



GOVERNMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO
MINISTRY OF TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Launch of the TTBizlink's Mobile Inspection Service

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FEATURE ADDRESS

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

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OLD FIRE STATION BUILDING, EXECUTIVE DINING ROOM

Ladies and gentlemen, this event comes at a time when our economy is faced with significant economic challenges. The Government's 2016/17 fiscal budget, which is currently being debated, is meant however to restructure our public finances and create the framework for economic growth and structural transformation of the economy. I am satisfied, however, that the Honourable Minister of Finance has brought the country's finances to a place of stability.

Increased Trade, in both goods and services, is one way in which Trinidad and Tobago intends to increase its revenue streams, acquire foreign exchange, create sustainable jobs and, in the long-term, make our economy less vulnerable to the volatility of the international commodity markets. To improve trade, Trinidad and Tobago must

- i. widen the range of goods and services exported;
- ii. exploit existing markets and create new market access opportunities; and
- iii. improve the cost and efficiency of the trade process itself. Today's event is primarily aimed at achieving this.

To give you an idea of the current economic realities facing Trinidad and Tobago, there has been a decline in our visible trade by 37.6% over the period April 2015 to June 2016-- from TT\$12.6 Billion to \$7.8 Billion from the corresponding period one year earlier, according to the 2016 Review of the Economy. Additionally, our balance of trade with our CARICOM partners decreased by 50% over the same period, falling from \$11.8 Billion to TT\$5.9 Billion.

Of this amount the Balance of Trade Excluding Mineral Fuels to CARICOM contracted considerably (-22.3%) over the same period owing to decreases in non-energy exports from TT\$5.2 Billion to TT\$4.2 Billion.

It stands to reason then, that if the non-energy sector is to fill the gap left by the fall in energy revenues, then we must make it easier to trade across our borders.

Ladies and gentlemen, it is with this understanding that the previous PNM Administration saw the urgent need to establish a National Single Electronic Window for Trade and Business Facilitation in 2009, which was later branded as TTBizLink.

EXPANSION OF TTBIZLINK

The Government in April 2016 executed a US\$25 million loan with the Inter-American Development Bank to strengthen and expand TTBizLink. This project, which has already commenced and will continue over the next five years, will seek:

- i. to optimize and simplify foreign trade and business processes to reduce time and costs;
- ii. to improve domestic interoperability among national government institutions and external interoperability with trading partners; and
- iii. to modernize the governance and the institutional framework of the Single Electronic Window (for example we intend to repeal the 1958 Trade Ordinance and replace it with modern legislation)

In addition, only last month Cabinet approved an extension of the existing Contractual Arrangements with CrimsonLogic of Singapore in the amount of US \$2.8 Million to ensure the continued operation of and support to TTBizLinK for the period 2017-2019.

These decisions clearly emphasize the Government's commitment to improving Trinidad and Tobago's trade performance, while enhancing its competitiveness, both of which are key elements for strengthening our economy.

TTBizLINK

With over 7,200 registered users, TTBizLink currently hosts forty six (46) transactional e-services administered by 24 government departments across seven Ministries. It has substantially reduced the need to send duplicate and repetitive information to multiple agencies and has successfully improved information sharing among government agencies, not to mention significantly reducing the time it takes to conduct several business transactions. At the foundation of TTBizLink's success is collaboration—between several diverse public and private sector bodies, Ministries, Agencies and Associations.

Our recent efforts allowed us to collaborate with the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries and the Ministry of Health for a second time this year and has brought to fruition **TTBizLink's 47th e-service - the *Mobile Inspection Service***.

The launch of the TTBizLink Mobile Inspection Service will complete the loop in the digitization of Import Declarations processing by the Trinidad and Tobago Bureau of Standards; Plant Quarantine Services of the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries; and the Food and Drugs Inspectorate under the Chemistry, Food and Drugs Division of the Ministry of Health.

Prior to this morning, Inspectors in these agencies had to conduct physical inspections with printed declarations, printed inspection forms and printed checklists. Now, these officers can complete the entire import clearance process electronically, since the Mobile Inspection Service eliminates the need for paper documents during inspections and increases efficiency due to the instantaneous decisions being sent via mobile devices.

This service will eliminate the need for manual inspections of imports at the main ports of entry for the vast majority of our imports (such as food and plant materials, vehicles and machinery, etc.) thereby significantly reducing the time to conduct business. And as we all know—***time is money; time is scarce***.

