

ADDRESS BY

SENATOR THE HON. MARIANO BROWNE  
MINISTER OF TRADE AND INDUSTRY  
MINISTER IN THE MINISTRY OF FINANCE

AT THE COMMENCEMENT OF THE

**SINGLE ELECTRONIC WINDOW PROJECT -  
IMPROVING TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO'S  
INTERNATIONAL COMPETITIVENESS**

8:00 AM,  
TUESDAY 20<sup>th</sup> OCTOBER, 2009

REGENCY BALLROOM III AND IV  
HYATT REGENCY TRINIDAD  
WRIGHTSON ROAD  
PORT OF SPAIN

- Cabinet Colleagues
- Mr. Leong Peng Kiong, Chief Executive Officer, CrimsonLogic Pte. Ltd
- Permanent Secretaries and other Government officers
- Members of the Business Community
- Members of the Media
- Ladies and Gentleman.

Good morning everyone. This is indeed an exciting event for the Ministry of Trade and Industry as we commence one of our flag-ship projects for Fiscal 2010 – the Single Electronic Window (SEW), and we are truly pleased that you our stakeholders, could join us today.

Let me first of all begin by placing on record my sincere appreciation to my predecessor in the Ministry of Trade and Industry, Senator Dr. the Honorable Lenny Saith for his work at initiating this project in September 2008 during a visit to Singapore.

Since that time, technical officers at the Ministry of Trade and Industry (MTI) have been working with their counterparts in Singapore to define the project and complete the necessary administrative, technical and legal requirements leading up to today's launch. I wish to also recognize the strong support of my other Cabinet colleagues, in particular the Ministers of Public Administration, Agriculture, Legal Affairs, Health, Works and Transport and Finance, all of whom serve on the Cabinet appointed Inter-Ministerial Committee responsible for the SEW implementation process.

The decision to adopt this system is firmly grounded in Trinidad and Tobago's Vision 2020 goal to transform the country into a regional trading and business hub and the concurrent need to improve national competitiveness.

Trinidad and Tobago's international competitiveness is high on MTI's agenda, given our Vision 2020 objectives. This country's ranking in the recently released Global Competitiveness Index (GCI) has improved from 92 in 2008-2009 to 86 in 2009-2010 out of 133 countries. While this is definitely a step in the right direction, it is not enough, and requires us to ramp up strategies and implementation since now we are competing with even more advanced and sophisticated economies.

Having said this, just to place it all in context, the GCI is a highly comprehensive index, which captures the microeconomic and macroeconomic foundations of national competitiveness. It is composed of a weighted average of many different components which are grouped into 12 pillars of competitiveness which are interdependent. Many of these pillars fall within the direct sphere of influence of the state but most, if not all, are a combination of the efforts of the public and private sectors.

The GCI draws its information from two sources: international hard data which emanates from organizations such as the IMF, World Bank, etc., and the Executive Opinion Survey, which captures the perception of local business executives about the environment in which they operate.

Interestingly enough, the perceptive data is where the more negative impact is evident.

According to the GCI, Trinidad and Tobago falls into the stage three level of economic development – the innovation driven stage - based on its current GDP per capita estimate (US\$19,012) which has accelerated significantly since 2001. Other countries at this level include the US, UK, Australia, Korea, Italy, Japan, Singapore, Dubai, New Zealand, Switzerland, Sweden, Canada and Ireland.

Clearly Ladies and Gentlemen, we need to view our past business activities in a more positive light, we have had tremendous success as a center for business and trade in the CARICOM region and this should give us the confidence to stride toward the future, positioning ourselves as an investment and commercial hub for the Americas. This I assure you is our vision for Trinidad and Tobago.

Today, developing economies are faced with increasing competition and the loss of preferential treatment in various export markets. In turn, goods and services which are no longer subject to tariff barriers and emanate from economies larger and more powerful than our own, now have access to our markets. It is more important now than ever before to focus on increasing the competitiveness and penetration of our export sector, through improved products; enhanced service quality and greater economic efficiency.

