



Address

By

**Senator the Honourable Allyson West
Minister of Public Administration**

**Launch of TTWiFi Service at Scarborough Ferry
Terminal
8th August, 2020
Scarborough Terminal, Scarborough**

- The Honourable Shamfa Cudjoe – Minister of Sports and Youth Affairs and MP Tobago West
- Assemblyman Joel Jack - Deputy Chief Secretary, Tobago House of Assembly
- Mr Gilbert Peterson S.C – Chairman, Telecommunication Authority of Trinidad and Tobago (TATT)
- Mr Claudelle McKellar – Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Public Administration
- Mrs Cynthia Reddock Downes – Chief Executive Officer, Telecommunication Authority of Trinidad and Tobago (TATT)
- Commissioner Tommy Elias, Port Authority of Trinidad and Tobago (PATT)
- Commissioner Ethlyn John, Port Authority of Trinidad and Tobago (PATT)
- Mr Desron Palmer – Project Lead - TTWiFi Ministry of Public Administration
- Mr Kirk Sookram – Executive Officer Technology and Engineering TATT
- Ms Sherry McMillian – Executive Officer Corporate Communications, TATT
- Ladies and Gentlemen, all of Trinidad and Tobago
- Members of the Media

Good morning,

There are five (5) simple words with which you will soon become very well-acquainted and they are - “Dis is how we connect.” This is the tagline of TTWiFi, Government’s national free Wi-Fi initiative, which will provide Wi-Fi access across public libraries, transport hubs and waiting areas of national health facilities across the country in the coming weeks and months.

I am delighted to be here in Scarborough this morning to launch this initiative, because my presence here underscores the important connection between our islands. I believe connectedness can be considered one of our national values. How many of you grew up calling adults who have no direct relation to you “Aunty” and “Uncle”? How many times have you struck up a conversation with a stranger while “liming” on the block, at the market, gas station, and especially at a Sunday harvest? We connect easily with our neighbours and community – it’s part of who we are.

This connection is so easily seen here in Tobago, in spite of a Pandemic that has demanded that we be more aware of our physical proximity to each other. The health procedures to combat the spread of COVID-19 may have given us the parameters of a “new normal” this year, asking us to practice social distancing, but we have not stopped reaching out to our friends and loved ones – we have merely changed the ways in which we do.

It is that same spirit of connectedness which has driven us to rely so heavily during the Covid 19 inspired national lockdown and since on our mobile devices. This year especially, we have shared news, meetings, memes, church services, pictures of our loved ones and in my case family limes and cooking sessions. This is testament to how far the world in general, and Trinidad and Tobago in particular, has progressed along the digital spectrum. Our children are able to swipe on a tablet screen before they can walk and talk, and they are graduating with certificates in UX/UI Design and Digital Marketing from schools with no physical address. Products and services across social media platforms have connected us to each other on a global scale in ways that were previously unfathomable.

This year has also helped to identify those of us who find ourselves living outside the digital landscape, not fully connected, and unable to actively or creatively participate in the digital economy. While the internet, which provides increased access to information, goods and services, has been the great equalizer among developing and developed nations, it has also created a new divide at the community and social levels. This “digital divide” distinguishes between fully engaged e-citizens, and those who have the potential to, but do not have the infrastructural, financial or knowledge resources to take full advantage of the educational, business and social opportunities that the internet offers. It means then, that some members of our population do not have an equal opportunity to learn and develop and live more empowered lives.

As the Minister with overall responsibility for the National ICT portfolio, I can tell you, without exaggeration, that there are many aspects of our technology sector of which we should be proud. These include our infrastructure and sound investments in Information and Communications Technology (ICT) in both the public and private sectors.

I am heartened to see the ongoing implementation of projects under the ICT Blueprint, Trinidad and Tobago's National ICT Plan for the period 2018 to 2022. Many Ministries, Departments and Agencies, are offering e-services to our citizens. During 2020, I applaud the introduction of e-ticketing, e-payments e-appointments and e-applications and look forward to the ways in which they will significantly improve the ease of interaction with the government.

This is just the start of things to come. Covid 19 has forced all of us who were of the view that the e-World was something we could take or leave, or that we could take our time and get there when we get there, it has taught us that the e-world is here and now. Trinidad and Tobago managed to cope during the lock down with significant reliance on e activity. Businesses met electronically, private sector, public sector, educational institutions labour. That is how we largely kept things going. But it also taught us that if we had been further along the chain of development of our e platforms that we could have so much more efficiently identified and assisted out most vulnerable, taught our children and generally continued to operate.

Coming out of these lessons and out of the Committee established and chaired by the Honorable Prime Minister is a clear recognition of the need to jump with both feet into the e-world. The Honorable Prime Minister has committed us to the speedy conversion to e-government services so that we can better serve the public, starting with an e-identity which will lay the foundation for the introduction of more efficient government operation. Imagine for example a world where whichever public hospital you go to the doctor attending to you has access to your records, where your hospital birth records can be used to generate a birth certificate without your having to visit the Registrar's Office to apply for it. There are so many possibilities. The government is committed to this path and has in fact already approved a MOU with Estonia to assist us in getting there.

However, such advancements are of little use to someone who cannot access these digital services — either because it is not available or not affordable. A mobile device is not really 'mobile' if it cannot be used on-the-go. This is why TTWiFi is so important, and this is why I urge you to take full advantage of the many opportunities it presents to bridge the digital divide; to accelerate our development; and, ultimately, to drive our economic, social, and educational growth.

TTWiFi is a country-wide public Wi-Fi Internet Broadband Network for Trinidad and Tobago. Wherever you see our beautiful hummingbird logo with the Wi-Fi symbol in its wings, in our national colours of red, white and black, you can expect free and reliable access to the Internet.

With the full support and involvement of two of the Ministry's Agencies, namely the Telecommunications Authority of Trinidad and Tobago (TATT) and iGovTT, we can look forward to the availability of free public Wi-Fi at more locations in the future, starting with transport hubs, waiting rooms at health facilities and public spaces at libraries, and eventually at government offices, public recreational spaces and underserved locations throughout Trinidad and Tobago. I would also like to take this opportunity to acknowledge the assistance we receive from our service providers in building out these facilities. In the case of the wifi at this Port we must thank Digicel for working with us to make it a reality.

The overarching aim of TTWiFi, is to improve connectivity, by increasing access to and utilisation of the Internet and promote wider public interest in ICT. The TTWiFi initiative will therefore feature educational and awareness-building campaigns on topics ranging from data protection, accessing free academic resources at our libraries, and starting an online business.

This is my hope:

That in a year that has imposed restrictions on how we travel, visit each other, embrace and spend time together, despite masks and social distances, the internet, and the TTWiFi initiative will keep us connected to loved ones at home and abroad. It is this Government's vision that by laying the foundations for broad-based, inclusive participation in societal benefits, we will leave no one behind as we embrace the digital

transformation, and embrace the ways we are all connected. There is no age limit when it comes to connectivity, no geographic boundary, no class or racial or social restrictions. We all grow together.

Dis is how we connect, to each other, and to the world.

I thank you.