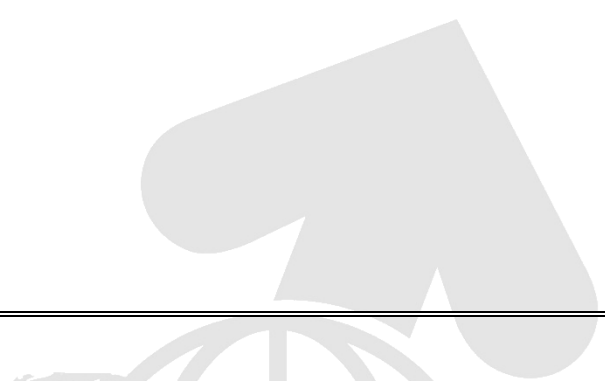


OPENING REMARKS

Commemoration Sailing Ceremony of the Dona Luisa N.V.

to be delivered by
Senator the Honourable Paula Gopee-Scoon,
Minister of Trade and Industry

September 20, 2024



Salutations:

- Senator the Honourable Rohan Sinanan, Minister of Works and Transport
- Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary, His Excellency Cornelis Wilhelmus Hersbach, Ambassador of the Kingdom of the Netherlands
- Mr. Randall Karim, Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Trade and Industry
- Mr. Maurits de Jongh, Don Andreas N.V
- Ms. Sonja Voisin, Managing Director, Gulf Shipping
- Ms. Trudy Gill-Colon, CEO, Port Authority of Trinidad and Tobago
- Mr. Roger Roach, President, Trinidad and Tobago Manufacturers' Association
- Ms. Kiran Maharaj, President, Trinidad and Tobago Chamber of Industry and Commerce.
- Specially invited guests

Introduction

Ladies and gentlemen, Good Afternoon.

It is a pleasure to deliver the keynote address at today's Commemorative Sailing of Dona Luisa and the commencement of what is now the first direct shipping service between Trinidad and Trinidad and Curaçao.

This occasion is a monumental step towards further strengthening bilateral ties between Trinidad and Tobago and Curaçao and by extension Aruba, Bonaire and the Kingdom of the Netherlands.

You may recall that in November 2022, I led a trade mission of 11 businesses to Curaçao. During the visit, I signed a General Framework Agreement with the Honourable Mr. Ruisandro Cijntje, Minister of Economic Development of Curaçao to commence negotiations of a Partial Scope Trade Agreement (PSTA) between

our two countries. The Framework Agreement signalled the commitment to deepen integration between the two countries.

Since then, there have been a number of activities between our two countries including a follow-up trade mission to Curaçao led by the TTMA and exporTT in 2023 and the actual commencement of trade negotiations in July 2024.

The need to further improve connectivity through air and sea linkages was also prioritized. In November 2023, an Air Services Agreement between Trinidad and Tobago and Curaçao (with the Ministry of Works and Transport assuming responsibility on our side) was signed which sought to liberalise the rights for passenger and cargo services. This Agreement serves to promote tourism, open up additional transit points and increase the potential for trade between both countries. This Air Service Agreement has laid the foundation for increased flights from Caribbean Airlines Limited (CAL) which first commenced in December 2021.

And on July 30th 2024, Curaçao became the 6th Associate Member of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM). Curaçao would bring a unique blend of cultural traditions and economic strengths which enhance the synergy of the Caribbean Community.

Through a journey marked by hard work, persistence and private sector dedication by all those involved, **this inaugural sailing**, has now materialized. Whilst I may not be able to identify each and every one responsible for today's success; I must acknowledge representatives from Don Andres and Gulf Shipping among others. I wish to commend you for not only recognizing the shortfall in our shipping connectivity but very quickly seizing the opportunity and undertaking this commercial venture.

Importance of Shipping Industry

Connectivity is a critical component of trade and its importance has been heightened globally within recent years.

It is a fact that the majority of the world's trade is carried by sea, making the shipping industry the central tenet for connecting markets, industries, and consumers worldwide. It is through this industry, that shipping lines and agencies, like you, play a critical role in the global economy enabling the efficient movement of goods.

