



ADDRESS BY

THE HONOURABLE CAROLYN SEEPERSAD-BACHAN

MP FOR SAN FERNANDO WEST

MINISTER OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

AT THE 9TH ANNUAL CTO FORUM

“TOWARDS A DIGITAL COMMONWEALTH”

HILTON, TRINIDAD

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“BROADBAND FOR A NETWORKED SOCIETY”

Honourable Kamla Persad-Bissessar, Prime Minister of
Trinidad and Tobago

Ministerial colleagues of the Government of Trinidad and
Tobago

Das Thomas, Chairman of the Commonwealth
Telecommunications Organisation (CTO),

Brahima Sanou, Director of the Telecommunications
Development Bureau, International Telecommunications
Union (ITU),

Dr. Ekow Spio-Garbrah, CEO, CTO,

Members of the CTO,

Specially Invited Guests,

Members of the Media,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is with great pleasure indeed that I address you here this morning at this extremely important 9th Annual Commonwealth Telecommunications Organisation (CTO) Forum.

The theme of this year's forum - ***“Broadband for the Networked Society”*** – is truly a fitting commemoration of one of the development priorities of the Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago.

As many of you will know, this Government came into office just over one year ago in May of 2010 having made a series of commitments to the people of Trinidad and Tobago. The sum total of our commitment, embodied in the People's Partnership Manifesto, will be to take our citizens fully into the 21st century and to take our nation fully into developed country status.

These commitments in the People's Partnership manifesto, which has become the Government's National Development

Policy documents are each anchored in the seven interconnected pillars for development.

The pillars that are of particular importance to this forum are:

- Pillar number 4 – Information and Communication Technologies: Connecting T&T and Building the New Economy; and
- Pillar number 5 – A more diversified, knowledge intensive economy: Building on the native genius of our people;

In the context of the fourth pillar, we are focused on delivering on the need for a more connected society and the development of a nationwide broadband network to facilitate connectivity to the Internet, access to Government e-services, e-education facilities, e-health and the development of e-commerce.

In fact, ladies and gentlemen, what we are promoting is the one-stop Government shop for all of these services in every remote location of Trinidad and Tobago.

In the context of the fifth pillar, importance is placed on connectivity with an emphasis on the diversification of the economy and the creation of a knowledge-intensive economy. Deeper in our Government's National Development Policy Document, the commitment was made to ensure national availability and access to reliable broadband services, as well as the establishment of Government-funded, free internet cafés in communities across the country.

In addition, the promise was made for the creation of the enabling environment for facilitating foreign direct investment, and of equal importance, ensuring that indigenous businesses can enjoy lower costs of doing business, easier and more reliable and efficient access to Government services, better communications with partners abroad and more enhanced expansion and growth opportunities.

Further, the commitment was made to ensure that every conceivable effort would be made to restore a sense of national

security and safety to our citizens and our friends from abroad who visit our shores.

This will be done through the use of modern technologies in crime fighting and suppression strategies, which would rely on a strong and trustworthy telecommunications infrastructure.

Even further, the Government committed to ensuring that every new Secondary School student has full and unhindered access to a laptop to facilitate learning in an advancing and more demanding learning environment. Matched with this initiative, as you would expect, would be a reliable broadband network to bring our students, at all levels, into full online access.

Ladies and gentlemen, I have made these fairly exhaustive points to assure that not only does the Government have a clear plan for telecommunications development, but it is backed by the strong resolve to deliver.

Our policies for progress are purposeful and focused, with the primary intention of sustainable social and economic development.

This is why you will note that our policy direction in telecommunications aims to support our thrust in diversification and building the new, knowledge-based economy.

This support will come through a welcoming and supportive policy and regulatory framework that is strong and yet adaptive to ensure fair competition practices, consumer protection, and an environment conducive to growth and expansion.

In Trinidad and Tobago today, access to personal computers, mobile phones and the internet services are considered essential to our daily lives. In fact, it is now being argued that access to technology has become an inalienable human right - just as is access to food, water and education.

