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December 29, 2011

MEDIA STATEMENT
TO: NEWS EDITORS
For Immediate Release

Chamber looks back at 2011, and forward to 2012

As we come to the dawn of a new year, the Trinidad and Tobago Chamber of Industry and Commerce wishes to take a moment to reflect on the past year.

In 2011, the Chamber spoke on several issues which affected not our membership and by extension the national community.

There was a marked increase in ongoing industrial unrest in the nation over the past year. We are pleased to see that some of our labour unions were able to eventually resolve certain disputes, while many remain unresolved. However, for those resolved, they did not occur until after some severe disruption, and also that many negotiations still remain unresolved. The Chamber will not be supportive of any shutdown to commercial activity and will continue to champion a Tri-Partite approach among government, labour and the private sector to reach a national consensus regarding solutions to several lingering labour issues, as well as those concerning productivity and efficiency within all business operations – whether public or private.

We have also seen the three-month State of Emergency having an impact on business, particularly while the curfew hours were in effect. While we supported and viewed the SoE at that time as a necessary tool in the fight against crime and called for an Anti-Crime Plan to ensure sustainability of the reduction in crime, we have noted with growing concern a rise in serious crimes within the past few weeks – particularly with the murder of eight persons over the four-day Christmas weekend. Our expectation for 2012 is that the government will deliver on their promise to implement a comprehensive National Anti-Crime Plan, so as not to return this country to the levels of wonton murders and gang activity as seen in the past few years.

In 2011, we saw that T&T, like much of the rest of the world, faced and continue to face several economic challenges which ultimately affected business. The National Budget for 2012 was entitled “Economic Transformation” and as the substantial representatives of the private sector, we were pleased to hear of the Government’s plans. However, we now eagerly look towards 2012 for the implementation of these plans to “transform” our economy – all of which we expect will promote local business – both here and abroad –, encourage foreign investment, and restore the confidence perception in T&T.

In our support of economic transformation, which we believe will be essential to the growth of our nation, the Chamber will be embarking on several initiatives designed to aid our business development which will ultimately lead to the growth of a strong, sustainable national economy.

The Chamber has decided, therefore, to place the following six issues on the front burner of our agenda:

1. Crime reduction;
2. SME development strategies;
3. Sustainable Economic Growth and Diversification;
4. Improvement of our National Competitiveness ranking by focusing particularly on increased productivity and ease of doing business;
5. Governance and Transparency
6. Implementation of the agreed Work Plans to resuscitate Tobago's ailing economy

We will continue to work closely with all stakeholders over the next two years, to ensure that the above issues are adequately addressed and that tangible solutions are found to aid in making Trinidad and Tobago a safer, more efficient and first-class place to do business.

Even as the business climate remains cautious at best in 2012, the Chamber sees opportunities for growth and development here in T&T, and we wish to capitalize on these opportunities and build on business relations with countries and regions such as China, Canada, the Eurozone, Latin America, and our CARICOM neighbours. We view the Prime Minister's Bi-lateral Visit to India next month as a boost to our local business content and look forward to seeing the results that this Business-to-Business trip will provide in 2012.

As we say farewell to 2011 and inch ever closer to 2012, the Chamber would like to take this opportunity to wish all the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago a Happy and Prosperous New Year.

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