



Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago
Ministry of Trade, Investment and Tourism

One Vision. Global Connection.

Opening of the Trade and Investment Convention (TIC) 2026

Keynote Address
Senator the Honourable Satyakama Maharaj
Minister of Trade, Investment and Tourism

Wednesday, July 8th, 2026

Salutations

- Mr. Emil Ramkissoon, President of the Trinidad and Tobago Manufacturers' Association,
- Dr. Ramesh Ramdeen, CEO
- Members of the Executive,
- My Cabinet Colleagues,
- Members of Parliament,
- Members of the Diplomatic Corps,
- Captains of Industry,
- Members of the Business Community,
- Distinguished Guests,
- Ladies and Gentlemen.

Good evening.

It is an honour to join you this evening for the opening of the 2026 Trade and Investment Conference: One Vision. Global Connection. I congratulate the Trinidad and Tobago Manufacturers' Association for its enduring contribution to our nation's development. For decades, the TTMA has championed manufacturing, innovation, exports and entrepreneurship. Above all, it has championed the belief that Trinidad and Tobago can compete with the very best in the world. That belief has never been more important than it is today.

The global economy is changing at extraordinary speed. Markets are now digital, immediate and interconnected. The countries that succeed are those that connect capability to demand, products to markets, ideas to investment and national strengths to global value chains. The question is not whether change is coming. The question is whether Trinidad and Tobago is prepared to seize the opportunities it presents.

For generations, our energy sector has been the foundation of our economy. It transformed our nation and financed our development. It remains a vital pillar, but every successful economy must continue building on its strengths. That is why this Government has placed renewed emphasis on expanding the non-energy economy.

- Manufacturing.
- Agriculture.
- Tourism.
- Technology.
- Professional services.
- Logistics.
- The creative industries.

Together, they represent the next chapter of Trinidad and Tobago's economic story. Manufacturing deserves special emphasis because it is one of the few sectors that creates value across the entire economy. It creates skilled jobs. Generates exports. Drives innovation. Earns the foreign exchange that finances our nation's development. And because manufacturing strengthens businesses throughout the supply chain, when manufacturing grows, much of the economy grows with it.

Before entering public service, I spent nearly five decades building a manufacturing business in Trinidad and Tobago. Like many manufacturers in this room, I experienced firsthand both the opportunities and the challenges of competing from a small developing country.

I know what it is like to compete against multinational corporations with greater scale, larger marketing budgets, lower financing costs and established global distribution networks. Those years taught me two lessons.

First, building a world-class product is only half the battle. The other half is earning access to customers. Quality is no longer simply a competitive advantage. It is a passport to international markets. That is precisely why this Trade and Investment Convention, and every TTMA trade mission, is so important. They open doors to new markets.

But doors only create opportunity if we walk through them. Every conversation should lead to a contact. Every contact should lead to a proposal. Every proposal should lead to business. Second, competitive advantage is not determined by the size of your country. It is determined by the quality of your products... the strength of your people... and the ambition of your vision. Our size is a fact. Our ambition is a choice.

We saw a powerful reminder of that during the recent FIFA World Cup, when Cabo Verde, a nation of just over 500,000 people, pushed one of football's greatest powers, Argentina, to the very limit. The world does not reward countries for being small or large. It rewards countries that are competitive. When I came to public office, I brought one conviction with me. Business does not need more rhetoric. It needs clarity. Speed. Reliable systems. Strong standards. And a Government that understands commercial reality. That is the approach we are bringing to the Ministry of Trade, Investment and Tourism.

Ladies and gentlemen, every successful business begins with one question: Who is my customer? Without customers there are no sales. Without sales there is no growth. Without growth there are no jobs. The same is true for nations.

With a population of just 1.4 million people, our future depends on reaching customers far beyond our shores. Yet despite those challenges, Trinidad and Tobago has produced manufacturers whose products stand proudly beside some of the finest brands in the world. That should give every one of us confidence.

We are not asking our businesses to do something they have never done before. They have already proven they can compete internationally. That is why we are strengthening commercial relationships throughout CARICOM, Latin America, MERCOSUR, Ghana and the wider West African market.

For our manufacturers, these are not simply new destinations on a map. They are new customers, new distributors, new investment partners and new opportunities for growth. Ghana is more than another export destination.

Is our commercial gateway to ECOWAS, West Africa, a market of more than 420 million consumers, and a bridge to one of the world's fastest-growing economic regions. For Trinidad and Tobago businesses, that means the opportunity to reach a market nearly three hundred times larger than our own.

That is why we are pursuing direct air services between Trinidad and Tobago and Accra. Markets are built on relationships. And relationships begin with people meeting people. If you cannot visit a market, you cannot truly develop it.

Our vision is clear:

To position Trinidad and Tobago as the natural commercial gateway between the Caribbean, Africa and the emerging markets of the East, creating new opportunities for trade, investment and tourism. We should no longer think of these regions as the Global South. They are the Global Majority. Home to nearly 5.8 billion people. Home to some of the world's fastest-growing economies. And home to one of the greatest commercial opportunities of our generation. Expanding our international connections is not only about opening markets for our businesses, but also about bringing the world to Trinidad and Tobago.

To our international buyers and business partners who have travelled here from around the world, I extend a very warm Trinidad and Tobago welcome. I invite you to look beyond the size of our nation and judge us by the quality, innovation and reliability of what we produce. For decades, our manufacturers have invested in world-class facilities, internationally recognized standards, advanced technology and skilled people. Today, products proudly made in Trinidad and Tobago are earning the confidence of consumers throughout the Caribbean and in markets across North

America, Europe and beyond.