As you are no doubt aware, Finland has become the pioneer of this trend of thinking and a few months ago, passed legislation that will provide every Finn with the legal right to access to a one (1) megabit per second (Mbps) broadband connection. The Finnish Government has further vowed to connect every citizen to a 100Mbps connection by 2015.

The United Kingdom, through its Digital Economy Bill, hopes to accelerate the realization of universal broadband access within its borders by 2012.

These examples, taken in the context of our own development priorities will therefore clearly articulate the deep consideration given to our policies for development, and the unwavering commitment we have made to our people and industry stakeholders.

Here in Trinidad and Tobago, the telecommunications and broadcasting sectors contribute 3.4% of the Gross Domestic Product amounting to more than TT\$4.4 billion per annum.

It is noteworthy that the World Economic Forum ranks Trinidad and Tobago *among the top five countries in the world for mobile telephone penetration.*

In the context of the theme of this year's Forum – *'Broadband for a Networked Society'*, Trinidad and Tobago has recorded a total of 171,000 fixed Internet subscribers with over 163,000 being subscribers of fixed broadband Internet services, as at the end of 2010. Broadband Internet accounted for 95% of fixed Internet subscriptions in our country.

In terms of penetration levels, fixed broadband Internet household penetration measured 46%, meaning that 46 out of

every 100 households have access to broadband Internet services.

There are currently six operators who provide broadband services to the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago. As with most markets, competition among players leads to improved quality of service and more affordable prices for consumers.

As at the end of 2010, the International Telecommunications Union ranked Trinidad and Tobago *as having the lowest monthly fixed broadband Internet subscription of approx. US\$12, when compared to other countries within the Caribbean region.* And as of 2011, residential subscribers now enjoy Internet speeds of up to 100 Megabits per second.

Further, according to the 2010-2011 Global Information Technology Report published by the World Economic Forum,

Trinidad and Tobago ranks 14th as having the lowest fixed broadband Internet tariffs in the world.

The demand for ICT related entertainment and social networking also continues to grow steadily. Trends have evolved over the past decade resulting in an increase in online entertainment in the form of games and movies.

Social networking has also become an important element in our daily lives as there has been the growing trend to expand and keep alive social interactions and enhancement through social networking websites.

What this tells us is that Trinidad and Tobago as a nation has turned the corner in its appreciation for the need for fast, reliable, efficient and widely available Broadband services.

What this also tells us is that having recognised the needs and understood how the world's technology appetite has evolved, we must work to provide not only the access, but also a strong and trustworthy regulatory and policy framework which is conducive to growth and expansion, protective of consumer rights, adaptive to the evolving environment and firm in its regulation of fair practices.

The question we must ask therefore is where do we go from here?

At the current time, even with our enviable rankings for cost and availability of high level Broadband services, there still remain communities throughout our country that do not yet have access to this basic telecommunications service.

I am therefore delighted to tell stakeholders at this forum that the Telecommunications Authority of Trinidad and Tobago is in

the process of conducting Digital Divide survey, results which will be available within the next 2-3 months. You will recall another Digital Divide survey was conducted by the TATT in 2007.

The survey is aimed at identifying those communities which lack the infrastructure for accessing broadband service, as well as other essential basic telecommunications services.

The results of the survey will be used by the Government in taking forward its Universality Plan which seeks to facilitate accessible and affordable basic telecommunications service to ALL citizens of Trinidad and Tobago.

Let me repeat that...we are seeking to introduce Broadband internet services to ALL citizens of our country so that in taking forward our total economic development and diversification

plans, and building the knowledge-intensive economy, all citizens can contribute, and benefit!

Much work therefore lies in front of us and several strategies and initiatives are currently being undertaken by the Government and its agencies to deepen the penetration of broadband services in the country.

And we have wasted no time in clearly mapping the way forward. Among the initiatives that are currently underway include:

Implementation of an enhanced Broadband Strategy and Plan

When I came to office as Minister of Public Administration I requested TATT to investigate the different infrastructural development initiatives which have been successfully utilized in

other jurisdictions to facilitate the penetration of broadband services throughout T&T.

It is our firm view that any such initiative must involve a private/public partnership so that forward plans are inclusive and comprehensive. Ultimately, the aim is to encourage foreign direct investment and domestic investment and may include funding from the Universal Service Fund.

