



Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago

Ministry of Trade and Industry

## MEDIA RELEASE

### ***Government Reaffirms Commitment to Combatting Illicit Trade at TTMA Anti-Illicit Trade Forum***

**November 21, 2024:** Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Trade and Industry (MTI), Mr. Randall Karim, reiterated the Government's commitment to addressing illicit trade and ensuring an open, fair and competitive marketplace that is not undermined by illegitimate activity, while delivering opening remarks at the Trinidad and Tobago Manufacturer's Association (TTMA) Anti-Illicit Trade Forum, held at the Hilton Trinidad and Conference Centre, Port of Spain, on Thursday 21 November, 2024. The forum, the second of its kind, gathered a broad cross-section of stakeholders from Government, law enforcement, regulatory bodies, and the private sector.

During his remarks the Permanent Secretary highlighted the growing concern of illegal trade across the globe, noting its increasing impact on economies, including Trinidad and Tobago. "Based on available data, it is estimated that a significant percentage of imported alcohol enters Trinidad and Tobago illicitly. In the case of tobacco, it is estimated that the illicit trade of tobacco accounts for approximately 5%-10% of the market share. Furthermore, in 2023, the authorities seized \$1.5 million in substandard and falsified pharmaceuticals, and quarantined another \$10 million worth of products" he said.

Mr. Karim emphasized that wide stakeholder participation was necessary to adequately address these issues. As a result, a multi-stakeholder approach was taken in the composition of the Anti-Illicit Trade Task Force (AITTF), which comprises both public and private sector representatives as well as civil society.

Since the first Anti-Illicit Trade Forum, the Task Force has made significant strides in strengthening the legal framework to combat illicit trade. Mr. Karim highlighted that the Working Group established to review the national legislation has completed a draft legislative gap analysis of 14 pieces of legislation. They have also proposed various amendments which will modernise the legal framework to better treat with new and emerging issues regarding illicit trade. "A strong legal framework acts as a powerful deterrent, sending a clear message that illicit trade will not be tolerated in Trinidad and Tobago" he said.

The Task Force has also focused on strengthening the capacity of the country's enforcement agencies, including border agents and law enforcement officers, to adequately detect and seize illicit products. This effort has been supported by the hosting of workshops and seminars, including AITTF's recently concluded Seminar on IP Enforcement which took place in October, 2024.

Increasing public awareness in the fight against illegal trade remains another key objective of the Task Force's efforts. In 2024, a print and media campaign was launched to educate the public on identifying illicit goods, knowing the dangers of consuming illicit products and where to safely report illicit trade. This campaign marked the second phase of AITTF's awareness campaign; the first taking place in 2022. The Task Force will also be conducting "Anti-Illicit Trade Roving Exhibitions" across the country, with the first scheduled for November 28, 2024, at the Brian Lara Promenade, Port of Spain.

Mr. Karim who serves as AITTF's Co-Chair, commended the TTMA for organizing the forum and for their continuous efforts in the fight against illicit trade in Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Emil Ramkissoon, TTMA's Vice President and Chairperson of the Legislative Committee, also delivered opening remarks. He stated that the forum aimed for a collaborative approach among all stakeholders to combat illicit trade.

The specially invited Mr. Louis Comvalius, Associate Director – Intellectual Property Enforcement, Diosa, presented an overview of illicit trade in the Caribbean region. Mr. Comvalius recognized Trinidad and Tobago as the most active Caribbean country in the fight against illegal trade, commending the Government for its political will and dedication to the issue. He also called for greater collaboration and information sharing across the Caribbean to strengthen regional efforts against illicit trade.

The Forum's agenda included a panel discussion with representatives from various sectors. These included Mr. Gerard Maxwell from the Trinidad and Tobago Bureau of Standards, Mr. Richard Aching from the Intellectual Property Office, Mr. Darrin Carmichael of Crime Stoppers T&T, Mr. Farz Khan from the Chemistry Food and Drug Division, and Mr. Leon Haynes of the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service.

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