

Mr. Nicholas Galt – President, AMCHAM

Ms. Lisa Chamely-Aqui – Executive Director

Amcham Members

Distinguished Guests

Ladies and Gentlemen

Good Morning, Ladies and Gentlemen. I am delighted to address you at this your first meeting for the year. On behalf of my fellow Ministers, the Permanent Secretary and staff of the Ministry of Trade and Industry, I wish you a New Year that is even more fruitful and rewarding than the year gone by.

For the Ministry of Trade and Industry, 2005 is strategically significant, as we continue to position Trinidad and Tobago as the major manufacturing, transshipment and commercial platform in the region. In 2004, we emphasised the creation of expanded market access opportunities and exploitation of such markets by our local exporters. In this regard, my Ministry spearheaded the country's participation in negotiations at the World Trade Organization (WTO), the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA), the Cotonou Agreement, Bilateral Agreements with third countries and the

ongoing initiative to establish the CARICOM Single Market and Economy (CSME).

A critical element of these negotiations involved the trade in services. Today nearly all trade agreements encompass to one degree or another some aspect of the trade in services, evident in the active discussions of services trade issues at the various negotiating fora I have just mentioned. For us, the inclusion of services in negotiations opens another avenue for export, particularly under the agreements with countries such as Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic and Cuba.

The Services sector has demonstrated that it is in fact the sector that can contribute significantly to reducing the level of unemployment. Given the Government's intention to actively promote and expand the services sector and to create a more facilitative environment for it to operate, there is no doubt that services will in the coming years generate additional employment

Accordingly, Services has been specially targeted for development. We are mindful of the intangible nature of the sector, which provides certain challenges to our ability to acquire the necessary statistical data to plan

effectively for its growth and development. In this regard, the Ministry of Trade and Industry has embarked on a series of initiatives aimed at addressing these deficiencies.

The Trade Sector Support Programme, jointly funded by the Inter-American Development Bank and the Government of Trinidad and Tobago, has a key component which focuses on a Trade Assistance Programme (TAP), designed to provide assistance to the business sector. The TAP will assess the impact of trade liberalization and develop an adjustment programme to assist businesses to respond to the new environment. TAP is intended to help firms resuscitate and re-engineer themselves to face the challenges created by globalization and trade liberalization.

Accordingly, competitiveness studies will be undertaken shortly with respect to both manufacturing and services, to identify the competitive and sensitive areas. This information is absolutely essential to strengthen our ability to compete in the global trade environment. The studies will provide the necessary information to design intervention strategies and to determine the final structure of the Trade Assistance Programme.

In the interim, the Ministry of Trade and Industry is currently completing its work on the development of strategic plans for specific service areas including merchant marine, film, music and entertainment, and yachting industries, which are intended to form the basis for development plans for these sectors.

In addition, we have started preliminary work on a **Services Trade Policy** for Trinidad and Tobago. This policy, in conjunction with other guideline documents on trade, industry and investment, will guide the future direction of the services sector. The National Services Trade Policy of Trinidad and Tobago, 2005-2007 is being developed to achieve specific objectives over the period in order to:

- Determine services-related goals, targets and priorities of the economy;
- Offer some measure of predictability to investors in the services environment;
- Define the role of the public and private sectors in services activities, and identify a mechanism for the meaningful participation of private enterprise;
- Map out resource allocation;

- Earmark projections for sub-sectoral improvements;
- Provide policy direction in the external negotiation of trade in services; and
- Provide a basis for legislative and institutional interventions.

We should note here that the Services Trade Policy will be the result of an in-depth consultative exercise (including a statistical survey), which will provide a roadmap for the development of the Sector, within the overall context of achieving Vision 2020.

At the regional level, COTED has agreed to the formation of a National Coalition of Services Industries in each CARICOM member state and the establishment of a Regional Coalition of Services Industries as an overall framework for the national coalitions. The Ministry of Trade and Industry is facilitating the establishment of a **Trinidad and Tobago Coalition of Service Industries** which is basically an alliance of services organizations, associations and professionals coming together under one common institutional cover to advise, coordinate and collaborate on services trade related issues.

This umbrella body would function as the voice of service providers and will be the body which government will consult to ascertain sector needs and

constraints. The National Coalition of Services Industries therefore makes it all the easier for Government to communicate effectively with stakeholders, and to efficiently obtain feedback on pertinent issues.

In keeping with the move to establish the National Coalition of Services industries, a consultation with services associations was convened on 21st September 2004. One recommendation arising from these consultations was to establish a task force to undertake the work of developing the national coalition. This would involve, among other things, the development of the coalition's constitution, its national objectives and funding arrangements. The Ministry of Trade and Industry is now proceeding to institutionalize the task force.

In keeping with the thrust to develop the service sector's capability and capacity, the Ministry will be meeting with all services associations to ascertain their specific needs. These meetings will focus on particular problems and issues affecting the growth and sustainable development of the sub-sectors.