As the world evolves slowly out of the worst economic recession since the Great Depression, we have come to realize that many of the mechanisms and approaches adopted in the past are no longer relevant to the challenges which we face today. Countries in the developing world especially, must move swiftly to adopt appropriate systems and tools to survive and even thrive in the global arena.

As demonstrated earlier, the Single Electronic Window, or SEW is an IT-based trade facilitation tool which allows parties involved in trade and transport to lodge standardized information and documents at a single entry point, in order to fulfill all import, export and transit-related regulatory requirements. This mechanism is designed as a 'one-stop-shop', where private stakeholders and approving government agencies can collaborate to process necessary permits and approvals online in a seamless and efficient manner.

This project will complement the ASYCUDA system at the Customs and Excise Division and improve the quality and timeliness of trade data by allowing the CSO to generate information two weeks after the end of each month and thereby provide vital, timely information to support more efficient business-to-business transactions and indeed business and investment decisions.

The SEW system incorporates significant co-operation amongst a range of Ministries and agencies responsible for trade facilitation and because of its interactive nature will require major business process re-engineering on the part of some operators.

I am sure you will understand immediately the benefits of such a system, which is grounded in the concept of a standardized approach. It can provide operational efficiency, transparency of government services, improved collection of state revenue, speed the trade facilitation process and at the broader level, sharpen the competitive edge of our companies and industries. This in turn will strengthen our global competitiveness.

Many countries worldwide have sought to improve their trade processes and ultimately their competitiveness by implementing SEWs. You would have heard that the introduction of an SEW in Singapore, known as TradeNet, resulted in a move away from three paper-based trade documents to one single e-document, a decline in the processing time for permits/approvals from two to seven days to within two minutes, and an increase in the volume of documents processed from 10,000 to 30,000 per day.

Clearly it is no surprise that Singapore, because of its highly efficient and transparent border administration according to three major independent global surveys -the Global Competitiveness Index, Global Trade Enabling Trade Report and the Ease of Doing Business Report - is the most competitive nation worldwide. For this reason, the Government of Trinidad and Tobago, through MTI has sought to partner with CrimsonLogic, who as you would have heard, are an agency of the Government of Singapore and proprietors of the SEW system.

Ladies and Gentlemen, today's launch is just one element within the framework being constructed by Government to enable competitive businesses, and ultimately to improve the revenue generating capacity of the nation.

As Minister of Trade and Industry I have had the pleasure of participating in a range of activities designed to move this country forward economically. These include the launch of CARICOM/Canada trade negotiations, the eTeck ICT financing seminar, the Bureau of Standards regional workshop on the role of standards in economic development and trade, representing CARICOM at the recent WTO Ministerial in Delhi, India, all of which fall squarely within our mandate to grow trade, business and investment.

It may also interest you to know that last Thursday and Friday along with senior officers of the Ministry, I participated in a Strategic Review exercise designed to enhance the Ministry's performance and delivery to stakeholders through the introduction of various Change Management techniques, including the Balanced Score Card. Introduction of the SEW was one of the major corporate activities discussed during the session as we sought to efficiently align our resources to achieve optimum returns.

MTI intends to transform the way we do business within the organisation to be better able to impact our various external environments positively. We invite you to join with us in this change process.

Ladies and gentlemen, one of the points I often make is that the difference between developed and developing nations has nothing to do with the intellectual capacity of their respective populations. The key factors which distinguish these countries are organization, discipline and systems. Developed nations succeed in maintaining certain attributes and quality of life for their citizens because they possess long established, organized systems. I would like you to consider the SEW project as one such system we will be introducing to Trinidad and Tobago to move our country forward.

In closing, I wish to thank you all for your presence here today and assure you that we will undertake to keep all of our stakeholders continuously informed as the system is implemented over the next 18 months.

I thank you.