



Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago

**Ministry of Trade and Industry**

---

# *Virtual Fashion Tradeshaw and Exhibition*

---

FEATURE ADDRESS

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

MARCH 25<sup>TH</sup>, 2022

## SALUTATIONS

- Chairman of CreativeTT – Mr. Calvin Bijou
- Chairman of FashionTT – Mr. Jason Lindsay
- General Manager of FashionTT – Ms. Lisa-Marie Daniel
- General Manager of exporTT – Mr. Dhanraj Harrypersad
- Specially invited guests
- Members of the media
- Ladies and gentlemen

Good Morning

I am truly pleased to be a part of today's launch of the First Virtual Fashion Tradeshow and Exhibition being undertaken by the Trinidad and Tobago Fashion Company Limited (FashionTT) in partnership with exporTT. Both of these agencies fall under the remit of the Ministry of Trade and Industry.

This initiative will showcase the beautiful aesthetic of eleven (11) of Trinidad and Tobago's top export ready designers enrolled in FashionTT's Global Value Chain Programme (GVC). These designers include: The Individual Aesthetic, The Cloth, Meiling, Charu Lochan Dass, Heather Jones International, J. Angelique, Claudia Pegus, The Hideout Clothing, Genesis Swimwear, Neha Karina and Ecliff Elie. In the build-up to the Virtual Fashion Exhibition, these designers have been meeting with international buyers across various segments of the fashion industry. Over the years, their work has met with acclaim well beyond the borders of Trinidad and Tobago.

The Global Value Chain (GVC) is an integral component of the Fashion Value Chain Investment Programme (VCIP) and is designed to support participants in strategically penetrating regional and international markets for the purpose of boosting exports and revenues. Each GVC cohort will have the opportunity to participate in trade missions over a three-year period with the backing of the Government of Trinidad and Tobago.

Today's virtual mission builds upon the the Export Booster Initiative (EBI) to increase the export value of manufactured goods and services which was established by the Ministry of Trade and Industry, in collaboration with exporTT and the Trinidad and Tobago Manufacturers' Association (TTMA). Under the export promotion arm of the EBI, support is provided to small and medium sized local manufacturers to enable them to penetrate new markets via their participation in Virtual Trade Missions. In this regard, the EBI has been able to successfully extend its support to designers who will be participating in this Virtual Trade Mission.

We are pleased to have on board Cardinal Services LLC, a company based in Houston Texas led by its CEO, Dr. Sabeeta Singh, to establish international business linkages for this mission. The primary region of focus is the United States (US), with attendees from Florida, New York, Atlanta, Los Angeles,

California, Minnesota, Texas and New Jersey. Due to this mission being virtual, attendees are also expected from Canada, India, Belgium, Africa and the United Kingdom.

This event will be hosted on a 3D virtual conferencing platform, providing an interactive 3D experience, displaying the products of our local companies. Designer profiles will be available on the Virtual Exhibition platform, designed to match the Caribbean Aesthetics, welcoming guests with the sounds of Soca Music and cultural images that showcase the identity and soul of Trinidad and Tobago.

Trinidad and Tobago's National Development Strategy (NDS) 2016-2030, also known as Vision 2030 has identified the creative industries, of which fashion is a key subsector, as an economic sector that can provide opportunities for expansion and achieve global competitiveness. We are encouraged by the performance of the sector. During the fiscal period 2016 to 2020, the Garment Industry of Trinidad and Tobago generated exports of over \$97 million (US\$14 million).

According to an article by McKinsey and Company titled "The State of Fashion 2022", the global fashion industry has faced exceptionally challenging conditions. After nearly two years of disruption, the industry is beginning to settle and grow. This growth is likely to be driven by the United States where the release of pent-up demand has created spikes of so-called "revenge buying," leading to a growth spurt. This Virtual Fashion Trade Show is therefore timely as it presents a platform for our local fashion designers to take advantage of this spike in demand.

