



ADDRESS BY

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MINISTER OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

GOVERNMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO

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AND GENERAL CONFERENCE OF MINISTERS OF

THE CARIBBEAN TELECOMMUNICATIONS UNION BARBADOS

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Ministry of
Public Administration

Honourable Ministers of Telecommunications and Information,
Permanent Secretaries

Senior ICT Executives

Members of the Regional Media

Ladies and Gentlemen

I am delighted to have this opportunity to address colleagues and stakeholders from across the Caribbean region in this 24th Executive Council Meeting and the General Conference of Ministers of the Caribbean Telecommunications Union.

For me, as the Minister of Public Administration of Trinidad and Tobago, this meeting presents us with both opportunities as well as needed interventions to align our strategies towards the creation of an efficient and robust regional telecommunications sector.

Where my country is concerned, a combination of reforms, re-engineering and new strategies will see us in the short to

medium term moving to ensure that our sector is focused and in line with international standards and benchmarks in the context of infrastructure, penetration and indeed the solidity of our ICT network and legislative framework.

Our deliberate and carefully mounted approach will also see us consolidating our remarkable market penetration for mobile and broadband coverage and moving to increase not only access and quality, but also participation in the sector by local, regional and international business interests.

The future, in essence, is extremely encouraging for regional telecommunications but our success depends on our ability and indeed our willingness to collaborate, partner, capitalize on indigenous strengths and build synergies.

Ladies and gentlemen, the Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago has the responsibility for hosting the

Headquarters of the Caribbean Telecommunications Union and also has held the Presidency of the CTU since 2008.

In June of this year, when I was appointed as Minister of Public Administration, the Ministry with responsibility for CTU affairs, I assumed the Presidency and I would like to thank you for your welcome and generous information I received during my briefing.

In the briefing session with the Secretary General, Bernadette Lewis, I was pleased with the transformation that has taken place in the organization in the recent past, and the scope of the work undertaken by the CTU even with the challenges faced by resource constraints.

The accomplishments of the CTU are testimony of its ethos to move from dialogue to delivery of meaningful results for the benefit of its members and the wider Caribbean community.

And I congratulate the teams that have driven these successes and urge you to continue with your good work.

Having recognised the valuable work and contribution to regional telecommunications development of the CTU, I would also put forward that there is a great amount more that we can do and a great amount more that we can achieve if we further enhance our collaboration and work smarter.

I feel that if we can align our strategies appropriately, we will be much better able to seek the public interests of our countries, while at the same time seeking the interest and development of the entire region.

Ladies and gentlemen, we are all aware of the significant challenges we face as our Governments seek to integrate the region economically.

These challenges are not insurmountable and should in fact be the impetus that drives our actions to work together, strategize together and build together.

As nations of the Caribbean, we share common goals and objectives which are geared towards bridging divides, uniting communities, enhancing the access and delivery of services and creating an information and communication technologies (ICT) physical and legislative infrastructure that supports collaboration, partnerships efficiency and sustained development.

This is where our goals must remain aligned and even be strengthened as economic integration in the Caribbean family of nations and all of its implications and benefits will in the coming years rely more and more on the ability of our ICT infrastructure to ensure compatibility and sustainability.

Our energy would therefore be best utilized by using the opportunities brought on by our geographic location, size, operation and nature of our economies and I feel that the CTU must now channel its focus here.

There are many critical ICT related issues facing all Caribbean nations, not least of which is the need for all Caribbean Governments to develop ICT strategies that, upon implementation, will provide the platform for sustainable economic growth and diversification.

A strong case in point is in fact Trinidad and Tobago. At the moment, our Government is looking very carefully at building a robust platform for the future post-energy economy and we have found that sustainability can be found in the global knowledge economy.

You will have noted that Trinidad and Tobago has already taken the critically important step of opening the broadband sector

up to deeper and wider participation and introducing competition.

As a result of this move, 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.

Ladies and gentlemen, this move came out of the recognition of the fact that the world's technology appetite has grown significantly and we as a nation needed to remain linked and partnered in the global technological rubric.

It was also out of a need for our nation's broadband infrastructure to be modernized and competitive to ensure that

we can participate in the global knowledge economy, and build the knowledge intensive economy that will be key to post-energy strength and leadership.

We are now putting great effort into legislative reviews that will bolster our broadband sector to further expand participation, thereby impacting not only tariffs, but also quality of service as well as access and involvement in the global sector.

My reason for sharing this with you is to illustrate the remarkable benefits we have gained from purposeful strategies, and also to place this on the table for discussion – ***How could ICT development collaboration among all of the Caribbean family of nations create even greater benefits for all of our people.***

A single, cohesive, regional approach will not only strengthen our ability in taking our place in the global knowledge economy, but also introduce the element of economies of scale.

Our ability to attract not only foreign direct investments, but also the RIGHT foreign investors into our region will be greatly enhanced. Our ability to fast-track ICT developments in our region will also be enhanced by this partnership approach underlined by the very simple principle of '*strength in numbers*'.

I am therefore proposing to this conference that our first action must be the definition of a clear agenda on what we propose to discuss and what we propose to gain for all of the Caribbean family from our discussions.

For its part, the CTU has largely risen to the challenge and has demonstrated its capacity to **identify** the opportunities to forge

ahead with its work in facilitating levels of cooperation and collaboration in the region.

The CTU's work is designed to balance the interests of all territories and find the synergies that we **must** use for all our citizens and for all our peoples to make beneficial use of ICTs.

As a background, the breadth and depth of the CTU's work can be captured by several milestone achievements, which include:

- 1. The Anguillan Declaration on spectrum management,** developed by a caucus of CTU Ministers who met in April 2007, and was adopted by the 10th General Conference of Ministers in October, 2007.

