



EMA's Recycling Exhibition Opening Ceremony

April 26th 2017

UTT O'Meara Campus

**Feature Address on behalf of the Minister of Planning
and Development**

SALUTATIONS:

Ms. Desdra Bascombe, Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Rural Development and Local Government,

Ms. Althea Thompson, Member of the Board of Directors, Environmental Management Authority,

Mr. Dale Cozier, Senior Project Manager, Environmental Management Authority,

Mr. Ronald Roach, Chief Executive Officer, Solid Waste Management Company Limited (SWMCOL),

Mrs. Toyfan Arneaud, Director, Institute of Marine Affairs (IMA),

Mr. David Simmons, Consultant, Simmons and Associates,

Professor Valerie Stoute, Programme Professor in Environment Studies, University of Trinidad and Tobago (UTT),

Other esteemed members of the academic fraternity,

Representatives of the Green Fund Executing Unit,

Distinguished Students,

Members of the Media,

Ladies and Gentlemen.

Good Morning.

It is my pleasure to be here this morning at the Opening Ceremony for this Recycling Exhibition, the first of its kind in this country. Regrettably, the Minister of Planning and Development could not be here as planned but she has asked that I convey to you Madam Chair of the EMA and your team her congratulations on this very important initiative.

Just 4 days ago, on April 22, more than 193 countries in the global community celebrated and honoured the rich vast Earth that continues to sustain life and inspire all of us with its wonder, beauty and resilience. Earth Day provides the instant for raising environmental consciousness and awareness.

Mankind has inflicted a lot of damage to the environment in the pursuit of economic and social progress. Increasing urbanisation and our consumption and production patterns have caused a deviation from a

trajectory of sustainability with environmental challenges becoming more acute and pressing. Trinidad and Tobago has not been spared from such challenges.

Our future must not only be defined by the strength of the economy, or how much social progress we have made, it must equally be defined by the quality of our environment and our individual and collective resolve to protect and preserve it.

As global citizens, we have the responsibility to minimize the negative impact of our activities on the planet and to accept the responsibility of ensuring that we achieve and maintain high environmental standards. Issues such as the conservation of our limited natural resources and waste minimisation have come to the forefront and must be dealt with earnestly. In particular, the current state of our waste management and disposal

system and the general poor attitudes of our citizenry toward good waste disposal practices require both urgent and decisive action.

Indeed, the world has chosen sustainability as the key guiding principle for all current and future local, regional and international development agendas. But what does this mean to the average person? Our ability to extract natural resources, be it our forests, fossil fuels, or food supply, must be on par with nature's ability to replenish the same. If there is an imbalance, we then risk an unsustainable trajectory for our future populations. Therefore, we must challenge ourselves to reduce our commercial demands and develop methods for reusing or repurposing items deemed as "waste".

The issue of finite resources is compounded by pollution. Ocean Conservancy records that the 2016 Annual International Coastal Clean-up yielded eighteen million, sixty-two thousand, nine hundred and eleven

(18,062,911) pounds of garbage, with plastic beverage bottles listed as the second most collected item, with one million, twenty-four thousand, four hundred and seventy (1,024,470) pieces collected. Plastic bags also appeared on the top ten list, with four hundred and two thousand, one hundred and twenty-two (402,122) bags collected.

Ladies and gentlemen, we know that plastic waste is detrimental to marine life as it often mistaken for food. There are increased reports of whales, turtles, and other species washing ashore on beaches with stomachs filled with plastics, bottle caps and other forms of waste. It is alarming to think of how much of this waste has already entered the human food chain.

When we think of recycling, we should really embrace the whole concept of ‘Reduce, Reuse, and Recycle’ and our responsibility to be actors and advocates. This concept must play a fundamental role in transforming our present economic model; one which is currently carbon intensive and

ascribes significant burdens on our resources into one that embraces the principles of the circular economy and sustainability, at its core.

The reasons why we should all Reduce, Reuse and Recycle are compelling. We will not only help the environment and preserve our rich ecosystems, we will also conserve natural resources, save and generate energy, reduce the garbage in our landfills, create jobs and save money. The change must begin in our homes and continue in our work places and businesses, in our schools and institutions and in our public spaces.

The United Nation's 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is the global action plan for ensuring safe and accessible resources for the present and future populations and fostering innovation is intricately woven into each of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

More importantly though, the Government has developed a National Development Strategy, *Vision 2030*, with five (5) overarching development goals that are closely aligned with the SDGs. One such Goal recognises the importance of the environment and, particularly the magnitude of climate change impacts and the need to source renewable forms of energy. The Vision 2030 Strategy also addresses waste management, not only of solid waste but also other forms of waste such as air pollutants and chemical waste.

Most recently, the Government has taken the decision to modify the role and function of SWMCOL to undertake those of a Waste Recycling Authority in addition to its current functions. This modification will facilitate the efficient coordination of the waste management system particularly as it relates to:

- promoting the recovery of waste through recycling and reuse;

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- implementing deposit refund systems or any other system to encourage waste recovery;
 - promoting business opportunities;
 - encouraging a culture of waste minimization among manufacturers, producers, distributors and consumers.

The EMA is also drafting Solid Waste Rules to support these solid waste management and disposal initiatives.

In the policy approach now being embraced, waste is not only seen as burden to our society but as a valuable resource. As far as possible, the intent is to stimulate the development of lucrative downstream waste industries nationally, encourage entrepreneurs, create jobs and protect human health and the environment.

Ladies and gentlemen, this Recycling Exhibition dovetails quite nicely with current efforts to revise the National Environmental Policy and to

address the issue of Styrofoam packaging in the food and beverage industry. Cultural shift is going to be the main driver and will determine the extent of our success.

This exhibition features the real foot soldiers of the local recycling and repurposing revolution. Our community groups, schools, non-governmental organizations, and corporate sector partners here today have achieved significant milestones in this arena, and they are not merely present to display their products and services, but to demonstrate the possibilities that exist once a concerted effort is made. They are here to provide inspiration and stimulate the innovation needed to shift to a culture of recycling.

I congratulate the University of Trinidad and Tobago for taking bold steps in research and innovation, and developing worthy academic programmes aligned with the objectives of this exhibition. I particularly applaud your

Fashion Programme which has ventured into converting ordinary waste items into “Wearable Art”, as seen in some of today’s décor elements. Art always expands our creative intuition, and creating art from waste has the vast potential to become a lucrative industry in this country. You have created the ideal breeding ground for ideas and concepts on managing our waste streams.

Ladies and gentlemen, reducing, reusing and recycling must occupy a space in the national psyche. We are being summoned by our own planet to be innovative and responsible. We should not miss this opportunity to continuously streamline our own development agenda to this call. When we look ahead to the future, we see our future generation staring back at us, with eyes and hearts filled with hope. Let us communicate messages of prosperity for our planet by doing what is right now. We all share this planet let us work in unison to protect it, we all live in this island state let us preserve its richness using our creativity and behaving

responsibly. The good news today is that this Exhibition is a positive step along this pathway.

I end by reminding you that innovation is deeply rooted in our history. From the bamboo-bamboo bandsto the metal pan bandsto the steel-pan bands we have a history of repurposing materials. Let us continue to find solutions to our development challenges through creativity and innovation. And finally, let this Exhibition be the spark for transforming the way we think about how we generate and dispose of our waste and how we relate to our environment. I thank you.