HEALTH, SAFETY, SECURITY AND ENVIRONMENT CONFERENCE AND EXHBITION 2017

F E A T U R E   A D D R E S S

SENATOR THE HONOURABLE PAULA GOPEE SCOON
MINISTER OF TRADE AND INDUSTRY

14TH NOVEMBER, 2017

mti
REPUBLIC OF TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO
MINISTRY OF TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Good morning

It is with great pleasure that I join you today on behalf of the Prime Minister, Dr the Honourable Keith Rowley, at the opening of the 21st Annual Health, Safety, Security and Environment (HSSE) Conference hosted by the American Chamber of Commerce (AMCHAM). Over the years, AMCHAM has successfully promoted HSSE best practices through this Conference, which has served as both a forum for exchanging ideas and information, and a platform for industry insight on trends and opportunities in matters of Health, Safety, Security and the Environment. We applaud the good work of all.

INTRODUCTION

In 2016, the Minister of Energy and Energy Industry, the Honourable Franklin Khan delivered the keynote address at this event. In his presentation he shared challenges and issues facing the energy sector pertinent to the Government's vision for HSSE and energy. This address, however, extends beyond energy to consider the state's perspective on the cross cutting theme of HSSE and the role it plays in supporting the implementation of the country's National Development Strategy - Vision 2030 which places people at the centre of development.

PEOPLE. SYSTEMS. SUSTAINABILITY.

The theme of this year's conference: People. Systems. Sustainability, is more than a collection of disparate words, and rather reflect an integrated approach to HSSE solutions. From the perspective of Government, sound HSSE practices should not only promote the safety of our people but rather create a paradigm shift where new mechanisms are introduced to guarantee a more secure, sustainable and healthier future. There are many strategies which challenge and advocate change - all based on the premise that "systemic changes begin and end with people." A strong foundation is therefore required for any meaningful future impact by all change agents. The Government is encouraged by the interest demonstrated by various groups working together to create the desired HSSE culture in their respective spaces.

HSSE AND NATIONAL PLANNING

If HSSE is to have the desired impact on the intended targets, the concepts of People, Systems and Sustainability must be central to the national planning framework. In this regard, the National Development Strategy, Vision 2030, clearly articulates Government's people-focused development agenda. Interestingly, the elements of this Conference theme —People, Systems, Sustainability, are also embedded in the five (5) overarching themes of Vision 2030, but more so in the themes of:
- Putting People First: Nurturing our Greatest Asset
- Placing the Environment as the center of Social and Economic Development.

HEALTH

Goal 4 of the National Development Strategy (NDS) Vision 2030 focuses on the creation of a sustainable and modern healthcare system for improved service delivery. The Government recognises that due consideration must be given to the health of employees. This includes the physical, emotional and mental well being, and for large employers including the Government, unhealthy employees not only bear a significant financial cost but also severely impacts on policy development and outcomes. The issue is not only social, but economic.

An investment in Health is an investment in our people. A healthy workforce promotes productivity, and avoids wasted expenditure on account of injury leave, further recruitment and additional training. However, if Occupational Safety and Healthy (OSH) is to be promoted and entrenched in the culture of any organization, it must not only be employee-focused, but must also be introduced within reliable and sustainable systems.

Since 2004, the Government has established a National Occupational Health and Safety Authority and Agency which seeks to address oversight of HSSE issues and gaps in regulation. This organization, in the pursuit of its core mandate continues to introduce greater efficiencies in the system, recognizing the impact on the regulatory, investigative, informational, preventive and advisory functions.

By example, the Agency has introduced the option of dealing with legal matters by Consent Order, allowing businesses to settle outstanding cases with the Authority, without taking matters through the lengthy Court system. In order to create a more effective and proactive system, the Authority is also promoting the use and analysis of OSH data by firms, to increase awareness of shortcomings and possible solutions. If we are to learn from and improve Process Safety and Incident Investigation, which will be addressed by two of the conference's guest speakers, accurate and reliable data is of the utmost importance.

SAFETY

You would agree that public safety is a fundamental right of all citizens. While the state remains committed to ensuring this through its various agencies, recent surveys, including the Association of American Chambers of Latin America and the Caribbean's Business Pulse Survey both highlight safety as an ongoing concern among local businesses. Cognisant of this, the Government, through the Ministry of National Security is making every effort to ensure the safety, security and well-being of every citizen of Trinidad and Tobago.

The concept of safety as it relates to the quality of locally-produced standards is also very important, particularly for a country seeking to develop a strong export base and culture. Businesses have long recognized, that associating brands with quality systems and building brand awareness are critical for maintaining and growing customer bases and margins. Therefore, if we are to properly position our local goods and services to compete with those of the developed world, we must revolutionise the products we export; ensuring that international standards are met.