Over the next few days, I encourage you to meet our manufacturers, discover their products and explore the opportunities they offer. If you are seeking reliable suppliers, innovative products and long-term partners, I believe you will find them here. Many of the brands showcased at this Convention deserve a place in your product portfolio, on your shelves and in the hands of your customers. I encourage you to begin those conversations today, because some of your most valuable business relationships may begin at this very Convention.

Tourism is also one of our most valuable export industries. But our objective is not simply more visitors. It is attracting visitors who stay longer, spend more and create greater economic value. That is why we have made the yachting sector a priority. Since taking office, we have reduced yacht clearance times from approximately four hours to just fifteen minutes, upgraded arrival facilities, and are positioning Trinidad and Tobago to become the premier yachting hub of the southern Caribbean.

More importantly, these reforms demonstrate our commitment to building a more competitive, more efficient and more business-friendly economy. To advance that goal, we are strengthening the Trinidad and Tobago Bureau of Standards to enhance the quality of our products and services, modernising digital platforms such as TTBizLink, streamlining government services, improving trade facilitation, expanding market access and working alongside our exporters to help them grow with confidence.

Together, these reforms are transforming Trinidad and Tobago into a country where it is easier to invest, easier to innovate, easier to manufacture, easier to export and easier to succeed. They send a clear message to investors, entrepreneurs and trading partners around the world:

Trinidad and Tobago is open for business.

And we intend to compete with the very best in the world. But Government alone cannot build a great economy. Prosperity is created when Government and the private sector move forward together. That is why we have strengthened our partnership with organisations such as the Trinidad and Tobago Manufacturers' Association. It is also why we encouraged the formation of the Private Sector Organisation of Trinidad and Tobago (PSOTT), uniting business chambers, financial institutions, accounting firms and law firms under one umbrella so that the private sector can engage Government with one strong, coordinated voice. For the first time, the Ministry of Trade, Investment and Tourism has a single strategic partner representing the breadth of Trinidad and Tobago's business community. Together, we can identify challenges more quickly, develop better solutions and build a more competitive economy.

Government must create the conditions for enterprise to thrive. Businesses must invest, innovate, export and create jobs. But before a business can successfully export, it must first be strong at home. The domestic market is where businesses develop their products, build their brands, earn the trust of customers and generate the profits needed to grow. It is the incubator where companies refine their offering, expand their capacity and build the financial strength required to compete internationally.

Successful exporting is rarely funded by export sales alone. It is financed by a strong and profitable home market. That is why our partnership is the foundation of the Buy Local. Build Trinbago. campaign. We must support our manufacturers and service providers at home so they have the strength to conquer markets abroad.

Every purchase is more than a transaction. It is an investment in a Trinidad and Tobago business. An investment in new equipment. An investment in innovation. An investment in better jobs. An investment in exports.

And an investment in the foreign exchange our country needs to prosper. Every competitive local product we choose... Every local business we support... Every Trinidad and Tobago service we use...Strengthens local enterprise. Creates jobs. Retains foreign exchange. Builds the financial capacity for our businesses to compete internationally. And transforms local success into global success.

So I invite every citizen, every business and every public institution to support Buy Local. Build Trinbago. Because every dollar we invest in our own businesses today helps create the exporters that will strengthen our economy tomorrow. To everyone gathered here tonight—Continue investing. Continue innovating. Continue building businesses that compete at home and abroad. Because when productive businesses succeed... Trinidad and Tobago succeeds. Different roles. One purpose. One national mission.

To build a stronger, more competitive and more prosperous Trinidad and Tobago. There is no limit to what Trinidad and Tobago can achieve.

Ladies and gentlemen, Every generation inherits a country. But every generation also has the opportunity to shape its future. This is our moment. Years from now, people will not remember every conference we attended or every speech we delivered.

They will remember what we built. They will remember whether we had the courage to build it. That is why I remain optimistic. Because I have seen manufacturers from this small nation compete successfully with some of the largest companies in the world. I have seen entrepreneurs build internationally respected brands from modest beginnings.

I have seen ordinary Trinidadians and Tobagonians accomplish extraordinary things. And that has led me to one deeply personal conviction. After nearly fifty years in business... after travelling to countries around the world... after seeing what many nations have achieved... I still believe Trinidad and Tobago is the greatest country on earth. Not because we are the largest. Not because we are the richest. Not because we are without challenges. I believe it because of our people.

Our resilience.

Our creativity.

Our diversity.

Our generosity.

Our entrepreneurial spirit.

Time and again, Trinidadians and Tobagonians have shown that, when given the opportunity, there is no challenge too great, no market too distant, and no competitor beyond our reach.

If we can achieve all of that with our relatively small population... Imagine what we can achieve when we truly believe in ourselves. When we invest with confidence. When we compete with ambition. When we work together with one shared vision.

Because the future of Trinidad and Tobago will never be determined by the size of our country. It will be determined by the size of our vision. So let us choose ambition over complacency. Enterprise over dependence. Confidence over doubt. And let us prove, to ourselves and to the world, that the country we love can become everything we know it is capable of becoming. Because I believe with all my heart that the greatest country on earth has not yet written its greatest chapter. Together, let us write it. Together, let us build the Trinidad and Tobago we know is possible.

Thank you.