



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

“What Does the Budget 2016 have for Young People?”

HELICONIA FOUNDATION MEETING

FEATURE ADDRESS

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A pleasant good evening.

Let me begin by saying that it gives me great pleasure to join the Heliconia Foundation for Young Professionals here this evening on the matter of '*What Does the Budget 2016 have for Young People*'.

According to the National Youth Policy for Trinidad and Tobago, it is estimated that there are approximately 450,556 young people between the ages of 12 and 29 in Trinidad and Tobago, representing some 34.2 % of the national population; with males out-numbering females 51% to 49%, respectively.

But with the reverse regarding scholastic achievements.

In light of this, the Government acknowledges that each young person has a purpose in life and our goal is to help reveal that purpose and engage each of you in a plan to achieve that purpose and to prosper; whether through educational, cultural or business pursuits.

In this regard, the 2015-2016 Budget has outlined *specific measures* to assist young professionals, and young people in general, to realize their dreams.

Let me therefore take a few moments to focus on the key areas of the 2015-2016 Budget that are relevant to the youth sector in Trinidad and Tobago.

Firstly, Investment opportunities in Services, Agriculture and Energy Services under the CARICOM Single Market and Economy (CSME).

Notably, there is increasing recognition, among policy makers, that the CSME is about the future of young people and that there can be no successful CSME unless young professionals are fully involved in the process, and are capable of grasping the opportunities which an integrated regional space offers.

In light of this, the Government intends to do its part in reviving and rebuilding the CSME process, with the explicit objective of promoting the free and efficient movement of goods, services, labour and capital. These initiatives will give young professionals who are entrepreneurs in Trinidad and Tobago, the opportunity to enhance their ability to export goods and services to regional member states.

Specifically, the Ministry of Trade and Industry will work closely with CARICOM to formulate and advocate areas of economic benefits for its citizens at the Council for Trade and Economic Development (COTED).

Some of the areas with direct benefits for young people include but are not limited to:

- e-commerce;
- services;
- free circulation of goods in the CSME; and
- creating an enabling business environment.

These initiatives will change the operating business environment for young people by providing opportunities with a larger market to exploit, reduced barriers, free movement of goods and services, as well as, the possibility of establishing facilities in any member state.

Young entrepreneurs are encouraged to exploit these opportunities.

Secondly, Education and Training in Innovation and Entrepreneurship

Our Government's goal is to make young people more employable, foster entrepreneurship and stimulate innovation. By combining entrepreneurship education and interaction with businesses, young people can develop the practical skills, knowledge and attitudes that allow them to innovate.

Additionally, entrepreneurial thinking is key to the process of innovation, since entrepreneurs by nature constantly challenge the existing orthodoxies of businesses, and thus push further the frontier of managerial capabilities for creating extraordinary values for all stakeholders.

In this regard, as outlined in the PNM's Manifesto which is now the Official Policy Framework of the Government, we will:

- Ensure that our system of education at the primary, secondary and tertiary levels prepares our young people for the challenging world of Science and technology;
- Equip all schools to benefit from technological innovations;
- Ensure that all students in all schools have free and easy access to fast Broadband Internet in all schools (not just laptops);
- Ensure that the education and training of teachers is adequate to meet the challenges that face our young people including penetration of foreign cultures, technological devices and social media.

Furthermore, the Government has as one of its priorities, the development and implementation of an Innovation Policy which will be the foundation for ensuring business sophistication.

Thirdly, Diversification

The Government recognizes that diversification is not easily achieved in a small country of limited land mass and a relatively small population.

For this reason, it requires the building up of several different capabilities, such as entrepreneurship, management, a culture of innovation and an ability to adapt quickly to changes in the global economy.

As a result, there are certain industries which we have identified as having many of the ingredients for investors (young and not so young) to develop and further successfully penetrate international markets.

These include:

- Agriculture and Agro-processing;
- Maritime Services – shipbuilding, ship repair, dry-docking and yachting services
- Fishing and Fish Processing;
- Aviation Services – aircraft maintenance and repair;
- The Creative Industries – film, music, entertainment, fashion and design;
- Financial Services – making Trinidad and Tobago a regional financial centre;
- Software Design and Applications – making Trinidad and Tobago a technology and innovation centre.

The development of the above sectors will contribute to the diversification thrust, which in turn, will

create successful opportunities along the business value chain for the nation's citizens, inclusive of the youth.

Fourthly, Job Creation and Enterprise Development

The current Administration is aware that unemployment, especially among the youths, remains a major challenge to our development.