Use of Incentives

We appreciate that a level of incentivization is required to encourage the build-out of broadband capacity. The range and types of incentives are currently being explored and will not be limited to tax incentives.

An option under consideration is the revision of the fee structures in certain circumstances for use of spectrum. The

Telecommunications Authority will shortly engage in stakeholder consultations on this particular area.

Encouraging competitive behavior: Legislative amendments

Our initiatives will involve encouraging competitive behaviour. Recognizing the need to provide an environment the Government will also be moving to strengthen the legislative framework to allow TATT to provide wider oversight and governance with a view to preventing anti-competitive behaviour and protecting consumers' interest.

The proposed amendments to the Telecommunication Act, which was passed in 2001 and promulgated in 2004, will therefore allow TATT to move beyond just pricing issues and to address issues pertaining to anticompetitive behavior including antitrust and mergers. The proposed amendments will also allow for a wider application of the Universality initiative.

One of the first projects identified under the Universality initiative will be the provision of basic telecommunications services, including access to broadband services, to our physically challenged citizens through the use of assistive technologies.

Ladies and gentlemen, this morning the Prime Minister mentioned the possibility of a third mobile operator into the market. As a precursor a number of Portability Drafted Regulations will be taken to Parliament for resolution to facilitate the legal enforcement for the adherence of the existing number plan.

Implementation of an Internet Exchange Point in T&T

The primary benefit of this initiative is to have all local internet traffic switched locally and thereby allow local traffic on the internet to remain within the jurisdiction of Trinidad and Tobago.

Benefits include local peer to peer traffic arrangements, data privacy and security, reduced costs, faster access to local data and mirrored sites. This will improve the speed of access and enhance the competitive environment.

TATT has so far been able to facilitate an agreement among the ISPs for the establishment of a consortium to provide this service locally.

The objective of this initiative is to develop an attendant industry creating a wide range of new investment opportunities in the context of our local content development policies. It presents a number of value-added opportunities in distance education through UWI/UTT, culture and entertainment.

Wireless Access to Broadband services

Government is working aggressively to encourage participants to take up wireless broadband services. We can join the rest of the world and other countries who have successfully pursued this wireless access to broadband as we see it as a way to provide broadband access in remote locations and to do so expeditiously. To date, two spectrum auctions have been held by the Telecommunications Authority to make spectrum available in the 700 MHz and 2.3 GHz frequency bands.

Another auction is scheduled for 2012 in which further spectrum will be made available in the 700 MHz, 2.5 GHz and 3.5 GHz frequency bands.

Currently there are six (6) operators who have been authorised to provide broadband wireless access services to the Internet.

It is anticipated that the additional spectrum which will be made available will both increase competition and provide additional capacity.

Underlining every initiative will be our thrust towards the expansion of services, in a regulated environment, with the protection and benefit of the consumer at the centre.

In moving forward, with the commitment that implementation will involve Government, the private sector and the public; I want to issue a challenge, particularly to our local stakeholders.

While many medium and large businesses have embraced the use of technologies in their operations, many small businesses remain outside of the loop. I am not referring to the use of point of sale services or email contact points; I am referring to introducing technology into small business that will enhance stock control management, sales and accounting management,

customer enquiry contact, online product and service descriptions and indeed, online purchasing.

While the issue of cost remains a core consideration, the issue of cost-benefit is also of great significance.

As we in the Government are working to provide the infrastructure and regulatory framework that will place our nation firmly into the technological age, its wider use by small businesses and their customers will be essential for its continued growth and success.

In closing, let me say that as Minister of Public Administration, I am heartened by the timeliness of this Forum as I have every confidence that some of the insights gained here will educate and improve our forward plans.

I would also wish to thank the Commonwealth Telecommunications Organisation for accepting the invitation to have this Forum in Port of Spain.

To the Government of Trinidad and Tobago, this speaks to the recognition of our country as now moving to rise to our feet in Telecommunications and specifically, in Broadband services, and to walk determinedly forward.

Ladies and gentlemen, I thank you!