Video Statement for the TT Internet Governance Forum

Presented by Senator the Honourable Allyson West, Minister of Public Administration

On behalf of the Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, it is my pleasure to address you here today on this occasion - the 4th Annual Trinidad and Tobago Internet Governance Forum themed, "The Internet and You: Ensuring the Internet's future." I am sorry that I am not able to do so in person.

Looking towards the future, there is no doubt that we can take comfort in and celebrate that there are a growing number of citizens in Trinidad and Tobago that access the internet on a daily basis.. However, as the Internet expands and evolves, so too does the complex set of challenges it brings to individuals, corporations, governments and societies at large who have become so dependent on its use.

Internet governance is no longer simply for the technical experts, the coders, programmers and developers. In fact policy creation and governance has become more inclusive and focuses on comprehensive stakeholder engagements that rebound in addressing the needs of the end user. It is important to note that as the growth of the Internet continues expeditiously, the rules governing its usage will be affected by political, economic and cultural changes. Much of these changes will in one way or the other have an effect on every citizen. As such, it is safe to say that all citizens are now empowered enough to have a say in the way the Internet is governed.

For countries such as Trinidad and Tobago, the challenges of social and economic development are now inextricably linked to issues of Internet access, affordability and resilience. Understanding this, the Government has started the conversation and developed a comprehensive strategy – the National Development Plan, Vision 2030 to address these among other issues relating inclusive of the use of ICT in the development of Trinidad and Tobago.

As the Minister of Public Administration with a mandate to drive National ICT Development and to modernise and transform the public service, I would like to amplify Government's position on the use of ICT more specifically the issue of Digital Government both as an enabler and a key component for transformation.

Digital Government ensures the use of ICT to transform the delivery of public goods and services and the strengthening of institutional capacity. In effect, it focuses on working as an integrated Government with well governed processes and quality outcomes directed at improving operational efficiency and customer service satisfaction. With the implementation of proper digital governance mechanisms, citizens will certainly benefit from positive ripple effects such as the strengthening of public institutions through enhanced ICT capability and capacity training for employees operating within this scope.

The aim of digital government strategies is to bring the public sector closer to citizens, residents, visitors and businesses. It recognises that today's technology is not only a strategic enabler for improving public sector efficiency, but also supports the effectiveness of policies and creates a more open, transparent, innovative, participatory and trustworthy government. Furthermore, in conjunction with public sector transformation, while the plan seeks to enable a necessary shift from citizen-centric approaches (government anticipating the needs of citizens and businesses) to citizen-driven approaches (citizens and businesses formulating and determining their needs in partnership with government), the proliferation of technological options introduce new risks and greater stakeholder expectations that government must be prepared to address.

Another important objective is to leverage the Public Sector ICT spend in support of the development of the Trinidad and Tobago ICT Sector. To date, that spend has been more inward than outward looking, focused on providing Government Ministries and Agencies with tools to make them more efficient. The focus going forward has to be more citizen focused, i.e.

introducing measures to make the interaction between GORTT and the citizen, businesses and other stakeholders easier and more efficient.

Towards this objective Government will build on the advancements already made—in terms of the digital penetration levels of personal computers and mobile telephones, Internet connectivity, organisational web presence and business investments in local Datacentres. This is expected to widen the number of online services available to all stakeholders while at the same time promoting the uptake of GoRTT's Digital Services. Supported by the requisite policies, governance, infrastructure and processes, the focus will be placed on having multiple Service Delivery Channels. Citizens and businesses alike will be provided with the choice and convenience of use of digital services, thus aiming at enhancing their overall e-user satisfaction. Simultaneously, there will be initiatives that support user adoption and change management programmes.

As you may know, the Ministry of Public Administration is the custodian and implementation agent of the *ICT Blueprint, National ICT Plan 2018-2022* and we also champion Public Service Modernization and Transformation. Strategically, our role is fundamentally the utilization of ICTs to transform and modernize the way the Government operates through the rollout of Digital Government Strategies.

To this end, all Government entities are now online and information on their services can be found on the digital government portal, *ttconnect*. Moreover, Government's single electronic window to facilitate business and trade related services, TTBizLink, facilitates collaboration among multiple government entities to provide electronic approvals for over 25 Government to Business (G2C) services including certificates of origin, import/export permits and licenses, company registration and work permits.

In the coming months, the Ministry will be embarking on some key ICT initiatives namely;

1. **TT WiFi** - Country-wide Public Wi-Fi Internet Broadband Network for Trinidad and Tobago. The aim is to increase access to and utilization of the internet and interest in ICT. This will increase access to government information and services; and facilitate greater participation in the digital economy, and increased opportunities for education, training, skills and business.

2. **e-Payments/GovPay** - A secure way for citizens to pay bills, fees and taxes online.

3. **Interoperability Solution** - A solution, with the help of The Republic of Estonia, for all of the Government Ministries, Departments and Agencies to work cohesively with others.

4. **e-Identity** - A computerized/electronic Identification which will significantly ease the citizen's interaction with GORTT as well as help prevent fraud and forgery; fight against terrorism, corruption; offer citizens access to a wide range of public facilities with new highly-secure technologies.

5. **Community ICT Access Centres -** The Ministry has embarked on an initiative to establish user-friendly ICT-enabled Access Centres that will allow community members quick and convenient access to information, training and e-government services in the rural and less developed areas of Trinidad and Tobago.

6. **GovNeTT NG** - GoRTT's move to (in country) Cloud Computing Services. GovNeTT is government's network backbone infrastructure that provides high speed, secure communications and interconnecting Government Ministries and Agencies to enable greater communication and increased efficiency. NG (Next Generation) introduces the Public Sector to Cloud Computing Services and away from the practice of investment in "mini-network operations centres" - commonly called Server Rooms. This model affords the respective public sector actors to focus on improving their respective services to the public.

Trinidad and Tobago is behind the ball in its ICT transformation process and we are trying to catch up. We need the help and cooperation of all to get us there in a timely fashion. We are in an exciting path and I look forward to us getting there together.

Ladies and gentlemen, I hope I have provided you with just the right amount of information to bring you into the conversation. I hope that the issues and solutions provided will form part of the conversation. Let me end by wishing you a fruitful session and pray God's blessing on you and our nation.

I thank you.