



Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago

Ministry of Trade, Investment and Tourism

Remarks by

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Conference (AIFAC 2025)**

*“Transforming Vision into Legacy: A Business Blueprint for Future
Ready Enterprise”*

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Good morning,

It is a tremendous honour to open this 16th Annual International Finance and Accounting Conference under the powerful theme, “Future Ready: Innovation, Transformation, Resilience.”

I thank ICATT for this invitation and for your unwavering commitment to strengthening the ethical, professional and governance standards that support our financial system and drive our country’s broader economic development. Today, we gather as leaders, thinkers and builders, at a pivotal moment in this country’s history, a time when disruption has become the very environment in which we operate.

The pace of change is no longer steady; it moves with extraordinary speed. Your theme, Future Ready, Innovation, Transformation and Resilience, goes to the heart of what every modern enterprise must now confront. But it also speaks very personally to my own journey which began decades ago.

A Blueprint Shaped by Experience

Looking back, the lessons that shaped Sacha Cosmetics can serve as the foundation of a business blueprint for future-ready enterprises. And the lessons learnt over the years of this “Trinbago born – Globally accomplished” business, rests on five pillars: Vision, Innovation, Transformation, Partnerships and Resilience.

Step 1: Define and Align Your Vision

I began building a company with a vision that many believed was unrealistic. Sacha Cosmetics was not born out of convenience; it was born out of necessity. The global beauty industry had overlooked women of colour for generations.

In my memoir, Building a World-Class Brand on a Shoestring Budget, I wrote:

“When I launched Sacha, I wasn’t just starting a business — I was challenging an industry that treated women of colour as an afterthought... In the global cosmetic industry, we were the outlier, not born in Paris, New York, or Milan, but in Trinidad — a small island in the Caribbean.”

In my mind - The vision was clear.

Vincent Van Gogh said, “I know nothing with any certainty, but when I look at the stars, I dream.”

Dreams become visions and visions become legacies — but only when they are aligned with purpose.

When I started Sacha, my purpose was simple but bold: to celebrate beauty in every shade of the Caribbean woman. That purpose shaped every decision, every product, every hire and critically, every partnership.

Step 2 - Innovation: Solving Real Problems

Every future-ready enterprise must recognise that innovation is not a moment, innovation is a discipline.

In the early days of Sacha, innovation was not optional. It was survival.

We solved a problem the world had ignored: shade-matching for diverse skin tones in tropical climates. We invested in research, tested relentlessly and refused to compromise on quality — even when resources were scarce. Innovation caused every breakthrough and it continues to be the engine that drives relevance across many businesses in a changing world.

Today, innovation has been refined into data-led, customer-informed and continuous actions, not episodic. If you innovate only when forced, you are already behind.

Step 3 - Transformation: Reinventing Before You Must

Transformation is often misunderstood as a reaction to crisis. For example in the pandemic years, the word “pivot” was used to convey the change in operating norms, when in hindsight, companies were in fact adopting “transformative strategies” for business-survival. We can now admit that the companies that endured are the ones that transformed long before they planned to – in the midst of the crisis.

At Sacha, transformation has always been a way of life. We modernised production, expanded into new markets, embraced technology before it was convenient and refined our brand identity repeatedly. Some nights were relentless, testing formulas at 2 a.m., balancing cash flow, renegotiating with suppliers who underestimated a Caribbean company's potential.

But transformation, when driven by purpose, becomes momentum.

And this raises a critical question for all of us:

How do we ensure that the transformation we pursue today becomes the foundation for companies and the next generation of leaders — not just a milestone, but a movement?

Step 4 - Partnerships: The Force Multiplier of Growth

From my experience, no business and no nation can transform alone.

Sacha's global reach was not built on product alone. It was built on partnerships. Partnerships with distributors who believed in us before the world noticed. Partnerships with businesses across the world. And partnerships with regional institutions that gave us access to new markets. Partnerships are the multiplier that turns a local idea into an international brand, provided you have set your sights far and wide.

Today, as the Minister of Trade, Investment and Tourism, those same principles guide my approach. Everyday, the task is crafting meaningful partnerships for the economic well-being and growth of Trinidad and Tobago. Work is underway for a partnership with the Private Sector Organisation of Trinidad and Tobago, as we view this Public-Private Partnership as essential to building a resilient, competitive, future-ready economy.