Ladies and Gentlemen, the above initiatives have been highlighted to indicate that the groundwork is being well laid to obtain the necessary information and data to develop a comprehensive Assistance Programme for the growth and development of the services sector. We therefore invite you to continue cooperating with us as we work towards achieving this goal in 2005 and the years to come.

As we continue to pursue the objective of positioning Trinidad and Tobago as the commercial, business and investment hub of the region, we have sought to attract investment in strategic sectors. This was exemplified by the start-up of the Wallerfield Technological and Industrial Development Park. The strategic sectors identified were Agri-business, Information Communications Technology (ICT), Tourism/Hotel Development, Film, Packaging, Chemicals, Downstream Energy, and Leisure Marine.

Along with the Wallerfield development, my Ministry led a number of trade and investment Missions to regional destinations to develop investment opportunities for the country. In this regard, at the invitation of the Canadian Minister of trade, we visited Canada. As you are aware, Trinidad and Tobago and Canada share a long-standing, excellent relationship, which

provided the platform for our recent Trade and Investment Mission, the strategic objective which was to encourage Canadian foreign direct investment into Trinidad and Tobago and to foster even stronger Trinidad and Tobago/Canada government/social relations. The delegation visited five Canadian cities - Halifax, Quebec City, Montreal, Ottawa and Toronto - and met with senior business and government leaders.

As a result of the meetings conducted, a return Trade and Investment Mission from Halifax comprising participants from the Provincial Ministry of Energy and business leaders from five business groups in Nova Scotia visited Port of Spain and San Fernando from November 14-17, 2004 and participated in the World Energy Cities Partnership (WECP) annual meeting, which was held in Trinidad and Tobago for the first time. The province of Quebec has also expressed interest in launching a similar Mission to Trinidad and Tobago in the near future.

Out of this Mission, a few specific potential opportunities have been identified in the leisure marine, film, energy services, medical scientific and ICT sectors. The Tourism and Industrial Development Company (TIDCO) is currently pursuing these potential interests.

With respect to our Investment Mission to Atlanta, the State of Georgia and Trinidad and Tobago share a very fruitful relationship, as a result of the twinning of the two Cities, Port of Spain and Atlanta. Accordingly, in addition to investment initiatives, the Mission pursued specific training and development projects and the sharing of specialist technical information with respect to the Police and Fire Services. In addition, the Mayor of Port of Spain pursued further initiatives with his counterpart, the Mayor of Atlanta and other City Officials, under the Sister Cities Programmes. Investment initiatives were pursued with the following objectives:

- Create a higher investment profile for Trinidad and Tobago;
- Develop strategic alliances with major companies operating in the city of Atlanta;
- Market Trinidad and Tobago as a strong trade and investment destination;
- Pursue business opportunities in targeted sectors identified for growth and development.

The targeted sectors included the ICT, packaging, distribution and warehousing and chemicals sectors. A few potential opportunities were identified in the ICT sector. These are currently being pursued.

Ladies and Gentlemen, in 2005 it is our intention to continue to build upon the momentum we generated in 2004 through our various trade and investment initiatives, and to move that much closer to our stated goal. For the year ahead, the Ministry of Trade and Industry will pursue the following key initiatives:

- **Market Access Initiatives** – participation in the ongoing negotiations at the WTO, FTAA, ACP/EU, CARICOM and various bilateral agreements including enacting the legislation for implementing these agreements.

- **Trade Sector Support Programme** – Consultants will start work on the five components of the program - Reorganization and Strengthening, Technical Training, Technical Studies, Integrated Information System, and the Trade Assistance Program.

- **Industrial Development** –Sector Development work in the targeted sectors will be implemented, along with a review of the enabling environment for business.

- **Export Strategy** – development of an Export Strategy for Trinidad and Tobago.

- **Spanish as the First Foreign Language** – Formal launch of the program and its Secretariat. Implementation of specific bilingual initiatives, especially in conjunction with the Ministry of Education, and development of a Spanish Programme for Business Executives.

- **Route Development** – Review performance of Phase I of the South/South Route Development Program and examine feasibility of Phase II, which includes proposed flights to Panama, Belize, Brazil and a connection between Cuba and Canada.

- **Legislative Review** – Continue to update and revise the trade legislative framework.

These are just a few of the initiatives which we hope to accomplish in this year, in collaboration with our various stakeholders and partners. We recognize that a collective approach is necessary for us to successfully face the challenges of the global economy. As a result, at the Ministry of Trade

and Industry, we have fully embraced stakeholder participation including the provision of funding, and the inclusion of members of the private sector and the wider civil society on various advisory committees, thus ensuring your inclusion in the decision making process.

In closing, I encourage you to continue working with us since we value and welcome your input at all times. Rest assured that even when we may not agree fully on a particular issue, at least we still maintain sight of that common goal – the ongoing development and transformation of the nation’s economy to ensure an acceptable standard of living for all citizens and a sustainable level of development for many years to come.

I Thank You.