



TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO MANUFACTURERS' ASSOCIATION

MEDIA RELEASE

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TTMA CALLS FOR TASK FORCE TO TACKLE ILLICIT TRADE

Port of Spain, January 23rd, 2020 -The Trinidad and Tobago Manufacturers' Association (TTMA) campaign against illicit trade has taken unprecedented steps to strengthen the relevant regulatory bodies who have the power to seize illicit products.

The TTMA has long advocated the negative impact that illicit trade continues to have on the local community and economy.

Speaking at a stakeholders meeting, hosted by TTPS, on Monday, TTMA President, Ms. Franka Costelloe, outlined the association's approach towards a robust action plan to combat illicit trade.

Costelloe explained that, "the TTMA fully supports competition and diversity to ensure consumers are given value for money. What we do not support is the sale of products that do not conform to regulatory requirements that ensure consumer protection."

While acknowledging that competition is healthy and welcomed for the economy, she advised that some persons and companies have been engaging in activities that run afoul of the rules of fair trade. These activities, she said, "demonstrate a blatant disregard for industry standards, consumer health and safety, and seriously impact legitimate business and the State's financial purse." Illicit trade is particularly prevalent within the alcohol and tobacco industries.

Costelloe explained, "We estimate that illicit tobacco accounts for 10% of the market, which translates to approximately \$40M of state loss funds from foregone tax, VAT and duties.

At the stakeholder meeting, there was general support for the Commissioner of Police and his expressed interest and focus on combatting illicit trade. The group also commended the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service on past interventions and seizure of items that were deemed illicit. The TTPS is one of a number of agencies responsible for seizure of illicitly traded products.

The TTMA has previously publicly stated that illicit trade practices erode market share of legitimate businesses and facilitates a leakage of much needed foreign exchange from the local banking industry.

Costelloe cited illicitly trading businesses for operating below the tax radar and thereby reducing competitiveness, limiting employment opportunities and failing to contribute to the economy where they are earning and making profits. "It is the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago who are the main victims in all this", she said, "as those tax dollars are needed for critical services such as health and education programmes."

Meeting with the TTMA yesterday, was Deputy Commissioner of Police Jayson Forde, Deputy Commissioner of Police Anthony James, representatives of the Police Legal Unit, Mr. Regan Asgarali Controller of the Intellectual Property Office, Mr. Darrin Carmichael and Mr. Garland Samuel, Director and Executive Manager of Crime Stoppers respectively, TTBS, Hamelsmith, Customs. The meeting and reinforced commitments from all sides to combat the illicit trade market and culminated in the formation of a task force which is expected to be implemented before March 1st, 2020.

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