McKinsey and Company also noted that consumers spend more time online. To capture these untapped value streams, designers should explore the potential of virtual fashion, which offers fresh routes to creativity and commerce. Stefan Larsson, Chief Executive of PVH Corp, the company that owns Calvin Klein and Tommy Hilfiger, believes 'when you see those exponential growth rates of consumer-shifting behaviour, you need to follow that, including the meta-world, and be open to how the consumer wants to engage and be open to the possibility that it could, sooner rather than later, be an income stream. In a crowded and disruptive digital market, the seasoned executive considers creativity one of the most important differentiators.'

The Wall Street Journal, in an article on January 6<sup>th</sup> this year, stated that successful brands have remained relevant by staying on top of new and emerging trends and adapting to shifts in consumer preferences. COVID-19 has accelerated digitalization and direct-to-consumer options, requiring new levels of operational efficiency and innovation for the apparel and retail industry. Fashion brands that had more flexible and digitally enabled product-to-market processes were better positioned to pivot and get the right product to consumers as demand shifted.

I would therefore like to commend FashionTT for its foresight and execution of strategic initiatives such as this virtual trade show, which allows local fashion entrepreneurs to bolster their commercial and export capability using online tools. In Fiscal 2021, capacity development support provided by FashionTT through the VCIP helped transition fifty-seven (57) designers to conduct transactions digitally via e-commerce platforms and sixteen (16) new designers commenced exporting their goods to markets such as

the United States of America, The Netherlands, Oman, Dubai, Scotland, Germany, St. Lucia, the United Kingdom, Canada, France, Barbados, Mexico, Switzerland, Jamaica, Grenada, and Antigua and Barbuda.

Trinidad and Tobago's designers are prepared to transition from small scale export to larger opportunities selling to buyers' boutiques, agents and large online retailers. FashionTT has worked with designers over the past six years to ensure that their business operations, procedures and processes are globally competitive. The eleven (11) designers selected for the GVC programme have been handpicked by an international expert panel based on their capability and capacity to compete in the international fashion industry.

Interestingly, seventy-five percent of the top tier designers in this programme have female owned and operated businesses. These businesses are founded and operated by women and predominantly cater to women of all ages, shapes, sizes, ethnicities, and style preferences. These brands ensure that women look good and feel good whether it's in the boardroom or at the beach.

The Government stands ready to lend additional support to our female entrepreneurs through the SheTrades initiative, which was launched October 2020 in collaboration with the International Trade Centre. This transformative platform offers invaluable opportunities for Trinidad and Tobago's female-owned Micro Small and Medium Enterprises, as it promotes their inclusion into global supply chains, facilitates Business-to-Business (B2B) and Business-to-Consumer (B2C) linkages and provides an income-earning avenue for our enterprising women. It provides a pathway for business expansion, enabling female entrepreneurs including fashion designers to receive technical training, professional mentorship, compete in international tender and procurement processes and attend international trade and business events and workshops. The Government continues to encourage our female designers to visit our website to find out more about how they can benefit from this programme.

Also, the Trinidad and Tobago Bureau of Standards (TTBS) has developed a number of standards over the years to improve the quality of our fashion products, increase our access into international markets and ensure that the local fashion industry can successfully compete in the global fashion market. This is another plank of support to our local designers and garment manufacturers to achieve industry standards, which will provide their customers with added confidence.

Following this Virtual Trade Mission, FashionTT will be launching its 5th Fashion LookBook on March 30, 2022, presenting 12 designers from emerging to the veterans in the industry. To date, these digital LookBooks have promoted 116 designers locally and internationally through the channels of Caribbean Airlines, Private Sector Partners and our Embassies, High Commissions and Consulate Generals all over the world.

In closing, I wish to assure you that the Government remains committed to the development of a strong fashion manufacturing base in Trinidad and Tobago, which is crucial for reducing the country's import bill, generating foreign exchange and providing sustainable employment. It can also promote the diversification of the economy by supporting the growth of priority industries like fashion. Moreover, we

are dedicated to forging strategic partnerships with the business community to create and sustain increased global competitiveness of local businesses.

I wish you all a success in this venture.

Thank you.