

**ADDRESS BY**

**THE HONOURABLE DIANE SEUKERAN  
MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY  
OF TRADE & INDUSTRY**

**AT THE TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO BUREAU OF  
STANDARDS ACCREDITATION SEMINAR  
(HOSTED IN CONJUNCTION WITH THE INTER AMERICAN  
ACCREDITATION COOPERATION)**

**THURSDAY OCTOBER 28<sup>TH</sup> , 2004**

**THE BELMONT SALON,  
HILTON HOTEL AND CONFERENCE CENTRE  
LADY YOUNG ROAD, BELMONT**

**Mr. Lawford Dupres    Executive Director, Trinidad and Tobago  
Bureau of Standards**

**Representatives from    The South African National  
Accreditation Service (SANAS)  
The International Accreditation  
Cooperation (ILAC) and  
The American Association for Laboratory  
Accreditation (A2LA)**

**Delegates**

**Management and staff of the TTBS**

**Distinguished Guests**

**Members of the media**

**Ladies and Gentlemen**

- I am delighted to address you on the commencement of this seminar entitled – “Accreditation in the Region- Past, Present and Future”. To our visitors – both regional and international - I extend the warmest of welcomes to our twin island nation of Trinidad and Tobago.
  
- We are honoured that the Inter American Accreditation Cooperation (IAAC) agreed with the Trinidad and Tobago Bureau of Standards in selecting our country as the venue for the IAAC’S 9<sup>th</sup> Annual General Assembly. I wish you all success tomorrow at your General Assembly Meeting.

- This collaborative effort is a solid example of South/South co-operation, an activity which is becoming even more important as we move towards the CARICOM Single Market and Economy (CSME) and the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA), and face the challenges and opportunities of the new world economic order.
  
- We support the IAAC's mission which is to promote cooperation among accredited bodies and interested parties of the Americas, and its primary aim, which is the development of conformity assessment structures to achieve the improvement of products, processes and services.
  
- The IAAC's members are bodies that accredit certification/registration and inspection, testing and calibration laboratories, as well as other types of organisations involved in standards and conformity assessment. Trinidad and Tobago is proud to be included among its nineteen full members and seven associate members.
  
- By promoting the recognition of reliable and technically competent conformity assessment bodies, the IAAC facilitates the well being of the inhabitants and environment of the Americas. Equally important, the organisation contributes to regional and global efforts towards liberalisation, trade and investment, by reducing and eliminating technical barriers to trade through the area of conformity assessment.

- All of us in this room will agree that most developed countries currently enjoy the trade benefits and increased market access which result from national accreditation systems.
- Indeed, the lack of such accreditation programmes in developing countries is a key factor preventing their full integration into the established world trading system, and, as a result, stunts their overall economic development.
- At present, out of over one hundred and fifty laboratories in Trinidad and Tobago, only three are internationally accredited. These include PETROTRIN, CARIRI, and TTBS, These last two agencies, I am proud to say, fall under the purview of my Ministry. We in the Ministry of Trade are particularly keen to see standards established.
- So too, throughout Government there is concern about the lack of accreditation on the part of other facilities. Consequently, the implementation of a cohesive, integrated and effective accreditation structure is therefore a key development priority of the Government of Trinidad and Tobago.
- But why is it imperative for a nation to develop and adhere to international accreditation standards?
- First of all, manufacturers and importers all depend on the services provided by laboratory and testing facilities to make critical product decisions, which ultimately impact on local, regional and international

- consumers. There is a direct correlation between the quality of these services and the level of public confidence in manufactured products.
- Today's consumers are sophisticated, informed individuals who know exactly what they want from a product or service and demand that these expectations be met. Countries which produce goods and services which are proven to meet internationally recognized standards have the edge against their trading competitors.
  - In fact, research has shown that the use of a well-designed and implemented accreditation process will result in improved quality of goods and services. In developing countries such as ours, this is especially true when the accreditation scheme is integrated into a larger quality improvement and recognition programme.
  - Secondly, the decision to seek accreditation implies a commitment by laboratory owners and management to impart confidence that the facility is being operated at a competent level by implementing the internationally defined "best practice" standard for their operations. Accreditation also brings laboratory technical staff into direct contact with experts in the field. This in turn facilitates the transfer of medical, industrial and scientific technology.
  - While accreditation does not guarantee test results, it provides a certain level of assurance with respect to the validity of the test data. To recognise the benefits derived from accreditation one only has to

look at the ongoing success of CARIRI since the accreditation of its facilities.

- Thirdly, accreditation is internationally recognized as a reliable indicator of technical competence and overall quality. National economies with established accreditation infrastructure are better poised to build national and international confidence in the quality of their products and services. Certification of products according to internationally recognized standards will ensure that no country can deny them access.
  
- The greatest difficulty in implementing an accreditation system, as highly specialized and knowledge-intensive as it is, is of course, cost. This is where the Regional Project “*Overcoming Technical Barriers to Trade through strengthening of Accreditation Systems*” funded by the Inter American Development Bank (IADB) comes in. The IADB, through its Technical Cooperation Facility of Multilateral Investment Funds (MIF), is supporting this project here in Trinidad and Tobago, and in Costa Rica, Paraguay and Mexico.
  
- The overall objective of the project is to increase the competitiveness of small and medium sized enterprises (SME’s) and to facilitate greater access to regional and international markets by establishing and/or strengthening the capacity of the accreditation bodies and the conformity assessment bodies.

- In support of this initiative, the government of Trinidad and Tobago in its budget presentation for the fiscal year 2004/2005 recognized the importance of upgrading the functions and operations of various regulatory bodies including the TTBS, the Chemistry, Food and Drug and Plant Quarantine Divisions. The objective of this reformation exercise is to rationalize and streamline these agencies to increase their collaborative efforts and capability to respond to the changing trade scenario, in light of the several bilateral, regional and multilateral trade agreements which we have signed.
  
- The emphasis on accreditation extends into the socio-economic arena, where Government is seeking to develop accreditation standards for tertiary level institutions to ensure a high quality human resource base, capable of taking advantage of economic opportunities and responding adequately to challenges.
  
- Ladies and gentlemen, one of the Government's main policy objectives is the diversification of the economy away from its dependence on the energy sector. Emphasis is being placed on developing micro, small and medium sized enterprises in both the manufacturing and services sectors.
  
- Our ultimate goal is to create an expanded, diversified, export oriented non-energy business sector, which will contribute to:
  - Sustained economic growth and balanced, integrated development

- Increased levels of foreign and domestic investment
  - Widening the range of business activities
  - Generate meaningful employment opportunities
  - Development of a knowledge-based, technically competent society
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- The work of the TTBS, the IDB and by extension the IAAC is therefore tied directly to the national objectives. Accreditation is a stepping-stone to achieving quality products geared for export, generated by a more productive workforce, efficient management and technologically advanced processes. All of these things have a direct impact on our growth levels, and on the quality of life of our people.
  - In closing, we must remember that a domestic or regional accreditation programme will not in itself transform the economic landscape of a developing country or eliminate all future disputes. However, accreditation can provide a developing country with a powerful tool to expand their export markets into the developed countries which demand products that conform to an internationally accepted assessment regime.

- My Government envisions Trinidad & Tobago as achieving developed nation status by 2020. We are clear that our programme of action must encompass a range of initiatives to promote macro-economic stability, improve economic efficiency, provide the environment for increased savings and investments, even as we upgrade and build infrastructure.
  
- In closing, I once again commend the TTBS and the IAAC for hosting this Assembly. I am sure that the deliberations here will provide a meaningful platform for future action.
  
- I thank you.