FACILITATING TRADE

Ladies and gentlemen, under this Government's stewardship, Trinidad and Tobago became the 9th country to ever ratify the World Trade Organisation Trade Facilitation Agreement, which aims at expediting the movement, release and clearance of goods. The Ministry of Trade and Industry has also established a National Trade Facilitation Committee (NTFC) to facilitate the implementation and coordination of this newly ratified Agreement. The Trade Facilitation Agreement and the NTFC will together ensure that there are new reengineered processes for the import and export of goods.

According to a recent study by the OECD Trade and Agriculture Directorate entitled, "Implementation of the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement: The Potential Impact on Trade Costs", it is estimated that those countries which successfully implement the TFA can expect a 14% reduction in trade costs which will benefit both suppliers and consumers.

BUILDING EXPORT CAPACITY

A critical tool in developing, expanding and diversifying our exports is through a National Export Strategy. Such a Strategy is being developed by the Ministry to address the issue of improving export performance from three broad approaches:

- i. strengthening exporter capacity and competitiveness** – through the development of Private Sector Partnership Programs and the ramping up of efforts with Market Surveys to assist in the exploitation of the Caribbean Diaspora in countries such as Canada, the USA and the UK;
- ii. enhancing the local trading environment** – by updating relevant trade and related legislation, the establishment of a Valuation Committee at Customs and Excise to treat with valuation disputes, the revision the Customs Brokers and Customs Clerks Regulations, and Service Delivery Improvement Plans throughout all Trade related Institutions;
- iii. export promotion** – by implementing a Trade Missions Strategy to coordinate overseas trade missions, creating a National Country Brand to raise the profile and attractiveness of Trinidad and Tobago, and Trade Facilitation Offices in key targeted markets to enhance export penetration.

CREATING AN ENABLING ENVIRONMENT AND IMPROVING COMPETITIVENESS

Despite these many accomplishments of the Government through the MTI, there are several inefficiencies which continue to plague our business environment. Several international institutions and agencies, including the World Economic Forum and the World Bank, have highlighted several of these areas including, among others:

- corruption,
- inefficient government bureaucracy,
- limited access to finance,
- lengthy procedures involved in trading across borders, and
- inefficiencies in resolving commercial disputes.

The implementation of this module, as well as the strengthening and expansion of the SEW, will improve the transparency with which the government operates and also the efficiency of government services offered to the public. Additionally, the Ministry will continue to lead in particular areas, while in others, advocate and collaborate with other public and private sector entities to implement reforms aimed at creating a more enabling business and investment climate. These include:

- The development and implementation of a Secured Transactions System – which will facilitate the use of movable property (such as inventory and machinery) as collateral which form the asset base of the majority of SMEs in Trinidad and Tobago. This system will allow businesses, in particular SMEs, greater access to credit.
- Modernization of the Framework for the Enforcement of Commercial Contracts.
- Reform of the Construction Permitting Process.
- Reform of the Property Registration Process.

FUTURE TTBizLINK PROJECTS

The Ministry of Trade and Industry intends to continue the roll-out of new e-services and other solutions to enhance the trade facilitation environment in Trinidad and Tobago. Specifically, we have begun to collaborate with the Customs and Excise Division to implement a modern risk management system which is intended to, among other things, reduce the volume of cargo chosen for inspection. In addition, we intend to implement a *Multi-modal logistics module* which will allow data to be shared among the main Ports of entry/exit.

CONCLUSION

As I close, I would like to extend my sincerest thanks to the Trinidad and Tobago Bureau of Standards, Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries and the Ministry of Health for their support and guidance in the development and implementation of this new e- service. Your commitment to this project was instrumental in shaping and implementing this service; for this, I thank you.

TTBizLink continues to redesign the way business is conducted in Trinidad and Tobago and I thank each and every one of you for sharing in yet another milestone as we continue along this path of transforming Trinidad and Tobago into a Leader in innovation and *the* place to do business.

The Government cannot do this alone. During these challenging times it is imperative that we work together and move as one in securing the future of this country. Government should not be the main driver of growth, but rather have a facilitative role that encourages risk taking, entrepreneurship, investment, trade and commerce. It is on this basis that the initiatives of the Ministry, and by extension the Government, are being strategically developed with an eye to the future.

I thank you.