



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

Graduation Ceremony of the 2nd Cohort of International Trade Specialists (ITS)

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FEATURE ADDRESS

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

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LEON AGOSTINI ROOM - TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO
CHAMBER OF INDUSTRY AND COMMERCE

It is my distinct pleasure to join you this evening for the Graduation Ceremony of the 2nd Cohort of International Trade Specialists. I extend my sincerest congratulations to the graduating class—you've made a wise choice and you should be proud of your achievements.

I would like to thank the hardworking and visionary persons of exporTT Limited and eBSI Export Academy for creating a program that provides exporters and staff of exporTT with the skillsets necessary to boost your competence in key areas of international trade, with a focus on exporting.

eBSI is recognised as a leading Online Trade Training Academy specialising in the delivery of Certified International Trade Programmes. The eBSI's academic team has worked with you and provided structured guided teaching which you have applied over the course of the program. They have imparted a valuable set of skills and knowledge which are of significant importance to your performance in the trade and international business arenas.

This understanding and appreciation of international trade will inevitably and ultimately result in more resilient and competitive businesses, and by extension, a stronger economy.

International trade is essential to any economy, not only in terms of the goods and services traded, but in terms of the jobs created, the spread of values and knowledge, and the overall advancement of countries.

Ladies and Gentlemen, given our current economic circumstances, Trinidad and Tobago must be proactive and progressive in pursuing trade and investment. It is time, that we re-brand ourselves once again as producers - producers of top quality, highly demanded goods and services.

It is public knowledge that Trinidad and Tobago's GDP declined in 2016 owing to a contraction in the energy sector. The International Trade Specialists here today, as well as the other projects and programmes being undertaken by exporTT, have a critical role to play in reversing this performance. You are now the ones with the understanding and the know-how to realize these objectives by seeking new markets, forging new relationships and taking Trinidad and Tobago to the world.

Guided by Government Policy, the Ministry of Trade and Industry continues its focus on pursuing extra regional and non-traditional markets, increasing export capacity and competitiveness of value added goods and services, improving the business and trade-enabling environment and strengthening the Institutional Framework for Trade.

To this end, we are enhancing market access opportunities with several Latin American countries. We have already signed and are soon to begin our implementation of the Partial Scope Trade Agreement with Panama, as well as we have advanced discussions with Chile for a similar Agreement. More recently, Trinidad and Tobago signed a landmark Energy Agreement with Venezuela for the supply of natural gas to Trinidad and Tobago. It is anticipated that the trade relationship with Venezuela will continue to expand as we explore the supply of new products and services. The Cuban market presents significant potential for our domestic manufacturers.

Building on the overarching aim of greater access to extra-regional markets, the Ministry of Trade and Industry is in the process of completing a comprehensive National Export Strategy (NES).

The NES is aimed at:

- Improving the competitiveness of exporters by strengthening their business knowledge and exporting competencies through the enhancement of trade support initiatives and addressing challenges such as labour productivity and capacity to satisfy international standards;
- Enhancing administrative efficiency of trade related services, via a reduction in the cost and delivery time of these services provided by public trade related institutions; and
- Providing greater support to help exporters penetrate targeted overseas markets, towards increasing and promoting the international profile and desirability of the country's exports.

A unique aspect of the NES is the extensive mapping of the local Trade Support Network. With this Network, exporters will have at their disposal a complete list of the major trade related services available locally as well as the providers of that service. This reflects the Government's on-going commitment to foster an open trade environment, appropriate for both budding and already established exporters. I am confident that the implementation of the NES will have a major and real impact on our exports and overall trade competitiveness.

It is my view that Government's efforts through the National Export Strategy and initiatives such as this course of study, provide an excellent opportunity to combine education and governance to advance our country's export competitiveness.

CONCLUSION

As newly recognized International Trade Specialists, all of you have a role to play in building our nation. Exporters now have the tools and enhanced knowledge-base to better navigate the global trading system; while those of you attached to exporTT will now have the knowledge to be more effective facilitators, while working closely with exporters and importers. Despite your unique objectives and skills, you are all linked and mutually dependent.

2016 was a challenging year for global trade. However, modest growth is expected in the future. And as is said, "if opportunity does not knock, one should build a door". The Government is a partner in this process and we are ready to do what is necessary to unlock new opportunities and markets, and remove unnecessary and unfair bureaucracy. I look forward to working with all of you as we work towards the shared goal of improved economic prospects.

In closing, I offer you my sincerest congratulations and I take this opportunity to wish you all the very best in your journey along the path of improved international trade.

I thank you.