



Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago

Ministry of Trade, Investment and Tourism

# **Catalyst SME Conference 2026 Trinidad and Tobago Chamber of Industry and Commerce**

Opening Remarks

**Senator the Honourable Satyakama Maharaj**

Minister of Trade, Investment and Tourism

Wednesday 11<sup>th</sup> March, 2026

## **Salutations**

- Ms. Sonji Pierre-Chase, President of the Trinidad and Tobago Chamber of Commerce and other members of the Board
- Ms. Vashti Guyadeen, CEO of the TTCIC and staff members
- Conference delegates, entrepreneurs and innovators,
- Specially Invited Guests
- Members of the Media
- Ladies and Gentlemen

### **Good morning.**

It is a pleasure to join you for the second staging of the Catalyst SME Conference, an event that has already established itself as one of the Trinidad and Tobago Chamber of Industry and Commerce's important platforms for business transformation in Trinidad and Tobago.

I commend the Trinidad and Tobago Chamber of Industry and Commerce for convening this important forum and for its long service to business development in our country. For 147 years, this Chamber has been a serious institution in the life of Trinidad and Tobago. That matters, because strong institutions help to build strong economies.

### **SMEs: The Engine of Transformation**

We are here to speak about small and medium-sized enterprises, but let us say from the outset that there is nothing small about their importance to this country.

SMEs are not a side story in the national economy. SMEs are the economy in motion. Over 70 percent of this Chamber's membership is made up of SMEs. That alone tells us something important:

### **If SMEs do not grow, Trinidad and Tobago cannot grow.**

SMEs are where innovation begins; where jobs are created; where risk is taken, where ideas are tested, where value is built, and where the future of our economy is being shaped in real time.

That is why the Government's approach is clear. SMEs are not peripheral to national development. They are central to it.

Earlier this year, I had the privilege of being a guest presenter in your Success Leaves Clues series. What struck me most was the hunger among SMEs, not just for information, but for community. For a space to share lessons, to collaborate, to build confidence, and to turn potential into performance.

Today's conference continues that mission.

### **Government's Commitment: A New Era of SME Support**

At the Ministry of Trade, Investment and Tourism, we are driving an economic strategy built on growth, competitiveness, and national self-belief. Our mandate is not passive. It is active. It is to create the conditions for business growth, investment expansion, tourism development, and national economic renewal.

That is the mission.

We are moving to reduce friction in the system. We are working to make approvals, processes, and business facilitation more efficient and more predictable. We are advancing a stronger framework for local business development because too many of our enterprises have had the talent, the drive, and the ideas, but not the level of support needed to scale.

That must change.

We also believe that local businesses must lead in Trinidad and Tobago. Our people must not remain spectators in their own economy. We must build local capacity, local ownership, local confidence, and local champions.

That is how nations become strong. **Buy Local, Build Trinbago.**

### **Catalyst 2026 Focus Areas: Agriculture and the Creative Industries**

The Chamber has chosen wisely to place attention on agriculture and the creative industries. Agriculture is not just about production. It is about resilience. It is about food security. It is about reducing import dependence and retaining more value within our own economy.

The creative industries are equally critical. Culture is not a side issue. Culture is business. Culture is export. Culture is intellectual property. Culture is identity converted into value. In a global economy driven increasingly by ideas, brand, content, and experience, our creative entrepreneurs have enormous potential. Trinidad and Tobago has the talent. What we need is the structure, the support, and the strategic seriousness to unlock it.

Buy Local, Build Trinidad: A National Movement. Buying local is not charity. Buying local is strategy. It supports jobs. It keeps value circulating here at home. It eases pressure on foreign exchange. It strengthens communities. It gives our producers, manufacturers, farmers, creatives, and service providers the demand base they need to expand.

Every dollar spent on a quality local product is an investment in national strength. And we must challenge the old mentality that imported automatically means superior. That is outdated thinking. Trinidad and Tobago produces excellence. Our people are capable of excellence. Our businesses are capable of excellence. Many of them are already meeting international standards, already exporting, already proving that they can compete with anyone.

What they need is a country that believes in them and backs them.

### **Exporting Trinidad to the World**

At the same time, we are not speaking only about the domestic market. We are speaking about exports. We are speaking about building businesses that earn foreign exchange, penetrate new markets, and carry Trinidad and Tobago to the world.

That includes manufacturing, agro-processing, digital services, creative industries, marine services, tourism products, and many other sectors where our SMEs can win. We want our businesses to think bigger, move faster, and compete harder.

Because Trinidad and Tobago must be known for more than potential. We must be known for performance. That is why the message of this Ministry is simple and unambiguous: Trinidad and Tobago is open for business.

### **A New National Tone: Trinidad and Tobago Is Open for Business**

And make no mistake, conferences such as this are part of that tone. Your businesses are part of that tone. Your innovation, your digitisation, your growth—these are the signals that investors, partners, and global markets are watching.

### **Closing: Turning Potential Into Performance**

Therefore, as we begin Catalyst 2026, I want to leave you with this:

SMEs are not small. SMEs are strategic. SMEs are national assets.

You are the innovators.

You are the job creators.

You are the exporters.

You are the ones who will turn Trinidad and Tobago's potential into performance.

The Government stands ready to partner with you, through policy, facilitation, incentives, and a renewed commitment to building world class local businesses. Let us innovate. Let us digitise. Let us grow.

Moreover, let us build a stronger, more competitive, more resilient Trinidad and Tobago, together.

Thank you.