One example of the Government's efforts to improve the exportability of domestically produced goods and services, to advance the competitiveness of firms, and also protect public health and welfare, is our commitment to creating a robust National Quality Infrastructure (NQI). This system promotes equity and fairness between buyers and sellers in the marketplace and most importantly creates the legislative framework to accommodate free trade. To this end, the Government is in the final stage of developing a National Quality Policy, which will ensure that domestic industry is fully compliant with the country's international and regional trade commitments.

The Trinidad and Tobago Bureau of Standards is leading this initiative and is working to ensure that our nation's development is based on internationally recognized Codes and Standards, as well as measurement and Conformity Assessment Systems.

SECURITY

The prominence of this topic on your agenda is noted. Ladies and gentlemen Goal 4 under Theme II of the Vision 2030 National Development Strategy (NDS) focuses on continually reviewing, modernizing and strengthening the country's legal and legislative framework in tandem with the on-going reforms in the judicial system. Relative to business, it may interest you to know that in 2016 alone, the cost of cybercrime globally, however, was estimated at US$450 billion.

Cybercrime is an international as well as national issue. To boost confidence and attract investors, the Government is treating seriously with the matter of cyber-security and cyber-crime. The Cybercrime Bill, which is currently before a Joint Select Committee of Parliament, seeks to create offences related to cybercrimes and repeal and replace existing, outdated legislation. Some of the new offences in the Bill relate to the illegal access to computer systems, illegal data interference, offences against critical infrastructure, computer-related fraud and computer-related forgery. Additionally, new agencies will be established to boost the law enforcement system to streamline operational efficiency through better allocation of resources.

Cabinet has also recently considered a National e-Commerce Strategy which seeks to create an environment that facilitates and promotes e-commerce for local businesses to serve domestic and international consumer markets. The successful implementation of this Strategy will not only provide an opportunity for the country to diversify the economy and promote entrepreneurship; but will encourage cost savings, increased efficiency, and assist Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) in offering niche products and services to the local and global markets. If we are to fully recognize the benefits from the burgeoning world of e-commerce we absolutely must minimize the negative effects of cybercrime. While such technological innovations are necessary in today's world to provide convenience, the necessary security systems need to go hand in hand to ensure confidence in these systems.

ENVIRONMENT

Vision 2030 Goal 1 under Theme 5 focuses on strengthening environmental governance and management systems including a comprehensive and well co-ordinated system to address the interconnected environmental issues. Other focal areas treat with the reduction of carbon emissions, energy efficiency, alternative fuels, renewable energy technology, climate vulnerability and rising sea levels with a view to creating effective adaptation strategies for building resilience and sustainable development.

Ladies and gentlemen, recent regional events have forced us to appreciate the costs of environmental neglect and destruction. Hurricanes have battered our Caribbean neighbours and cities and towns across North and Central America. Human action over centuries has resulted in climate change which affects us all, but more so, the region's small island developing states. Therefore comprehensive disaster management is critical to the sustained growth and stability of the region and individual countries.

The World Bank estimates that some 26 million people—the equivalent of the combined population of Chile and Bolivia—fall into poverty each year due to natural disasters. But such devastation also presents opportunities. Only this month Dominica's Prime Minister Roosevelt Skerrit presented a bold rebuilding plan that would make his country the world's first climate-resistant nation in the climate change era.

PRIVATE SECTOR
With increasing global competition, companies are searching for ways to improve their ability to mitigate against risk and more productively deploy their assets. In fact, HSSE has become so critical to organizational performance that HSSE performance is now considered by some as a measure of maturity, a predictor of future success and a company differentiator.

To optimize their performance, companies must evolve their HSSE practices from one in which compliance is the primary driver to one in which risk management is the fundamental component which can ultimately lead to a state of sustainable development. Many firms, small, medium and large, are currently doing so and Governments, especially those in the Caribbean, must follow the trend.

Further, many private sector companies have embraced corporate social responsibility (CSR) programs, which consider the "triple bottom line"—social, economic, and environmental performance—and extend HSSE beyond the boundaries of the company to include the community, regulators, customers, suppliers, partners, shareholders and other key stakeholders. This is an excellent approach.

CONCLUSION
Issues regarding Health, Safety, Security and Environment will never become outdated; however, the policies, procedures and technologies related to HSSE issues will continually change and evolve over time. In fact issues relating to HSSE are critical to the growth and development of any economy especially those in developing countries like ours. It remains that both the Governments and the private sector must be able and willing to adapt to the changing environment and demand a healthier, safer, more secure and environmentally friendly world where we can all live and work.

I thank you.