



Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago

Ministry of Trade, Investment and Tourism

Remarks

by

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Ministry of Trade, Investment and Tourism

**Official Launch of Steelpan Manufacturers Association of
Trinidad and Tobago (SMATT)**

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Port of Spain

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10:00 AM

Good morning.

It is indeed a pleasure for me to deliver remarks on behalf of Senator the Honourable Satyakama Maharaj, Minister of Trade, Investment and Tourism who sends his regards. This launch of the Steelpan Manufacturers Association of Trinidad and Tobago (SMATT) is an important milestone in the continued development of one of our nation's proudest creations: the steelpan. Today we celebrate not just the establishment of an association, but the birth of a new chapter of the steelpan.

I wish to express my sincere appreciation to the Chairman, Mr. Michael Cooper, for inviting me to be part of this auspicious event. Through this newly formed association, you are transforming the entire Steelpan industry in Trinidad and Tobago.

For too long, the industry has been fragmented. Individual brilliance has shone brightly, but a lack of collective structure has prevented our true potential on the global stage. That must change. We need a unified, strategic approach and it is through organizations such as SMATT that this can be achieved. The formal organization of steelpan manufacturers places Trinidad and Tobago in a much better position to transform the industry through various initiatives including:

Firstly, Standardization and Quality Control: The quality of a pan should be consistent and predictable. We need clear, industry-wide standards—from the gauge of the steel to the precision of the tuning—to ensure that every instrument bearing our national mark is synonymous with excellence. This protects the buyer and, crucially, protects the reputation of the instrument itself.

Secondly, Innovation and Training: We need investment in research for better materials, more sustainable processes, and modern manufacturing techniques. Equally important is formalizing apprenticeship and training programs to transfer this sacred craft to the next generation of tuners and manufacturers.

Thirdly, Global Market Access: The demand for the authentic Caribbean steelpan is quite significant, but reaching international markets requires a unified front. The Association should act as a singular, powerful brand ambassador, negotiating bulk purchases, participating in global trade shows, and securing fair pricing for all our members.

SMATT's mission is clear: To establish the steelpan as a globally standardized, professionally marketed, and sustainably manufactured instrument of the highest quality. To achieve this, the immediate focus of the Association should include the following:

Implementation of a Certification Programme: Implementing a voluntary but rigorous certification that manufacturers can achieve and proudly display, guaranteeing quality to international customers.

Procurement of Resources: Creating a collective platform for reliably sourcing high-quality raw materials efficiently and affordably.

Intellectual Property Protection: Effectively collaborating with legal experts to safeguard the designs and innovations of our local tuners and manufacturers against unauthorized replication and market dumping.

Focus on the Export Market: Our greatest potential lies in export earnings. Demand for the authentic, Trinidadian-tuned pan far outstrips our current production capacity. Every pan exported is foreign exchange flowing directly into our economy.

Education and Training: The global proliferation of steelpan in schools and universities creates a continuous, recession-resistant demand for instruments, instructional material, and certified tutors. We export both product and expertise.

Cultural Tourism: Events like Panorama draw international tourists, filling flights, hotels and sold-out performances and supports local businesses that serves as a catalyst for our tourism sector.

Ladies and gentlemen, the Ministry of Trade, Investment and Tourism, and by extension the Government, see this moment as more than a cultural milestone – *it is an industrial and economic opportunity to monetize our national instrument.*

But while the Government is deeply focused on developing the industry there is also a critical role for private sector involvement. In this regard, I take this opportunity to introduce to you to the Private Sector Organization of Trinidad and Tobago (PSOTT).

Just like SMATT, the formation of PSOTT marks a historic step in building a genuine partnership between Government and the business community. For the first time, all major business chambers, law firms, accounting firms, and other stakeholders, including organizations such as SMATT, are united under one umbrella, speaking with a unified, single voice.

Through the collaboration between PSOTT and organizations such as SMATT we can now shape policy together, improve the ease of doing business, attract investment, drive export growth and truly diversify the economy. This partnership will also strengthen our capacity to respond to crises, position Trinidad and Tobago as a credible and competitive destination, and ensure that inclusive growth benefits all businesses and every citizen.

As we launch the Steelpan Manufacturers Association of Trinidad and Tobago today, let this be a commitment to collaboration, quality, and innovation. Let SMATT be the bridge between our nation's creative spirit and its manufacturing potential — ensuring that every note on a Trinidad and Tobago pan be a symbol of pride, professionalism, and infinite possibility.

To the founding members and leadership of SMATT, I extend heartfelt congratulations. You are carrying forward a legacy that belongs to every citizen of this country. The Government stands with you as partners — in melody and in mission — as we work together to make the steelpan industry not only a national treasure, but a truly global enterprise, and may the sound of the steelpan continue to inspire generations to come.

I thank you.