



Media Release

TRADE AND PLANNING MINISTRIES COLLABORATING TO REDUCE TIME FOR CONSTRUCTION APPROVALS

February 13, 2017:- The Ministry of Trade and Industry (MTI) is currently collaborating with the Town and Country Planning Division of the Ministry of Planning and Development to automate the construction permit process with the main objective being the improvement of the efficiency in the building approval system. This means that requests for construction approvals will be done online in the near future. As a result, Trinidad and Tobago's ease of doing business, our competitiveness and trade environment will be enhanced as well as the application process for citizens building private homes and investors in major developments will be made a lot easier.

The Automation of the Construction Permitting process will increase efficiency, reduce the logistical burden for the applicants, simplify processes as well as improve management oversight, transparency and customer service delivery. The new system will also result in the reduction of approval times through online registration, online submission, email notifications, web monitoring and automated payment methods. It will enable applications to be tracked electronically through each stage of the process and thus facilitate the monitoring of the status of applications online in real time.

The World Bank has indicated that Trinidad and Tobago currently averages 273 days for a construction permit which includes all agencies involved in the approval process i.e. TCPD, WASA, T&TEC, the EMA as well as the Municipal Corporations. We are currently ranked 149th in dealing with construction permits according to the World Bank. Automating the system will significantly reduce this time frame and raise our ranking. The TCPD with the Ministry of Trade and Industry will roll out a pilot test later this year to determine exactly how many days can be cut from the process.

With this objective in mind, the Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago has entered into a US\$25 million loan agreement with the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) for the enhancement of the Government's Single Electronic Window (SEW) for Trade and Business Facilitation – TTBizLink under the Ministry of Trade and Industry. One specific area of focus under this agreement is the matter of construction permits. Automation of the building permit system at the Municipal Corporations is also in keeping with the Government's efforts to reform local government. The initial phase of the Project will be 12 months, which have already begun, after which a pilot project will be conducted in the Northern Division of the Town and Country Planning Division (Port of Spain and environs) and later extended to other divisions across Trinidad and Tobago.

As part of this process, the Ministry of Planning and the Ministry of Trade and Industry co-hosted a Workshop on Thursday 9 February, 2017 at the latter's Nicholas Tower office to discuss reforming the current Construction Permitting process in Trinidad and Tobago. This workshop engaged the TCPD and the Ministry of Trade and Industry's Single Electronic window staff and brought focus to areas of business process reengineering; automation of the Workflow Processes; upgrading of hardware infrastructure; map digitization; capacity building and change management; public awareness and administration and monitoring and evaluation.

In addressing the participants at the workshop, Ms. Frances Seignoret, Permanent Secretary (Acting), Ministry of Trade and Industry, expressed confidence that the stakeholders present will play a critical role in charting a way forward for the improvement of Trinidad and Tobago's business climate and thereby contribute to the country's development. Mrs. Joanne Deoraj, Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Planning and Development, in her Remarks emphasised the Ministry of Planning and Development's focus on national development based upon a framework for economic, social, environmental and spatial progress reinforced by the work of important Units such as the TCPD who deal directly with members of the public, especially in the ever-important area of spatial development.

The implementation of an Automated Construction Permitting process at the Town and Country Planning Division is in keeping with the Government of Trinidad and Tobago's commitment to the facilitation of physical development which is connected to the stimulation of economic growth.