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**MEDIA RELEASE**

**June 17, 2017**

### **Is there no end to the sea bridge crisis?**

Since April of this year, the Tobago Division of the Trinidad and Tobago Chamber of Industry and Commerce (T&T Chamber), has been closely monitoring the unfolding events surrounding inter-island transportation. Prior to that, the Tobago Division warned the authorities of the likelihood of total chaos on the ports, if provisions for appropriate and effective sea transport were not firmly established. Unfortunately, the advice was not heeded and the people of Trinidad and Tobago - and more so, Tobago - are currently paying the price for the failure on the part of the authorities.

The cargo and passenger vessels currently in use are woefully incapable of providing the required service. Consequently, stakeholders within every segment of the commercial eco-system who interface with the port authorities, have been severely affected.

Having surveyed our membership, we at the T&T Chamber were inundated with reports of delays and changes in sailing schedules; delays in stock replenishment; increased transport expenses owing to inappropriate cargo vessels in use; increase in overtime costs; loss of revenue and overall poor port operations. Numerous respondents reported that only 40% of their average weekly sales was being shipped.

Given the current crisis, and the rapidly escalating cost of doing business on the port, the T&T Chamber encourages and remains hopeful that creditors would demonstrate some measure of leniency and restraint towards contractors and suppliers in this precarious situation.

Adding to the current fears, is the prospect of any approaching weather system which may well find Tobago under-stocked and ill-prepared, should the island be impacted.

While we anxiously await the Works and Transport Minister's short, medium and long-term solutions to bring welcome – albeit long-overdue – relief, the high-volume July/August hotel season looms ominously before us.

The stakes are very high in the current matter. How long must the people of Tobago continue with sparse grocery shelves, delayed deliveries or outright unavailability of critical supplies? How long must business continue to bear the financial burden precipitated by this untenable situation? Under the circumstances, we continue to implore the authorities to redouble their efforts to return the sea bridge to some level of normalcy.

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