



## **Welcome Remarks**

To be delivered by

**Mr Moonilal Lalchan**

**President**

Trinidad and Tobago Chamber of Industry  
and Commerce

**ON THE OCCASION OF THE “3RD ANNUAL PRE-BUDGET PANEL  
DISCUSSION”  
MONDAY 15<sup>TH</sup> JULY 2013  
8:00 AM – 11:00AM  
AT THE LEON AGOSTINI CONFERENCE HALL, CHAMBER  
BUILDING**

### **SALUTATIONS**

**Good morning.**

**On behalf of the Trinidad and Tobago Chamber of Industry and Commerce, I welcome everyone to our third Annual Pre-budget Breakfast Meeting. It is indeed a pleasure to host this breakfast meeting for another year and I wish to thank each and every one who has shown their support this morning.**

**At this time, permit me to also welcome our esteemed panelists – Dr. Roger Hosein, Mr. Norman Christie, Ms. Diane Hadad and Mr. Wayne Dass, as well as our equally esteemed Moderator, Mr. Rakesh Goswami. I would like to thank you for being here and agreeing to sit on our panel. I am sure I speak for everyone here when I say that we are all looking forward to hearing your presentations, and engaging in discussions.**

**Our Pre-Budget Panel Discussion, now in its third year, offers the business community the opportunity to become involved in the consultative process for our National Budget and thus influence the outcome. As we say every year, the National Budget is everyone's business, and I take this opportunity to thank the media for being here today to help us reach the wider national community and engage all of our citizens in these discussions.**

**Each year, the Chamber is asked by the Ministry of Finance and the Economy to submit recommendations for consideration in the upcoming Budget. After soliciting suggestions from our network of members and the business community at large, we carefully consider each, assess its feasibility and then develop a comprehensive list of recommendations for the Minister. Each year we have seen some of our recommendations incorporated into the budget, and we thank the Government for allowing us the opportunity to take part in the process. As the Chamber is a key stakeholder in growing and revitalising the economy, we hope that this year, more of our recommendations will be included.**

**We have also met with Minister Howai at least twice since the reading of the last Budget to follow up on**

**the implementation of measures that we felt were of importance to the business community. A few of these that we wanted some feedback on were:**

**– Amendments to the Exchequer's and Auditor's Act;**

**– Proclamation of the Electronic Transactions Act 2011;**

**– Amendment of the Customs (Amendment) Bill, which I am happy to report was passed in May 2013;**

**– The removal of Duties and VAT on closed-circuit television (CCTV) cameras and digital video recording equipment; and**

**– Legislation with the associated tax incentives to support the building of the Financial Institutions Support Services Industry.**

**As the Chamber has stated on many occasions, it is important to not just hear a list of measures that the government promises to undertake over a one-year period, but of greater importance is the need for government to apprise the public on the status of these projects.**

**And so, we are also keeping a close watch on those initiatives that have not yet been implemented, and we have reiterated some of these in our recommendations for the upcoming fiscal year in order to keep them on the front burner.**

**This year, we enter our private sector discussions on the budget against a background where we have seen a slight turnaround of our economy. And while we are happy to see that we have recently experienced three consecutive quarters of economic growth, we feel that we must not just sit**

**back and rejoice, but look forward to see whether this growth will continue within the next six months or so and make a reality the predictions of the Central Bank.**

**We do believe that business growth is synonymous with economic development, but the government does have a major role to play to provide the environment which encourages businesses to invest and subsequently grow. That is what we see as the PRIMARY role of government, and we will continue to call on them to keep that as their focus.**

**We saw government's focus on helping business grow when the Chamber's Tobago Division and other business organisations in Tobago, worked with both the Central Government and The Tobago House of Assembly to develop, launch and implement the Tobago Tourism Development Fund.**

**As you know, many businesses in the sister isle were under dire straits due to a lack lustre tourism sector and the country's economy has been stagnated for quite some time. This is why it was important for the business community, through our Tobago Division, to work with government to develop a Fund designed to encourage new investment and major upgrade to room stock. Development of Tobago's economy continues to be a priority area for the Chamber, and so I am quite pleased that for the first time, our Division's Chair, Ms Hadad, is part of our panel today to speak directly on behalf of Tobago.**

**But what this shows, ladies and gentlemen, is that when government performs its role as facilitator and business performs its role as the economic driver, then we can and will be able to start the process towards real and sustained economic growth and development.**

**In recent time, the Chamber has taken a very strategic approach to our recommendations and we have aligned these recommendations with our strategic areas of focus.**

**Therefore, for this year's Discussion, we have identified five pertinent topics related to these areas of national focus which we believe are of significance to the development of the economy in the next fiscal year and beyond. They are:**

- Tax Recommendations to improve the ease of doing business and to encourage investment and diversification of the economy;**
- Measures to combat barriers to SME Development;**
- Opportunities for diversification within the energy sector;**

- **Crucial issues for the Development of Tobago's economy; and**
- **The re-emergence of Trinidad and Tobago's International Financial Centre**

**On the global front, the World Economic Outlook 2013 has stated that global prospects have improved again, although recovery in the advanced economies have remained “bumpy” at best. However, the report showed that activities have stabilised in advanced economies and has picked up in emerging market and developing economies. This is encouraging news and although one cannot realistically expect to see as much economic activity as prior to the global financial crisis as the climate remains uncertain, we believe that this represents new opportunities for countries like Trinidad and Tobago.**

**However, as I said previously, in order to stimulate our economy, our government needs to be focused on creating a stable political, social and economic environment, with a view to more divestment and privatisation so that the private sector can become more involved, particularly through the Public-Private partnership model.**

**On the social front, CRIME continues to be a great issue plaguing Trinidad and Tobago. Murders and homicides continue to occur; there has been a very high rate of white-collar crimes (the Financial Intelligence Unit has reported, in fact, that just over \$638 million in dirty money transactions passed through the country's financial system in 2012 alone); and there continues to be an unacceptable detection rate in both areas of crime. The Chamber once again sees an urgent need to eradicate all levels of crime regardless of the offense or offender. Our concerns continue to grow over the negative effect crime has on**

**our investment climate, the cost of doing business in T&T - both in terms of direct dollars and productivity - our attractiveness as a tourism destination, and the lifestyles of our nation's citizens. While we do not have a panelist here on this area today, and unfortunately time does not permit us to cover this area, we can all acknowledge that crime is of concern to us all, and it would be remiss of me if I did not make mention of this.**

**I am certain that our panelists with us today will give great insights into the areas that will be discussed and I certainly look forward to hearing their views and engaging in discussion with our audience.**

**Based on the proposal submitted by the Chamber this year, we again anxiously await the inclusion of our recommendations in the 2013/2014 National Budget. As the business community, we must remain**

**confident in the Government's ability to identify the path of economic sustainability for our nation.**

**As the Chamber continues to fulfill its Vision as the Voice of Business in Trinidad and Tobago, we stand ready to work alongside the Government of Trinidad and Tobago to promote a more vibrant business climate making this country the epicentre of Trade and Investment in the Region.**

**With this said, I invite you to engage in enthusiastic discussion with our panel of speakers. I encourage everyone to partake in the question and answer segment as we eagerly await your contributions.**

**I thank you and have a great and fruitful morning.**

