



Remarks
Delivered By
Mr Andrew Sabga
Immediate Past President
Trinidad & Tobago Chamber of Industry
& Commerce

Chamber's Annual Business Meeting & Luncheon 2013

Wednesday 24th April 2013

Hyatt Regency Trinidad

Good afternoon to all,

It is amazing how quickly time goes by! It really does not seem like two years ago that I took up office as President of the T&T Chamber, and, yet, here we are at the end of my term. When I accepted the role of President in 2011, I had two main targets in mind: Firstly I wanted to raise the profile of the Chamber as a key influencer in the business community, which would benefit our Members and other businesses in Trinidad and Tobago. Secondly, I also wanted to make sure that the Chamber focused our attention on our core competency - that is, being the primary and preferred advocate to our Leadership on behalf of the private sector on national issues affecting business.

All in all, I believe that we have managed to achieve these aims.

Two years ago, when I first took over the helm of the Chamber Presidency, I stood before the Membership and spoke of my hope for the Chamber to focus on a few National issues. At that time, I said – and I quote: “I would say to you, number one on everyone’s mind has been crime; the economy comes second”.

Two years after that statement, it seems that not much has changed. Crime continues to be the Number One issue affecting our country and, more specifically, our business community as it increases the cost of doing business and also detracts from new investment. As a businessman myself, I understand that crime reduction is of paramount importance to every business, but it is also equally important to every citizen of Trinidad and Tobago.

I am sure you have heard me say on several occasions in my interactions at our Chamber's Breakfast Meetings or in media interviews that crime is not something that can be tackled by the government alone. While we continued to lobby for a more holistic approach to combating crime, we also recognise the importance for each citizen to be a part of crime fighting initiatives. My stance today as I move on from Chamber Presidency, remains the same.

Essentially, if there is one message that I would like to leave, it is to encourage all of us today to "Do the Right Thing - Always". I want this to be the slogan that our businesses promote and use on a day to day basis. When we aim to always do good, even when no one is looking, even when we think there are no consequences to our actions, we are building a culture that has a zero tolerance for any crime, and we are leaving a legacy for our children to follow.

Each person in our nation at all levels - whether an adult, or the young school child - must be able to know the difference between right and wrong and act according to what is not just legally, but morally right.

Away from the issue of crime, the Chamber has done so much work over the years that generally goes unseen.

Highlights of my past two years have been seeing the work we have done particularly in the areas of representation of our Members' interests. I have seen the Chamber Members actively come forward to be our voice and ears on various national consultative boards. I have seen our

Committees and members of our Secretariat in both Trinidad and Tobago work tirelessly with various stakeholders to put forward our Members' concerns - whether on VAT refunds, which we experienced some great success for our Members or trade agreements and negotiations or recommending and seeing the implementation of the Government loan guarantee fund for Tobago businesses to name just a few..

We have assisted our Members in various industries to explore new markets and new business opportunities by leading trade missions to Guatemala and the European Union over the past two years. I am happy to report that fruitful business relations and agreements among some local and international companies have been formed.

I have also been very proud of the Chamber's drive to educate our Members and the wider business community on opportunities for business development and growth, or on new legislation which may affect their businesses. We have also embarked on a robust drive for professional development training for our members in areas of Labour laws, HR practices, Business Writing, Implementation of ASYCUDA, Mediation and Alternative Dispute Resolution, or Customer Service Excellence. Education of businesses remains key to our dreams of national expansion, and I trust we will continue filling that need for our Members.

Our work in partnership with the Caribbean Corporate Governance Institute, a new regional organisation which should be of interest to all board members, and the T&T Stock Exchange, in developing a National Code of Corporate Governance for Trinidad and Tobago was also a main source of pride, as we saw a great need for the Chamber to be a pro-active Voice in improving transparency, accountability, and good governance within our businesses, and, eventually, within our government agencies. I encourage you to indicate your interest to be involved during the consultative phase which takes place within the next few months. I look forward to seeing the Code progress in its development and its eventual final launch later on this year. I believe that our work here shows that we go beyond just talk, or sitting back and waiting for others to act. We are a Chamber of ACTION, and I believe that we can continue to be seen as such.

I have been particularly pleased at the work we have done in building the Chamber internally. At the end of 2011, we not only decided to focus on key external National issues, but we also made efforts to focus on developing our the Core Values of the Chamber. These are:

- Customer-Focused
- Professionalism
- Transparency
- Productivity
- Independence, and
- Personal Development

We took the decision, therefore, to be the exemplars of the values we want to see instilled in all business organisations throughout Trinidad and Tobago. AS a Chamber, I believe we must "BE THE CHANGE WE WANT TO SEE", so I know that we will continue in this regard.

Finally, the Chamber's expenses were within budget and I am proud to hand over a healthy financial Chamber to the incoming President and Board of Directors. I wish to thank our Members for their continued support of the Chamber and its initiatives, in order to ensure that we can continue to serve you to the very best of our abilities.

It is important to note that on March 14, 2013, the Chamber celebrated 134 years of service to the business community in Trinidad and Tobago. To have one business organisation last as long as the Chamber has, while at the same time growing successfully, is no small feat, and it is testimony to the fact that the T&T Chamber of Industry and Commerce continues to be an active and significant contributor to national economic development and prosperity.

It is now my gracious duty to pass on the baton of leadership of our prestigious organisation to incoming President, Mr. Moonilal Lalchan, who previously served as our Senior Vice President.

Ladies and gentlemen, Moonilal is no stranger to serving the business and national community in key leadership roles. I know, therefore, that under his tenure, the Chamber will continue to grow from strength to strength and he will ensure the Chamber fulfils the mandate to represent the interests of the people whom we serve.

My two years in office have been some of the most enjoyable and enlightening of my working life and I look forward to that continuing as I serve as Immediate Past President.

In concluding this address and my Presidency, I must say that it has indeed been a privilege and honour having been President, and I would like to thank every Member of the Chamber, the Board of Directors, the entire business community, the various government agencies and other stakeholders I worked with, the media, the Chamber's dynamic CEO, the Committees, and, of course, the hard working Management team and staff within the Secretariat for making it such a wonderful experience. I look forward to seeing the next steps the Chamber will take in the near future.

I thank you.