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SECTION 34 CONTROVERSY URGES CHAMBER CALLS FOR INCREASED GOVERNMENT TRANSPARENCY

Over the past week, the Trinidad and Tobago Chamber of Industry and Commerce has been carefully observing the developments and discussions over the issue of the unexpected Proclamation into Law, inter alia of Section 34 of the Administration of Justice (Indictable Proceedings) Act 2011, contrary to what the Minister of Justice promised to the Senate in November 2011.

After careful consideration of the issues, the Chamber is of the view that there was good intent behind the Act. We have always called for a more efficient justice system and we believe that the Act was meant to address the perennial issue of delay in the system and the resultant waste of time and taxpayers' dollars in a justice system that has not evolved to meet the needs of today's society.

In the opinion of the Chamber, what remains of most concern to us is the lack of transparency with regards to the premature proclamation of Section 34 and despite the many calls from several quarters for an explanation for this, there still remains no satisfactory explanation by the government on this matter of national concern.

The importance of transparency in any government is an issue that cannot be overemphasized, as it is necessary to build trust between government and the people. The recently-released 2012 Global Competitiveness Index (GCI) has shown that Trinidad and Tobago continues to decline in rank in several important areas, most notably **Public trust in politicians, Irregular payments and bribes, Favouritism in decisions of government officials, and Transparency of government policymaking**. Incidents such as the Section 34 controversy only serve to further exacerbate, both locally and internationally that lack of trust.

Many of the challenges faced by Trinidad and Tobago within recent years which have impacted on our country's competitiveness, have been underpinned by repeating themes of the need for good governance and transparency, particularly by public officials. Therefore, the Chamber will continue to call for the highest ideals and values of good governance and transparency that is expected of our Government.

This matter is certainly not a 10-day wonder, and the Chamber calls for an immediate and satisfactory public explanation of the reasons for the early proclamation of this Section. We also believe that whether this course of action was done with intent or in error, this issue must not be swept aside and persons should be held accountable for this grievous act.

Public trust in public officials **MUST** be restored as TT approaches its next fifty years as a nation.

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