TTMA'S MANUFACTURING STRATEGY
WEDNESDAY 17, JUNE 2020
11:00AM

SALUTATIONS

- Ms. Franka Costelloe, President of the Trinidad and Tobago Manufacturers' Association.
- Dr Ramesh Ramdeen, Chief Executive Officer, TTMA.
- Members of the TTMA.
- Members of the Media.
- Ladies and gentlemen.

Good Morning

Ladies and gentlemen, I am pleased to join you here this morning for the timely launch of this Manufacturing Strategy as Trinidad and Tobago attempts to deal with the impacts of the COVID-19 Pandemic and embrace the 'new normal' in the manufacturing industry and certainly the way forward to a stronger even more efficient sector, contributing greatly to our country's growth.

Manufacturing is a very important pillar and a key driver of competitiveness in our economy as it is a major contributor to the country's GDP and is a net foreign exchange earner. It is also a major employer. In 2019, the Sector contributed just over TT\$30 billion or 19.4% of GDP, growing by 0.3%, and employing over 50,000 persons. During the first quarter of 2019, manufacturing activities continued to improve by recording an expansion of 4.9%.

These figures demonstrate that the Sector has maintained its strength and adaptability despite the challenges over the years. In this recent period, the unexpected and unprecedented impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, whilst

highlighting the Sector's tremendous value, has also exposed the fragility of manufacturing supply chains internationally.

The Covid-19 Pandemic has no doubt had a significant negative impact on economies globally, but it is with great resolve, careful management and decisive leadership, that this country continues to power through this challenge and herald in a stronger and more transformed economy.

In this context, the domestic Manufacturing sector remains a catalyst for achieving economic transformation, expansion and diversification and is a priority for the Government of Trinidad and Tobago. As a testimony of our support for the Manufacturing sector the Honourable Prime Minister and I had the pleasure of recently touring a number of manufacturing entities including Caribbean Packaging Industries, Vemco, Nestle and TYE Manufacturing. Quite noticeably, the COVID-19 protocols which have been put in place by these businesses and I'm sure the rest of the sector, reflect the agility and adaptability of firms to respond to the most serious of externalities.

Strategic Framework for expansion of the Manufacturing Sector

Given the potential of the sector to drive further economic transformation, the Ministry of Trade and Industry has recently developed a National Manufacturing Policy for Trinidad and Tobago for the period 2020-2025. The Policy's overarching goal is to “***transform the Manufacturing sector into one that is globally competitive, productive and innovative, utilizing advanced technologies and environmentally friendly practices***”.

Ladies and Gentlemen, this National Policy was shared for the consideration of the TTMA in the development of the Manufacturing Export Strategic Plan 2020-2025. The document before you today has been discussed with us and therefore, **WE** are in full support of this launch, as this Export Plan represents a harmonized approach which bodes well for the continuity and expansion of the Sector.

Essentially, what we have now done, is harmonise the private and public sector approaches unifying us in purpose, with the end result being a Strategic Framework for the Expansion of the Manufacturing Sector.

The major objectives of the Strategic Framework are to:

- Expand export growth and create more knowledge-intensive industries;
- Development of new and higher value added products;
- Enhance human resource capacity in the sector;
- Improve production capacity through research; development and innovation;
- Improve access to finance, particularly for MSMEs in the sector; and
- Strengthen administrative and institutional mechanisms.

Importance of the Sector in the Road to Recovery Process

It is without question that the Manufacturing Sector has been given significant prominence in the Government's Roadmap to Recovery. Mr. Robert Bermudez Chaired the Manufacturing Sub-Committee and deliberations were held with the President, CEO and other Members of the TTMA. During discussions, issues relating to (i) the ease of doing business (ii) enhancing access to finance and foreign exchange; (iii) modernizing the productive capacity of local manufacturers; (iv) promoting

new and niche products as well as expanding export growth in traditional and non-traditional markets; and (v) ensuring manufacturers are allowed to maintain their domestic competitiveness were examined. The report clearly articulates pointed policy measures and strategies geared towards achieving policy objectives in the medium to long term. The Final Report is currently with the Vice Co-Chairs for presentation to the Honourable Prime Minister and will be made available to the public very shortly.

On a related note, COVID-19 has brought home to us the immense cost and folly of our reliance on imported food. Consideration must therefore be given to manufacturing these items by tapping into regional and international supply chains with a view to reducing the food import bill (which is currently approximately TT\$5 Billion per annum), and for exports. This is the Reality!

Conclusion

Today's event reinforces the values of effort and collaboration as you seek to capture, access and develop the opportunities presented in this "New" era of manufacturing. The Government will implement transformational measures towards a welcoming environment for all businesses including

manufacturers to expand and export. I wish you all the best, and I congratulate TTMA on the launch of this Manufacturing Strategy.

Thank you.