A nation rises on the strength of collective ambition.

Step 5 - Resilience: The Character of a Company, the Backbone of a Country

Resilience is not simply the capacity to endure hardship, it is the ability to grow because of it.

Resilience, I learned, is the result of culture: a culture of trust, ethical leadership and uncompromising standards. At the start of the Sacha Cosmetics journey, I was told it could not be done here, that a company from Trinidad and Tobago could not compete with global giants, however I did not let that deter me. As stated in my memoir “it’s not just about chasing new markets, it’s about carrying your values with you into every decision, every formula, every story you tell. When your brand is built on belonging, there’s no limit to where it can go.”

The same is true for Trinidad and Tobago.

Our resilience is found in our people, their creativity, their determination and their refusal to accept limitations imposed by geography or global competition.

This blueprint — vision, innovation, transformation, partnerships and resilience — is universal. It applies whether you are building a cosmetics company, a tech firm, a financial institution, or a government ministry.

From Enterprise to Economy: A Blueprint for National Transformation

Today, as Minister of Trade, Investment and Tourism, I carry this blueprint with me, not as a business strategy, but as a national mission.

Our vision is clear:

to transform Trinidad and Tobago into a future-ready economy — innovative, export-driven, investment-attractive and globally competitive. One that is Open for Business.

To achieve this, the Ministry has articulated bold but achievable targets and a clear action plan: growing exports, accelerating investment attraction, growing tourism, modernising trade facilitation and diversifying the economy.

Execution matters and so we have strengthened our performance framework with a weekly reporting system and an unprecedented partnership with the Private Sector Organisation of Trinidad and Tobago.

I wish to recognize ICATT as the model professional institution in the country. One that focuses on the promulgation and implementation of International Accounting, Auditing and professional performance standards in Trinidad and Tobago. ICATT is seeking to maintain world class standards in all of its efforts. This is what we have to be doing in all facets of institutions in the country.

All professions, law, medical, engineering, economics, etc can do well to learn from the quality model you have developed. This will be a major contributor to lifting standards and quality across our society.

We need our professions to lead in national transformation and development. I challenge ICATT to reach out to the other professions and the Private Sector Organisation of Trinidad and Tobago in contributing to this national transformation and development process.

Just as Sacha Cosmetics had to execute with discipline, so too must our nation. Just as we built a brand that competed globally, we are now building an economy that will

compete globally. This is how vision becomes legacy — not by what we build for ourselves, but by what we build for others.

I see my role not only as Minister, but as mentor and enabler — building a new generation of SMEs and exporters equipped to scale, digitise and compete internationally.

Our story in Trinidad and Tobago is a story of resilience. If we channel that potential through strong governance, disciplined financial systems, entrepreneurial support and visionary leadership, we will create enterprises and economies that endure for generations.

Before I close, I wish to leave you with a few final thoughts which I urge you to share with your teams and clients and which are contained in my teaching memoir, Building a World-Class Brand on a Shoestring Budget, against all odds.

It is this background and experience that I bring to bear on my position as Minister of Trade, Investment and Tourism:

Compete with the top US brands

Quality

Value not price

Change the world

Legacy

Differentiate – sustainable

Best place to be in business – hurricane belt, eg. Skin tones

Flagship product - extend

Mc Kinsey

Miss universe, usa, halal,

Monte carlo

Conclusion

Ladies and gentlemen, the world is changing quickly. But the future does not simply happen to us — we shape it.

As we begin AIFAC 2025, I encourage each of you to embrace this mindset. Let us define our vision, let us align our vision to our strategies, let us innovate with discipline, let us transform our businesses continuously and demonstrate resilience. Through all of this we will continue to empower others so that the torch we carry today burns even brighter tomorrow.

Earlier this month, the Government of Trinidad and Tobago unveiled a bold transformative pathway for the country – The Revitalisation Blueprint – that aims to transform Trinidad and Tobago to a first-world nation in ten (10) years and heralding a new era of Trinbago excellence in the Region.

The Ministry of Trade, Investment and Tourism is also in step with the Revitalisation of several areas of business in the non-energy sector.

Trinidad and Tobago is open for business. Open for innovation. Open for transformation. Open for a resilient, inclusive future. Are you prepared to contribute to this path with the grit and determination necessary? I leave you with that question.

Thank you and I wish you a productive and inspiring conference.