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Director, SIS

“Bilingual Signage Presentation - Siparia”

Tuesday 19th February, 2008

- Member of Parliament for Siparia –Honourable Kamla Persad Bissessar
- Member of Parliament for Fyzabad – Honourable Chandresh Sharma
- Ms. Theresa Noel, Siparia Researcher
- CEO, Siparia Regional Corporation -Mr. Stephen Creese
- Councillor in the Siparia Regional Corporation – Mr. Ivan St. Clair
- Bilingual signage recipients
- SIS staff
- Ladies and Gentlemen

¡Bienvenidos a todos! Welcome, and thank you for being here with us today.

As you are aware, the SIS was formed under Cabinet directive in September 2004 to drive the SAFFL initiative, aimed at helping our nation become proficient in Spanish within the next ten to fifteen years. One of the three primary goals of the SAFFL initiative is to ensure a clear

understanding of the cultures which are emerging in our society, which in many cases, have been present and maintained for generations. I hope from this presentation today, the third we've had since our research into local historic Spanish communities began, that you gain a deeper understanding of the purpose of this research and by extension, the aspirations of the SAFFL initiative.

I will now take this opportunity to give a brief update you on our recent accomplishments as we continue to actualize the Spanish As the First Foreign Language (SAFFL) initiative in Trinidad and Tobago.

Since our official launch to the public in March 2005, we have made great strides in making this vision a reality. To name a few of our achievements over the past year:

- Under the guidance of the SIS, 100% of Government Ministries or agencies have begun programmes to introduce their employees to the Spanish language and the Hispanic culture via Spanish clubs, classes, the acquisition of library resources, and/or bilingual internal and/or external signage.

- We continue to have a positive impact in the private sector as the respective officer continues to meet one on one with numerous companies monthly, with the aim of guiding them in implementing similar programmes.
- We have hosted several Cultural Awareness Seminars, where representatives from Venezuela, Guatemala, Mexico, Colombia Argentina and most recently, in December 2007, Chile. These seminars give insight into the cultural norms and intricacies that one must consider when doing business with Latin American countries. Additionally, we have met and continue meeting with the Ambassadors of the Spanish-speaking world resident here annually.
- Articles related to the Hispanic world and second language acquisition are published fortnightly in the local press. The SIS also continues to get positive support from the various other media houses regarding awareness of the SAFFL initiative. The SIS DVD “SAFFL Actualised” was broadcast on various television and radio stations and cultural DVDs are aired on various local stations.

- The general public has been exposed to instructional programmes in the form of a children's radio programme, which was previously broadcast three times per week, and the *A la Orden* series which was re introduced on NCCTV. Spanish learning material, targeted to both children and adults are also published weekly in the local press.
- Free basic Spanish community classes at the Basic, Intermediate, Advanced and Conversational levels, have been offered to citizens of Trinidad and Tobago since the launch of the Spanish Language Acquisition Programme in July 2005. This programme has proven to be quite successful and to date, more than 900 persons have benefited from these classes. The next phase is due to begin soon. The SIS also hopes to partner with a number of vacation camps and non governmental organisations in order to help them introduce Spanish to its daily programme of activities.
- In 2007, the SIS hosted its first Spanish Service Providers Workshop. This was well attended by the nation's service providers and even by some Spanish-speaking instructors hoping to enhance their skills in

the Spanish language. More workshops are expected to actualize in the upcoming months.

- The SIS has also coordinated the installation of bilingual signage at the nation's popular beaches, tourist and nature sites, along the highways, at the Piarco International Airport, some of the nation's supermarkets and other local historic Spanish communities.

As you can see, we have made great strides since our official launch in March 2005. We hope to continue serving the country as a national resource so that by the year 2020, Spanish will indeed be the first foreign language of Trinidad and Tobago.

I thank you for your time and attendance.

¡Muchísimas gracias!