



Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago

Feature Address by

**The Honourable Camille Robinson-Regis, MP
Minister of Planning and Development**

**at the
Initiation of the Global Services Promotion Programme**

Tuesday January 17, 2017

***“Seizing the opportunities of the Information Technology
enabled Services (ITeS) Sector”***

Ladies and gentlemen, it is indeed a pleasure to welcome you here this morning, as we launch what is arguably, for us, one of the most exciting projects being undertaken by the Ministry of Planning and Development. That we do so at the commencement of the year, is also heartwarming, as it augurs well for what is to come for the rest of 2017. Indeed, I could think of no better way to signal our intention that this year, 2017, is going to be one of delivery, one of transformation, and one of growth.

Allow me as well, to thank all those who have joined us on the live internet feed. In this age of the digital economy, when the currency of choice is information that is delivered quickly, uncensored, and is of relevance, there is no doubt that what we do today could significantly impact the quality of the ICT sector in Trinidad and Tobago.

Ladies and gentlemen, the Global Services Promotion Programme, which we initiate today in partnership with the IDB, is a launching pad for what promises to be an exciting journey of economic transformation through the growth of ICT in Trinidad and Tobago. At the height of its execution, it will offer a multitude of opportunities for employment and for business creation.

All that is required from us is the capacity to seize the limitless possibilities emanating out of the Information Technology enabled Services Sector (ITeS) while, simultaneously, sharpening of our competences, our skills and our human capital.

One of the features of this morning's exercise is the opportunity to highlight your role in the identification of the human capital requirements and implementation actions needed to help Trinidad and Tobago develop the required skills to achieve the vision we are laying out together. I am confident that the seeds we plant today will bring home a harvest of unprecedented opportunity and growth which will significantly enhance the quality of life enjoyed by our citizenry, those directly involved in this initiative, and those who will benefit indirectly from the goods and services that will eventually emerge as a result.

The Global Services Promotion Programme, which is funded by the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) and is being implemented by my Ministry, aims to facilitate, support and lead the advancement of this country's position as a premier location for the provision of information technology enabled services.

The Programme is a loan and grant agreement to the amount of US \$18 million between the IDB and the Government with a view to utilizing structured activities,

state of the art facilities and equipment to materialize our nation's full capacity as a global leader in the IT enabled services sector. To accomplish this, the Programme intends to combine the strengths and capabilities of both the public and private sectors toward improved ICT service delivery and exports locally, regionally and internationally.

These sectors will therefore be provided with innovative methods to develop human capital, re-imagine export strategies, and stimulate investment. With these goals at the helm of positive, targeted actions, the Global Services Promotion Programme aims to deliver on Trinidad and Tobago's economic transformation agenda.

Another key goal is to strategically position Trinidad and Tobago for a future in which IT enabled services can be exported and therefore become a significant contributor to the country's GDP.

Part of the reason why so many of you who are directly involved in the ICT sector were invited to today's launch, is the Government's realization, that as much as we know there is a role for government, we are equally convinced that as we move forward as a country, there should be less government and more private sector

involvement in activities such as this. The Government will provide the vision, as we had done with VISION 2020 and now with VISION 2030, but our role will be increasingly facilitative, thus ensuring that more and more private sector entities are empowered to take the lead and drive the developmental process.

One of the pillars of VISION 2030, is the “creation of Globally Competitive Businesses”. Today’s call for proposals then, involves an invitation to businesses excited about that possibility, and requiring partnerships with local or external training providers to submit a proposal for a skills development program. Proposals will be assessed on the basis of relevance, project design, number of beneficiaries and impact. Funding will be made available for successful projects, and I will leave that as a surprise until the announcement later on.

One of the critical factors that has been identified as a threat to our ICT development is the need for continuous technical training. While Trinidad and Tobago ranks comparatively well with our regional neighbours, we cannot deny that there are deficiencies.

In this context then, I am happy to indicate that this is already being addressed via a technical cooperation agreement with the IDB, with the goal being the development of a manpower strategy for Trinidad and Tobago. The objective here is to support

your businesses and institutions and by extension our society by developing a strategy providing short term technical training that is tailored to the various sector needs. The resulting benefit to be derived will be the creation of new jobs and the increase in national productivity.

The sectors that have been targeted for this focused attention under this initial technical cooperation agreement are the information communication technology (ICT) sector, the maritime services sector and energy services in the context of exploration and production activities. You will recognize, I hope, the nexus between these targeted areas, and the country's strategic direction over the next few years with respect to the diversification of the national economy.

The following three (3) main activities will be undertaken under this technical cooperation:

- Design and implementation of a sector-level skills strategy;
- Assessment of key social and education programmes in terms of their impact and the supply of skills; and
- Design of an information system for the tertiary education sector. The system will involve the collection, centralization, standardization and processing of administrative information.

Undoubtedly, ladies and gentlemen, for us to improve our rankings on every global index in which we participate, there must be greater reliance on solid and accurate data, meticulously gathered, and carefully analyzed. Our decision making process too, must be increasingly guided by empirical data, removing all avenues for subjectivity and political gamesmanship. The project upon which we embark today will, if we embrace it properly, afford us that which has seemingly eluded us over the years. Our VISION 2030 is indeed being realized.

