



Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago

Ministry of Trade and Industry

Virtual Launch of the Tobago e-Pavilion

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

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Salutations

- Assemblyman Joel Jack, Deputy Chief Secretary, Tobago House of Assembly- Division of Finance and the Economy
- Dr. Cyril Collier, Director, exporTT Limited
- Mrs. Maria Padilla-Benjamin, General Manager – Operations (Ag.)
- Senior members of staff of Ministry of Trade and Industry and exporTT
- Distinguished guests
- Members of the media
- Ladies and gentlemen

Good Morning,

It is indeed a pleasure to deliver remarks at the *Virtual Launch of the Tobago e-Pavilion*. Today's event represents a small but significant step in the right direction towards the digitization of the Tobago economy. At the Government level, this is yet another initiative aimed at achieving our Vision 2030 goal to ensure prosperity for all and the sustainable development of the country.

The disruption of production and supply chains as well as consumer patterns caused by the global pandemic is well known. However, I can attest that the Government has redoubled efforts to promote the recovery and diversification of our economy. Accordingly, several initiatives have been crafted to create an enabling environment to reposition and grow our manufacturing, among other, sectors and accelerate performance post Covid-19, to become more globally competitive, innovative and productive.

One such initiative is the significant focus on promoting an export diversification strategy for the non-energy sector, through development and mobilization of sixteen (16) planned initiatives under the **Export Booster Initiative, developed by the Ministry of Trade and Industry and implemented by ExporTT.**

Through the EBI, the Trinidad and Tobago Manufacturers' Association (TTMA) has signaled its commitment to increase the value of non-energy exports of particular goods to TT\$5.4 billion by 2024. The Government is supportive through the promotion of three broad strategic areas namely, Export Promotion, Capacity Building and Institutional Strengthening.

Under the EBI, four of the sixteen planned initiatives are specifically focused on Tobago with the Tobago e-Pavilion, being one (1) of the four (4) Tobago centric projects. This e-commerce platform is designed to promote Tobago's manufacturers to the world and increase access to global markets and customers via online sales.

This initiative is timely given the accelerated advancements in the global e-commerce landscape which continues to grow at unprecedented rates causing radical change in consumer and business markets.

According to the United Nations Conference on Trade and Economic Development (UNCTAD), the restrictions in movement induced by the Covid-19 pandemic have resulted in a significant rise in e-commerce transactions. The share of Online retail sales as a percentage of total retail sales increased from 16% to 19% in 2020. This includes business-to-business (B2B) and business-to-consumer (B2C) sales, and is equivalent to 30% of global gross domestic product (GDP) in that year. This demonstrates the growing importance of e-commerce today.

For us at the Ministry of Trade and Industry and exporTT, the development of the **Tobago e-Pavilion** is an obvious choice for Tobago businesses. E-commerce, once done properly allows for 24/7 access to buyers and sellers regardless of location.

This E- Pavilion follows in the wake of the national E-Commerce Policy 2017-2021, which articulates the Government's commitment to create an environment that promotes and expands the private sector participation and utilization of e-commerce and ensure that businesses and consumers have the necessary tools and resources to derive tangible benefits from e-commerce.

Ladies and Gentlemen, as mentioned earlier, this is one of the planned initiatives specifically targeting Tobago's manufacturers. Also being pursued is the development of a **Digital Brochure** which will assist Tobago's Corporate Clients, Stakeholders and Entrepreneurs with *doing business more easily* on the island of Tobago. The Brochure is intended to provide communication and service portfolios on **exporTT**, the **Eco-Industrial Development Company of Tobago Ltd (E-IDCOT)** as well as the **THA's Business Development Unit (BDU)** and **Strategic Business Support and Development Unit (SBSDU)** on a single platform.

Additionally, support for **Packaging and Product Upgrades for Indigenous Sweets will be provided under the EBI**. This programme will provide support to producers of indigenous snacks in their efforts to produce products and with the right packaging on par with international industry standards for specialty snacks of this nature, to improve exportability.

Ladies and Gentlemen, the economic forecast for Trinidad and Tobago has already shown significant signs of improvement with exports rebounding by an estimated 22% from Fiscal 2020. It is our intention that the EBI will positively contribute to continuing this upward trend.

In Fiscal 2021/2022 we will continue to roll out other Export Booster Initiatives in an effort to strengthen our Entrepreneurial Ecosystem. exporTT will accelerate its roll out of Trade Missions and Market Research surveys to key markets of interest to Trinidad and Tobago's exporters including the United Kingdom, Chicago, the Dominican Republic and Miami.

Very soon other types of support programmes will be launched including, Labelling and Product Testing and Green Packaging and Manufacturing programmes, set to come on stream early next year.

Support will continue to be made available under the International Certification Programme to assist companies to attain the international certification required to meet international standards.

It goes without saying that all sixteen (16) of the initiatives under the EBI will be available to Tobago manufacturers in addition to the existing suite of services and incentives offered by the Ministry of Trade and Industry and exporTT.

I wish to take this opportunity to thank the staff of exporTT Limited and all those involved in the EBI and in making today's launch of the e-pavilion possible. The Government remains committed to supporting and meeting the needs of manufacturers, particularly the small and medium sized, and new and existing exporters towards the growth of the economy.

Lastly, I encourage all manufacturers regardless of the stage in your export journey, to access the initiatives highlighted here today. The team at exporTT stands ready to assist you in achieving your export goals and will work with you to identify the facilities under the initiatives which are best suited for your export needs.

I thank you.