Young persons are facing several significant barriers to employment, whereby, those who want a job are unable to secure a sustainable job.

As part of our economic development plan, the Government will introduce a Graduate Recruitment Programme in 2016 in all 23 ministries for unemployed and/or University graduates, to enable them to become job-ready. This will further encourage entrepreneurship, innovation and creativity of the young people.

It is noted that the ratio of females to males at tertiary education institutions is disproportionately skewed in favour of females. Therefore, this initiative as outlined in the 2016 budget indirectly creates a unique opportunity for young women to secure gainful employment in Government ministries as Our Government seeks to ensure poverty reduction, gender equality, education, and the creation of a new social compact.

In light of the above, our Government will invest more than \$55 million to employ at least 500 graduates throughout Ministries, thereby, providing an adequate start for graduates, as well as, improving the national level of work experience.

In addition, the fiscal 2016 Budget has also included measures to improve the access to credit in the agricultural sector, as it is one of the dynamic drivers for growth and entrepreneurship development, especially among young people. Therefore, creating a conducive business environment for more jobs will be critical to provide access to affordable credit.

As such, the Government is committed to ensuring that financing is available through the National Enterprise Development Company Limited (NEDCO) to enhance entrepreneurial opportunities for young professionals to scale up their small businesses. This collaboration will provide adequate support which will enhance and promote an entrepreneurial culture among the youths of our nation, as well as, spur business growth and development in non-traditional sectors/businesses.

Furthermore, to ensure that our young people entering the job market are adequately compensated, there will be an increase in the stipend paid to young people under the On the Job Training (OJT) Programme by 20%. This initiative which will cost the Government an additional \$62.0 million will take effect on December 1, 2015, thus, enabling young people to attain meaningful jobs and adequate compensation.

Government's further investment in the talent and skills of our youths will ensure that we have the unique skills set we want and need for the sustainable growth of the Trinidad and Tobago economy.

It must also be noted that as the Government seeks to create a more innovative and dynamic business climate for businesses to compete, it has also taken the bold step to provide more income security for the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago.

This initiative will increase an individual's personal income tax allowance threshold from TT\$60,000 to \$72,000 per annum or from TT\$5,000 to TT\$6,000 per month with effect from January 1st, 2016. This in turn, places more purchasing power in the hands of income earners.

In this regard, a \$12,000 increase in the Personal Allowance equates to a \$3,000 reduction in an individual's Income Tax liability.

These positive developments show that our Government has listened to the deep concerns of our citizens including our youths, and will provide and support adequate employment opportunities.

Fifthly, Institutional Strengthening

According to the recent Moody's Investors Service report, Trinidad and Tobago, as it relates to the quality and availability of statistical information, has experienced a downgrade in its credit ratings.

This in turn, has severely affected the decision-making process at various institutions and organizations during the last five (5) years.

As such, in an effort to address these issues, Government has made commitments to introduce, in this new fiscal year, legislation to establish an Independent Statistical Institute. This Independent Institution will be staffed with individuals from the private sector, public sector, Central Bank and other organisations, which will aid in restoring stakeholders' confidence in the decision-making processes.

Furthermore, Government has recognized the role and importance of institutional strengthening. We have seen and heard wanton repetitions of allegations of corruption, theft, waste and squandermania in the awarding of public sector contracts. This PNM Administration will cut out this cancer of corruption and waste through the implementation of a modern, transparent and fair public procurement system in 2016.

As evident, in the last 5 years, the former government was accused of many offences, which caused the public to lose confidence in politicians and our system of governance.

This Government will seek to reverse this pernicious trend by implementing a code of conduct and ethical behaviour for all Parliamentarians, with sanctions and penalties for non-compliance, following the guidelines published by the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association.

I do recommended though, that the principles contained in this Code of Conduct (***Selflessness, Integrity, Objectivity, Honesty and Accountability***) be embraced by members of your Foundation, as we all have a role to play in restoring morality and integrity to our nation.

In closing let me share with you some biblical inspiration, despite what position you hold in society.

According to Daniel Chapter 12, Verses 1 to 3 *“The learned will shine as brightly as the vault of heaven and those who have instructed many virtues, as bright as stars for the eternity.”*

You can be assured that as we seek to re-build public confidence and restore the moral and ethical values in the society, the Government is keen in working with organizations such as yours which ultimately is concerned with ensuring that we develop a more vibrant, open, fair, transparent and prosperous nation.

It will require **ALL** of us to inculcate a culture of patriotism, hard work and above all, cohesiveness and social care.

I applaud the Heliconia Foundation for its commitment to these ideals.

I thank you.