



GOVERNMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO
MINISTRY OF TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Cocktails with the President & Launch of TTMA Careers'

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REMARKS

SENATOR THE HONOURABLE PAULA GOPEE-SCOON
MINISTER OF TRADE AND INDUSTRY

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I would like to begin by thanking you for inviting me to speak at this event. Today's event is a realization of what Trinidad and Tobago needs today—a dynamic and proactive private sector that understands the social and economic realities, and is willing to dedicate the resources and work with government to find solutions to our nation's problems. Inefficiencies in the labour market are problems that have often plagued Trinidad and Tobago, and more specifically the manufacturing sector. I am pleased that we are finally utilizing technology and more dynamic means so that we can maximize the full potential of manufacturers and tackle head on the problems of unemployment, labour shortages, and a private sector that may possibly be unproductive and uncompetitive.

With employment growth in 2015, the manufacturing sector currently employs an estimated 53,600 persons in Trinidad and Tobago – approximately 8.3% of the entire labour force, up from 7.4% in 2014. So the manufacturing sector is very relevant; but to operate at full capacity, innovate and compete at the global level, it needs to attract sufficiently skilled and competent workers. However, according to the National Training Agency (NTA) and evidence available to the public at large, there still exists labour shortages at all levels within the manufacturing sector.

The manufacturing sector accounts for 6% of GDP. The food and beverages sub-sector makes up the largest part of the sector in terms of value; however, it accounts for 72% of the total vacancies, most of which are identified as semi-skilled and graduate/professional workers.

In addition to the mismatch between labour demand and supply in the manufacturing sector, there is problem of productivity and competitiveness. In other words, quantity is a problem, but quality is a problem too.

The World Economic Forum's Global Competitiveness Report 2015-2016 has **“poor work ethic” in the national labour force as the most problematic factor for doing business in Trinidad and Tobago**. In fact, we are ranked 96th out of 144 countries in terms of labour market efficiency. This is untenable. With millions being invested in our youth and increased challenges around us, **it is critical that workers be allocated to their most effective use and provided with incentives to achieve maximum productivity**.

But also, I make the point about acting sensibly and making decisions to change sectors and adapt to new environments because today's circumstances might just require that.

I wish therefore to recognize the efforts of the TTMA and its members for developing TTMA Careers, which is aimed at boosting employment in the manufacturing sector by facilitating the needs and wants of job seekers and employers alike. In the medium and long-term, programs such as this will definitely have a significant and positive impact on sector and national productivity levels.

Our largest trading partner, the United States of America, is currently facing labour shortages in the manufacturing sector as a result of skills gap issues. Over the next decade, 3.4 million manufacturing jobs will likely be needed; however, only 60 percent of these positions are likely to be filled due to talent shortages. Despite predictions of growth in 2016, this persistent labour market problem will continue to limit the potential of the world's largest economy.

We must not suffer a similar fate. A new approach must be taken to resolve the supply-side constraints of labour in the manufacturing sector. High performance and productivity levels within this sector are

fundamental to improving trade, facilitating investment and becoming globally competitive.

The role of the manufacturing sector is critical to the diversification and growth of the national economy; therefore, **an advanced and fully exploited manufacturing industry is a priority of the Ministry of Trade and Industry.**

Private companies have long complained about having to compete with temporary work programmes for scarce labour; yet, we must understand and appreciate the importance of such initiatives. In so doing, I would like to reiterate this administration's intentions to ensure that such programmes are streamlined, made effective, efficient and transparent, and that we get value for money. Nonetheless, the manufacturing sector must not suffer as a result; especially now.

In order to meet the needs of the private sector, those seeking gainful and productive employment, and to minimize the negative effects of labour market inefficiencies, the Ministry of Trade and Industry will collaborate with the TTMA and other private sector organizations to continue:

- build a better educated and trained workforce;
- promote product and process innovation, as well as research and development; and
- improve global competitiveness for companies.

There is a need for workers to develop production skills; to set up, operate, monitor supply chain logistics; to control the manufacturing process; to ensure quality assurance; but also for employers to assist employees in the continuous improvement of these skills to ensure that products and processes consistently meet the highest standards.

A strong, competitive manufacturing industry is fundamental to a strong economy - now more than ever. Manufacturing contributes to higher export potential, better standards of living, and more jobs. We, as a country, are faced with the challenges of lower revenue and limited resources; however, let this be an **opportunity for us to collaborate, innovate and most importantly act together for mutually beneficial outcomes.** Manufacturers are no longer noisy warehouses in low-income areas filled with assembly lines of workers producing sub-standard products. We need our manufacturers to be industry leaders that are prepared to adopt and to invest in cutting-edge technology; to acquire the best workers and to produce the highest quality products. The products we produce speak volumes about values. Trinidad and Tobago is at a cross roads and you the manufacturers have shown us that you can lead the way. We expect much from you. I thank you!