



Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago

Ministry of Trade and Industry

.....

***Launch of Musical
Instruments of Trinidad
and Tobago Company Ltd
(MITTCO)***

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REMARKS

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

AUGUST 11TH, 2022

SALUTATIONS

- The Honourable Bridgid Annisette-George - Speaker of the House of Representatives of Trinidad and Tobago
- Honourable Cabinet Colleagues
- Honourable Farley Augustine - Chief Secretary, Tobago House of Assembly (THA) and other representatives from the THA.
- Your Excellencies, Heads of Mission and other members of the Diplomatic Corps
- His Grace, the Most Reverend Charles Jason Gordon, Archbishop of Port of Spain
- His Worship Joel Martinez – Mayor of Port of Spain
- His Worship Junia Regrello – Mayor of San Fernando
- Messieurs John Hadad, Robert Hadad, Joseph Hadad, Akua Leith, David Hackett and Mario Joseph - Directors - Musical Instruments of Trinidad and Tobago Company (MITTCO)
- Mr. John Arnold - Chairman, Trinidad and Tobago Music Company (MusicTT) and other representatives of MusicTT
- Special Invited Guests
- Member of the Media
- Ladies and Gentlemen

Good evening.

It is my distinct pleasure to join you, on this World Steelpan Day, for the launch of the Musical Instruments of Trinidad and Tobago Company (MITTCO) and to tour this new Steelpan Manufacturing Facility.

Allow me to congratulate all those associated with this project– the Directors for their vision, strategic direction and investment; and the Executive, Management and Staff for their unwavering dedication, passion and technical expertise. I know that you have been working on this for the past 2 years. These ingredients, bolstered by your love for the national instrument of Trinidad and Tobago and recognition of its intrinsic value to our indigenous creative sector, we are certain were key to bringing this idea to fruition.

Within all of the excitement of today, we must also pay tribute to the many individuals and entities over the decades who have contributed to, and still continue to play a critical role in, the development of our beloved instrument. Perhaps were it not for those toiling in the vineyards for decades, we may not have been here today to realise yet a bigger dream.

Additionally, we recognize the support of our local and successful First Citizens' Bank for their belief in this product and of its importance to the richness of our culture and what we have on offer as a nation.

More strikingly, we are most conscious that the melodic sounds of the steelpan have served to unify our people and our diaspora across the globe; the enjoyment of which is seen in our schools, in our pan yards and on occasions in and out of carnival. Clearly, how we vote is not how we party!

Ladies and Gentlemen, the Government sees the creative sector as key to our diversification efforts. The policy framework can be found in Vision 2030 and, more recently, the *2020 Roadmap for Trinidad and Tobago: Transforming to a New Economy and New Society*. The Roadmap, in particular, notes, “the steelpan manufacturing industry has already demonstrated its potential for earning foreign exchange and creating meaningful employment with significant annualized sales to regional and external markets.” Markedly, the Roadmap also highlighted that “...in its current structure, it is not ideally positioned to capture the growth opportunities in the emerging North American, European, African and Asian economies.”

Currently what exists is the manufacture of traditional steelpans, miniature pans, innovative pans, souvenirs, and complementary accessories. The industry is characterized by three (3) distinct tiers: the major manufacturers that employ 10-25 persons; the smaller-scale operators with 2-8 employees; and individual operations, mainly sole proprietorships including tuners. To date, the local production process for steelpans has remained relatively labour-intensive, utilizing both unskilled and skilled labour, making the industry artisan-type in nature.

Recognizing the challenges to growth with respect to availability, affordability and access to machinery, equipment, raw materials and training, the Government saw it necessary to establish an appropriate funding mechanism to stimulate the industry. Launched in 2020, the Steelpan Manufacturing Grant Fund Facility provides financial support for the acquisition of machinery, equipment, software, tools, raw materials and training to build capacity and expand the industry. Funding is available up to TT\$1 Mn for eligible companies for the purchase of approved items.

As at July 2022, 9 steelpan manufacturers have benefitted from funding under the Grant to the extent of approximately TT\$2.32 Mn. The funding received was used to restructure businesses and increase production capacity to serve regional and international markets including Barbados, Jamaica, Cuba, the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, France, Japan, China, Germany and Australia.

According to data from the Central Statistical Office since the introduction of the Steelpan Manufacturing Grant Facility in 2020, there was a notable increase in steelpan exports to an estimated TT\$2.19 Mn in 2021- ***the highest exported value of the product for the 6 preceding years.***

Whilst acknowledging some level of success, it is not enough to unlock the full potential of the industry. As such, several things are being done including a proposal for the expansion of grant funding to include support for manufacturers of steelpan accessories, including: stands, cases and sticks and also to allow for participation at local and international trade shows including booth designs and other associated costs and; expansion of market access including the use of e-commerce platforms.

Further, a governance structure is now contemplated to ensure that the development of the steelpan industry has clear strategic direction with a focus on innovation and sustainability. With the imperatives for success rooted in quality, standards, scale and competitiveness, it is envisaged that our manufactured steelpan instruments will exceed that of our international competitors.

With respect to quality, the Trinidad and Tobago Bureau of Standards (TTBS) is expected to create the necessary standards to command the desired trust of consumer markets beyond the standard already in place.¹

Additionally, exporTT, even as it transitions to the new Trinidad and Tobago Investment Promotion Agency, will continue to be an ally in promoting our locally manufactured products.

Today's launch is symbolic of the vision and partnerships we wish to see in the creative industry. This venture represents diversification to its core birthed from the synergy of culture and business. Our people are our greatest asset and this country is blessed with very talented individuals. It is collaborations such as this one that are needed throughout the various sectors of the economy if we are to realise our transformation agenda.

I therefore once again recognize all of the directors of MITTCO and all those persons who have contributed to this undertaking. Permit me to single out Director Akua Leith for conceptualizing and materializing this innovative facility and the Haddad brothers, in particular, for buying into this vision and truly backing their love for pan with this investment. Mr. Leith's wealth of knowledge in the pan arena and the Haddad brothers' experience and success in many business ventures will surely impact the ultimate success of this endeavour.

Tonight signals more than an investment; it represents passion for our culture along with trust and faith in the potential of our national instrument which will undoubtedly lead to the growth of the industry and propel steelpan instruments proudly 'Made in Trinidad and Tobago' on the world stage, where it so rightfully belongs.

This venture promises to have a revolutionary impact on our Steelpan industry in terms of scale, quality and availability; and with that comes the opportunity for prosperity for other value chain stakeholders, including a space where large, medium and small producers will thrive side by side. In other words, one may choose to purchase a tenor from MITTCO or Panland or a single producer. All will coexist.

Again, I wish to congratulate all those who have contributed to today's outcome. I wish MITTCO the very best for success.

Tonight further emphasizes that **pan is not in danger**.

I thank you.

¹ The Trinidad and Tobago Bureau of Standards (TTBS) developed a National Standard, TTS 412:2015, Steelpan Terminology for pannists, steelpan manufacturers, tuners, music professionals and other interested parties which seeks to define unique terms within the steelpan industry.