The declaration mandates the CTU to address Caribbean spectrum management. To this end, the CTU, through multi-stakeholder consultations, developed a harmonized Caribbean Spectrum Management Policy Framework

which provides guidance on spectrum management approaches appropriate to the region. Because of the consistent pace of technological advancement, it is imperative to continually review and update this policy guide.

2. **The Declaration of Paramaribo** in October 2009 on broadband deployment developed by ICT stakeholders at a broadband forum.

This declaration speaks to the need for providing better and more affordable access and connection speeds to our citizens, to facilitate their full participation in the global knowledge society.

3. The signature and highly successful **Caribbean ICT Roadshow** initiative which was launched by the CTU in July 2009. Since that time the initiative has already visited fifteen countries and revisited St. Kitts and Nevis and St.

Vincent and the Grenadines in 2011. Each Roadshow is individually customized and designed to educate and build awareness of the transformative power of ICT, to promote the beneficial use of ICT, and to discover and mentor young ICT innovators and entrepreneurs.

4. Established by the CTU in 2005, the **Caribbean internet Governance Forum** (CiGF) has been hosted seven times in different countries across the Caribbean. The inaugural CiGF in 2005, was the first regional gathering dedicated to Internet Governance in the world.

The Forum has developed an **Internet Governance Policy Framework** and a working Guide for the transition from IPv4 to IPv6 to ensure the continued growth of the Internet.

5. The final milestone I would like to highlight is the CTU's work in the proliferation of **Caribbean Internet Exchange**

Points (IXP). To date IXPs have been established in Curacao, St. Maarten, Grenada, the British Virgin Islands, and Haiti. Trinidad and Tobago is moving to establish its IXP early next year which would represent a landmark achievement as the Telecommunications sector leaps forward.

As you are no doubt aware, IXPs are critical elements of Internet infrastructure for Caribbean countries, as they seek to migrate to information societies.

Ladies and gentlemen, the CTU has also been strongly advocated and supported functional cooperation and integration.

However, in order to optimize the use of the human and financial resources available to the region to bolster ICT-enabled economic and social transformation, we as a region must all participate and guide the development of an agenda

and forward strategy on issues engaging the attention of the CTU.

We must adopt the CTU's recommendations which it has developed through consultations with our Governments. We must publicly demonstrate our confidence in the value of the work of the CTU in the region as it forges ahead with fostering focused collaboration.

We must be prepared to allocate resources to enable the CTU to fulfill its mandate. We must honour in a timely manner the obligation to remit our annual contributions. And we must seize the opportunity to obtain and contribute sound advice from the CTU in introducing new and innovative services driven by the technological revolution.

At the present time, an issue that requires our urgent attention and action is the impending switchover from analog to digital broadcasting. Decisive and focused action now can prevent

significant spectrum interference problems, given the close proximity of neighbouring countries across the Caribbean.

Beyond the immediate issues, I would also propose that we need to give careful thought on how we move forward with the development of our ICT infrastructure...as a Caribbean family of nations.

Ladies and gentlemen, in bringing the stark importance to the table, I would ask that we all consider these essential points...

In taking our ICT development forward, even if we were to unearth the best talents, the greatest potential for development, market space and demand, what good will it be if we lack the physical and legislative infrastructure?

What good will it be if we lack the onsite and available technological skills and competencies?

What good will it be if we have not structured an approach to operate our Governments in partnership through ICT?

We must be deliberate! We must carefully consider the way forward! We must consider the needs, the demands, what we have available and what we must do to align our strategies, work together and gain benefit for all of our nations.

As you will recall, the CARICOM Heads of Government adopted at the Twenty-Eighth Session of their Conference held in Barbados in July 2007, the ***Needham Point Declaration on Functional Cooperation***.

That Declaration recognized the growing importance of functional cooperation, and the Heads expressed their determination to make such cooperation a priority within the Community.

They also saw this as the principal means by which the benefits of the integration movement are distributed through the length and breadth of the Community including the Associate Members, and among its entire people, thereby engendering a ***“Community for All”***.

The Heads therefore pledged to invest in functional cooperation for the further development of the human and social capital of the region. As regards to ICT, the Needham Point Declaration seeks to:

"Stress the importance of adopting a coordinated approach to the development of and access to information and communication technologies and networks by the populations of the region as a means of achieving greater social cohesion and as a platform for further economic development and participation in the global economy; and with regard to Telecommunications: Resolve to establish a framework for the coordination of telecommunications policy and to develop

within the Community a single domestic space for Telecommunications."

Ladies and gentlemen, as members States of the CTU we must all do whatever is necessary to build and sustain our momentum; to encourage the efforts of the Secretariat, and to support the CTU in its pursuit of achieving its regional mandate which we hope to give clearer definition when we leave this conference.

Given the increasingly competitive environment and growing development challenges and opportunities faced by each of our countries, it is now more than ever that we must protect and enhance our collaboration and partnership.

Ladies and gentlemen, our future economic and social development depends on us making the right decisions, at the right time, on the right partnerships and the right strategies.

The time is now for us to invest and partner for investments in ensuring that tomorrow's ICT world includes us not only as individual stakeholders, but also as regional leaders in this sector.

Let's do what's good and right for our countries. Let's do what's good and right for our region. Our decisions today will impact the lives of millions of people so we must also do what's good and right for those who will come after us in the years to come.

The Global ICT Sector has neither eyes nor ears to see or hear who it leaves behind. We must either integrate ourselves as a partnership and participate in the great opportunities, or take the risk of falling well behind.

The choice, my dear colleagues, is ours.

I thank you.