



Media Release

ANTI-ILLCIT TRADE TASK FORCE APPOINTED

19 May, 2021: Senator the Honourable Paula Gopee-Scoon, Minister of Trade and Industry, appointed eleven (11) members to the Anti-Illicit Trade Task Force (AITTF) at its Inaugural Virtual Meeting on May 17, 2021. Speaking to the newly appointed members Minister Gopee-Scoon said, ***“Public-private partnership is key to combatting illicit trade. The installation of this Task Force is a clear demonstration of Government’s commitment to a holistic and coordinated approach to combatting illicit trade which has been increasing in Trinidad and Tobago and consequently affects our legitimate local businesses.”*** Underscoring the important role the Task Force has to play in mitigating the impact of illicit trade she added that ***“the formation of the Task Force comes at a crucial and sensitive time, where our economy, businesses and consumers are in a vulnerable position as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic”***.

The Government of Trinidad and Tobago has recognized the prevalence of illicit trade, in particular the increase in illegally traded consumer goods such as tobacco and alcohol. The effects of illicit trade are far reaching and impact Government, local businesses and consumers, as tax revenue is forfeited by the Government, legitimate businesses are undermined and negatively impacted by counterfeit goods and the health, safety and well-being of consumers are jeopardized by substandard goods. In this regard, several actions were outlined to combat illicit trade in the Road Map for Trinidad and Tobago including tasking respective Ministries and border agencies with taking action to restrict illicit trade and increasing consumer education on the responsible consumption of products.

Accordingly, a National Action Plan to Combat Illicit Trade in Consumer Goods in Trinidad and Tobago, which prescribes a holistic approach and outlines general measures to tackle illicit trade was approved by Cabinet in March 2021. Cabinet also approved the establishment of an Anti-Illicit Trade Task Force to coordinate the implementation of the Action Plan. The Task Force which is co-chaired by Mrs. Ayleen Alleyne-Ovid, Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Trade and Industry and Mr. Gary Joseph, Permanent Secretary, Ministry of National Security, brings together key public sector agencies and Ministries, private sector bodies and a non-governmental organization to implement the initiatives laid out in the National Action Plan. Representation

on the Task Force includes the Customs and Excise Division, Finance Intelligent Unit of the Ministry of Finance, Intellectual Property Office, Trinidad and Tobago Police Service, Ministry of Health, Trinidad and Tobago Bureau of Standards, Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries, Crimestoppers Trinidad and Tobago, Trinidad and Tobago Chamber of Industry and Commerce and the Trinidad and Tobago Manufacturers' Association.

The National Action Plan, which will be implemented by the AITTF, prescribes twenty-six (26) specific measures aimed at achieving five (5) general objectives to:

- i. Strengthen the legal framework to combat illicit trade – identifying and recommending legislation for review to ensure that illicit trade activities are effectively defined and addressed
- ii. Strengthen the capacity of Ministries and enforcement agencies to combat illicit trade
- iii. Enhance collaboration among regulatory and enforcement agencies;
- iv. Promote public-private partnerships towards fighting illicit trade; and
- v. Increase public awareness of illicit trade and the associated dangers.

Priority issues discussed at the Inaugural Meeting of the AITTF included:

- i. the Terms of Reference for the Task Force and its scope of work;
- ii. the establishment of sectoral sub-working groups to specifically address products which are more susceptible to illicit trade locally;
- iii. the implementation of a National Awareness Campaign; and
- iv. measures to boost enforcement of penalties and deter businesses from selling illicit goods.

In addition, the AITTF will create sectoral sub-working groups on alcohol, tobacco, cleaning agents and pharmaceuticals to assess the extent of illicit trade in these products, the specific enablers and recommend measures for action by the Task Force. In the coming months, the Task Force will also develop, and through the networks of its Member organizations, implement a National Awareness Campaign to inform consumers how to detect and report illicit products and the associated dangers which they can pose. This measure will assist with reducing the demand for these products locally. The AITTF will also review enforcement of penalties for illicit trade, including importers and retailers of illegal products.

The Government remains committed to collaborating with the private sector to address issues as it relates to illicit trade aimed at facilitating the growth and transformation of the manufacturing sector.

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