Ladies and gentlemen, we would be foolhardy not to admit that the traditional model of attaining economic prosperity through the exploitation of natural resources and large-scale industrialization is fast disappearing. There is a new economic paradigm to consider in which competitive advantage is built not on natural and non-renewable resources, but rather on ideas, creativity, innovation, productivity, technology and the quality of human resources. This is bolstered by the idea that knowledge is now undeniably a key factor of production. This paradigm shift has been exacerbated by the modern explorations and discoveries related to the Internet, the World Wide Web and the digital economy.

According to the European Commission, the digital economy is the single most important driver of innovation, competitiveness and growth, possessing huge

potential for entrepreneurs, small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and large corporations alike.

The UK/US based auditing company, “Deloitte”, defines this as the economic activity that results from billions of everyday online connections among people, businesses, devices, data, and processes. The manner, both in terms of speed and scope, in which your businesses adopt digital technologies will therefore be a key determinant of your future growth.

New digital trends such as cloud computing, mobile web services, smart grids, and social media, are radically changing the business landscape, reshaping the nature of work, the boundaries of enterprises and the responsibilities of business leaders. These trends have the potential to do more than just enable technological innovation in Trinidad and Tobago, they can enable innovation in business models, business networking and the transfer of knowledge, while fostering the access to international markets that small island developing states such as ours need.

Gloally, one of the best known ITeS success stories is India. In 2008, total exports of IT enabled services from India stood at US \$40.4 billion. That country’s IT services and ITeS industries contributed one quarter of their total exports and half of service exports in 2007. In the United States, the digital economy has had a

remarkable effect on jobs and growth. In 2014, the US exported roughly \$400 billion in ICT enabled services which accounted for more than half of the US's services exports. The Northeastern Europe nation of Estonia, with 1.4 million people has also had noteworthy success in promoting a technology based information society.

In Trinidad and Tobago, we are on the verge of moving in a similar direction. When selecting an investment destination for the Information Technology enabled Services industry a Duke University study found foreign investors consider five variables: (1) the country's cost structure (wages, infrastructure, taxes); (2) the current and potential availability of qualified human capital (3) the country's business climate; (4) infrastructure quality and (5) geographical and cultural proximity.

You would recall, ladies and gentlemen, the Government's stated intention to implement a national broadband strategy, and the recent launch of free WiFi services on selected PTSC routes by the Minister of Public Administration and Communications. These initiatives, when combined with what we launch today, place Trinidad and Tobago in a proper place to achieve the broader ICT goals we have set for ourselves as part of our VISION 2030. One piece that remains missing, is you, our private sector partners.

Greater autonomy, increased self-determinism, entrepreneurialism, networking, skills and talent as well as agility within the business landscape are emerging factors driving the contemporary models of global business. So amidst the current state of prices in the oil and gas sector, the need for a Global Services Promotion Programme rings more clearly as a cornerstone in the foundation of an alternative, diversified, transformed and sustainable foreign direct investment pipeline.

Ladies and gentlemen, your embrace of this project will certainly catapult Trinidad and Tobago ahead of its regional competitors in the provision of Information Technology enabled Services (ITeS). According to CARICOM's draft (ICT) Strategy for Regional Development, Trinidad and Tobago is one of three countries that has already begun to see developmental gains from ITC. Globally though, on the Digital Opportunity Index, we are currently ranked 59th out of 181 countries, a ranking which places us behind Barbados, Bahamas, Antigua and Barbuda, St. Kitts & Nevis, Jamaica and Dominica.

Two recent announcements are of tremendous significance in this regard, the first was the launch of the new driver's permit which, through the use of technology allows for a far more efficient and cost effective solution, and the second is yesterday's introduction of the UBER transport facility in Trinidad. These two technology driven services point the way in which we must go.

The Parliament currently has before it as well the Electronic Transfers Act which will go a very long way in facilitating more technology-driven financial transactions. All of this, ladies and gentlemen, points to the Government's investment in technology as a means of improving the daily lives of our citizens.

With this in mind, the Ministry of Planning and Development, as a project champion and implementation agency, commits to working hand-in-hand with you, our industry partners and tertiary institutions, to ensure that local companies and individuals can more effectively compete in the global ITeS sector.

Ladies and gentlemen, there is a frequently cited statistic from one of the key thinkers in the ICT sector, Thomas Frey, who argues that 60% of what will be considered the best jobs in 10 years, do not now exist. Today, we launch a programme, that is perfectly in sync with our VISION 203 strategy to "Build Globally Competitive Businesses." I am confident, that today's exercise will lead us to the place where those jobs will be created, those businesses will be established and strengthened, and the local economy will return to its path of positive growth. I believe it. The Government of Trinidad and Tobago believes it. The question is, do you believe it enough, to commit wholeheartedly to the future-proofing of Trinidad and Tobago?

Ladies and gentlemen I thank you. May God bless you and may God bless our nation.