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CHAMBER VIEWS ON DEFENCE (AMENDMENT) BILL 2013

The Trinidad and Tobago Chamber of Industry and Commerce continues to be concerned with the current unacceptable crime situation in Trinidad and Tobago, the immeasurable havoc it continues to wreak on the daily lives of all citizens, and, in particular, our economy. We continue to lobby for a holistic approach to combating crime, including short to medium and long term initiatives, with defined measurables to determine success.

With murders and gang activity seeming to escalate, not just in numbers, but, also in gravity, the Chamber adds the Voice of Business to that of the victims of crime and the law abiding, to express fear and frustration over the current situation. The Chamber believes that the country is now at a critical juncture, and cannot continue to depend solely on traditional measures that have been taken, if we are to reduce crime to a level where we can all feel some level of safety in our communities, schools, places of work and homes.

With this in mind, the Chamber lends its support to the Defence (Amendment) Bill 2013, as we believe that this measure could represent an effective weapon in the crime fighting arsenal at this time. We note that we have had joint police-soldier patrols in the past in order to maintain law and order and this has had some impact on crime. We believe that giving soldiers “the same powers, authorities, privileges and immunities as are given by law to members of the Police Service” and others can potentially have a positive impact on the reduction of crime. However, equally there **must** be the necessary controls, checks and balances in place to ensure that no breaches of our Constitutional rights result, and, as noted by the Law

Association, that there remains “the separation of powers and insulation of certain elements of the public service” in particular and law enforcement, “from political control”.

While the Bill proposes a term of operation for two years, the Chamber calls on the Government to publicly define how it proposes to measure the success of this initiative over that period.

We do acknowledge that there is a constraint in the resources in the police service, and we hope that alongside implementing this new measure, immediate efforts are also being made to deal with the current inefficiencies in the service and also to increase the numbers of policemen and women on duty and available for our crime fighting initiatives on a daily basis. The government must also use this opportunity to address the longstanding underlying issues, such as public confidence and terms and conditions of service – which all affect the morale within the police.

The fight against crime is for everyone – whether government, individuals or corporations – and the Chamber continues to pledge its support without reservation.

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