

MINISTRY OF TOURISM

**SUMMIT ON SEVEN DAY CRUISE-AIRLINE
HOPPING IN CURACAO**

AN ADDRESS

MELBA DEDIER

**PERMANENT SECRETARY
MINISTRY OF TOURISM
TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO**

Date: September 01-02, 2011

Venue: Curacao

Time: 10.00am

- The Honourable Gerrit Schotte, Prime Minister of Curacao
 - Ministers of Tourism
 - Captains of the Tourism Industry
 - Senior Government Officials
 - Other Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen
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Good Morning.

I apologize for the absence of Dr. the Honourable Rupert Griffith, Minister of Tourism of Trinidad and Tobago. Minister Griffith asked me to convey his disappointment at not being able to be here today to participate in this ground breaking initiative to promote regional tourism, and to sign the Letter of Intent himself. But unfortunately he had pressing and urgent matters at home that prevented him from being here.

On behalf of the Government of Trinidad and Tobago, I congratulate the Honourable Prime Minister of Curacao on this visionary concept and convey our deepest appreciation to the Government of Curacao for hosting and organizing this Summit. It is definitely a step in the right direction as it provides a framework for cooperation and a platform to further exploit the Caribbean's tourism resources.

The Letter of Intent for the seven island cruise-airline hopping initiative marks the beginning of what we consider to be a serious commitment to development of cruise shipping in the southern Caribbean. It augurs well for collaboration on various other issues that impact upon us all.

Our experience with other regional agreements has, however, taught us that establishing such an initiative is a process rather than an event.

More importantly, initiatives such as this call for strong political will and concerted action.

In that regard, I assure you that the Government of Trinidad and Tobago fully supports this initiative and our Prime Minister, the Honorable Kamla Persad-Bissessar, has taken a keen and personal interest in it. We are committed to working with all stakeholders to ensure that this creative vision becomes a reality.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The tourism industry is critical for the continuing development of the Caribbean, representing over thirty percent (30%) of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of the region and providing nearly three (3) million jobs. Indeed it is the mainstay of many economies in this part of the world, accounting for up to ninety percent (90%) of the GDP of some nations.

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Therefore, we welcome initiatives such as the cruise-airline hopping and look forward to intensified collaboration with all concerned.

This cruise-airline hopping among the seven Southern Caribbean destinations comprising Curacao, Aruba, Bonaire, Colombia, Venezuela, Grenada and Trinidad and Tobago is particularly important at this time. Considering the depressed economies in the major world markets of the USA, UK and Europe, aggressive competition for the tourism pie, and increases in airline taxes, it is imperative that we shake up our tourism business model.

The competition has become really acute and we must become more creative and innovative.

We view this cruise-airline hopping initiative as yet another tourism niche for development and one that will ultimately lead to increased international arrivals and the

development of a complete authentic Caribbean experience.

The tourism sector in Trinidad and Tobago is being positioned as one of the key pillars for economic diversification. As Minister Griffith often says, Trinidad and Tobago was one of the world's best kept secrets, but no more. We have entered the tourism market with great seriousness and will play our part with greater effectiveness in strengthening the Caribbean tourism product.

Trinidad and Tobago is not the traditional sea, sand and surf tourism destination. Our competitive advantage is our rich and diverse culture. Our attention is now focused on improving our existing product and we are investing heavily in our heritage and historical sites especially in preservation projects.

In parallel, we are also investing in creating a mix of vibrant and diverse events throughout the year ranging

from our world renowned Carnival to international music, culinary and sporting events. This exciting calendar of events, while differentiating us from other Caribbean destinations, will also serve to provide more diverse opportunities within the region to appeal to a wider audience.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Less than a year ago, the Government of Trinidad and Tobago approved an ambitious National Tourism Policy. One of the guiding principles of the National Tourism Policy says that our tourism development shall take place within the context of strong cooperation with other States in the region.

In addition, our tourism policy goals include strengthening the linkages between the Trinidad and Tobago economy and the tourism sectors of other Caribbean States; encouraging the further growth of the regional tourism

market; and using tourism to foster greater economic integration of the region.

This project therefore dovetails with our goals of enhanced regional cooperation and integration in the tourism sector as we work towards a diverse, sustainable tourism product for the benefit of the region.

We are proud to be a part of it.

I thank you.

August 30, 2011