We all have experienced the impact of recent disruptions in key global shipping routes like the Suez Canal, Panama Canal, and Black Sea which have resulted in unprecedented challenges for trade, including supply chain delays, increased shipping costs and commodity price spikes and hence the need to build new direct sea linkages to allow for more efficient trade flows.

Enabling Environment

Ladies and Gentlemen, the Government of Trinidad and Tobago has been pursuing a multi-pronged approach to expand our non-energy exports including the negotiation of market access trade agreements. It is in this light, that Trinidad and Tobago recently concluded the First Round of negotiations for a Partial Scope Trade Agreement (PSTA) between Trinidad and Tobago and Curaçao in July 2024. The Second Round of Negotiations is expected to take place next month, with the aim of finalizing the agreement by early 2025. The Cabinet of Trinidad and Tobago only this week approved Trinidad and Tobago's List of Products to be requested for duty-free entry into Curaçao.

However, negotiating a trade agreement is just one piece of the puzzle, without efficient and reliable logistics networks, goods cannot move between markets and the benefits of trade agreements which include lower tariffs, the elimination of trade barriers, and increased economic cooperation are rendered

meaningless. As such the physical movement of goods, whether by land or sea, is crucial for our traders.

Let me also say, that the creation of this new route is an example of the ultimate ripple effect that trade agreements can have on a country's economy. These agreements, while expanding markets for our products and services also create opportunities for further development of the private sector.

Trinidad and Tobago and the Dutch Caribbean Islands

The ABC Islands are lucrative markets that can emerge as valuable trading partners for us. While the populations of Aruba (106,000), Bonaire (26,000) and Curaçao (150,000) are much smaller than Trinidad and Tobago, these countries have seen significant growth, with recent statistics indicating a steady increase in tourist arrivals collectively reaching approximately 2.0 million in 2023.

These markets import approximately US\$2.4 Billion from the rest of the world (mainly from North America and Europe) of which only TT\$55 million is from Trinidad and Tobago. Therefore, there remains significant room for growth.

In 2023, Trinidad and Tobago's non-energy exports (valued at TT\$55 Million) were mainly prepared cereals, mattresses, paper products, agricultural chemicals, aerated beverages, wooden furniture and cleaning products.

This biweekly direct route marks a crucial step in linking the region and will significantly reduce the shipping time from a two or three-week transit to a two-day shipping time. This reduction in transit time will not only increase the type of goods being transported but also improve Trinidad and Tobago's shipping solutions to additional territories including Colombia and the Dominican Republic.

I am particularly pleased for example, with the ongoing discussions between commercial players in both markets to increase the supply of poultry and agricultural products to these islands which would otherwise be near impossible without a direct service. Data from the MTI's Trade and Business Information Portal also indicates that there is the potential to displace other imported products into Curaçao such as detergents and soaps, jams and jellies, biscuits, condiments, pharmaceuticals, cosmetics, vegetable products, canned foods and construction materials.

The potential for increased trade between our islands goes beyond the trade in goods but also extends to services as is demonstrated by the recent acquisition of 3 pharmaceutical warehousing and distribution companies including Curacao-based Aventa NV, Pharmaceutical Warehousing Incorporated (PWI) and Aventa Aruba NV by Agostini Limited.

Let me assure our friends in Curaçao, that we understand that international trade is a two-way transaction; therefore, while we speak of the potential for our locally made goods in Curaçao, we must acknowledge that Curaçao can have their goods and services enter our market. Trinidad and Tobago imports significantly more globally (approximately US\$9.1 Billion per annum), therein which lies the space for Curaçao's goods and services to enter Trinidad and Tobago. Additionally, enhanced air and sea connectivity between our islands will help our people to explore each other's tourist attractions fostering a reciprocal relationship that boosts our economies, encourages cultural exchange and enhances regional tourism development through multi-destination tourism.

Conclusion

As we draw this momentous occasion to a close, I once again commend the principals involved in making this direct service a reality. Your dynamism is welcomed and encouraged. We wish you all success with this additional route and look forward to it being oversubscribed.

Thank You.