

**MINISTRY OF TOURISM**

**RE-ENGINEERING THE LIFEGUARD  
SERVICES UNIT**

**FEATURE ADDRESS**

**DR. THE HONOURABLE DELMON DEXTER BAKER  
MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF TOURISM**

**Date: Monday January 24, 2011**

**Venue: T&T North Room, Crowne Plaza Trinidad**

**Time: 9.00am**

- Mr. Amroodeen Ali, Deputy Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Tourism
- Ms. Denise Duncan, Director Human Resources Ministry of Tourism
- Mr. Lennox Dwarkia, Lifeguard Supervisor, Ministry of Tourism
- Representatives of the National Union of Government and Federated Workers (NUGFW)
- Conference Delegates including representatives from our Protective Services
- Members of the Media

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Good morning, ladies and gentlemen.

Good Morning.

Your presence here is an indication of your support of this very important workshop geared towards developing a professional Lifeguard Service in Trinidad. As you would know, the Lifeguard Service in

Tobago is primarily the responsibility of the Tobago House of Assembly and as a Committee we have made every effort to include them in our deliberations up to this day.

The Ministry of Tourism recognising its mandate to increase the sector's overall contribution to the nation's Gross Domestic Product and understanding that the development of the tourism product in Trinidad and Tobago will in effect improve the lives of all citizens has moved its activity level into overdrive.

Noting that the nation's beaches are in effect hubs of a variety of sporting, recreational and economic activity that have for the most part been unregulated, and also recognising that in their present condition these prime spaces will not be able to attain either their revenue potential or overall safety profile the Ministry of Tourism sought to effect change.

Quite recently the country saw the heart-wrenching agony of a mother who lost her twin sons to drowning on one of our popular beaches. I am aware of the circumstances surrounding this tragedy, and would like to extend condolences on behalf of the staff of the Ministry of Tourism and myself to the family for their loss.

In the period of October 2009 and September 2010 our lifeguards made 76 rescues, more than 47% of which occurred at our flagship beach Maracas.

Regrettably though, our records indicate that fourteen (14) persons drowned between the months of June and December 2010. These incidents of drowning occurred outside of the lifeguard patrolled areas and during the non-working hours of the lifeguard service.

I reiterate that there have been no reported cases of drowning on the Ministry's manned beaches during

the hours of active beach patrols by our highly trained lifeguards over the past year.

Incidents and tragedies like these occurring as they do justify the importance of this conference today.

The Committee's hope in the development of a professional Lifeguard Service is that by supporting the efforts of this team and in broadening its scope of activity and responsibility that we automatically treat with issues of

- Water Safety
- Integrated Beach Front Use
- Decentralised, division-based management that would increase the flexibility of the service while reducing its response time, and
- Increasing the capacity of the service to influence national policy relating to the management of beaches, active waterways utilised for bathing and confined public pools

As you may be aware the Lifeguard Unit was only established a few years ago, thus we must act quickly to enact the proposed changes in order to keep abreast with more mature services in the First World.

Our lifeguards are first responders on beach fronts and also within many rural communities. Thus they must be well-trained and equipped to deal with incidents off-beach as well as on-beach. The Ministry of Tourism seeks to empower lifeguards to effectively treat with all of the circumstances that impact on their duties and give them the authority, commensurate insurance coverage and protection in law as they seek to execute this vital function.

The Lifeguard Unit in Trinidad consists of 124 persons and is responsible for specific beaches namely Mayaro, Manzanilla, Salibya, Maracas, Tyrico, Las Cuevas, Los Iros, Vessigny and Quinam.

Since the incorporation of Lifeguard Services within the Ministry of Tourism in 2004, we have sought to upgrade the professional caliber of the Unit as well as to increase the number of lifeguards that man the beaches.

This conference is a culmination of the First Phase of activities proposed to end in the production of a report to guide the consultancy in the preparation of the new Lifeguard Act and Lifeguard Service Structure.

The discussions have been dynamic, rational, with much high energy debating and deliberating and at the end of most days conclusive, with specific decisions receiving almost unanimous support after all the surrounding issues are ventilated and I know that we can continue in that vein over these two days.

Hopefully from the recommendations emanating from this conference, we will have a more visible, effective, and agile Lifeguard Service, with modern and

appropriate facilities for both men and women, a robust teaching and training unit, a policy development team, IT support for reporting and rapid interface, a new vehicle and equipment maintenance team, and a superior management team that allows for growth and upward mobility of all lifeguards.

With the upcoming graduation of 39 trainees including 8 female trainees in August this year and these persons we hope to deploy more lifeguards throughout the length and breadth of Trinidad based of course on beach traffic in addition to other issues.

These lifeguard personnel will continue to be afforded training opportunities in diverse areas so as to develop and enhance their technical skills base, personal aptitudes and professional attitude.

These include first aid, open water skills, cardio pulmonary resuscitation, water rescue and physical training and instructor programs.

However in spite of the progress we have made in upgrading the Lifeguard Unit we still have some challenges especially those pertaining to human resources and maintenance of lifeguard facilities. The Ministry of Tourism is hopeful that the proposals generated from this conference will help us deal with these issues and move the Service to the next level.

This year the Ministry of Tourism hopes to launch its Junior Rookie Lifeguard Program. This fantastic lifesaving program provides children, aged 8-12 years, with valuable water skills that could save their own lives or the lives of others within a fun and action packed environment.

It is critical that young people learn skills in water safety, rescue, resuscitation and lifesaving sports

skills so as to reduce the number of unfortunate deaths through drowning.

In closing, ladies and gentlemen, I wish to express my personal appreciation to all members of the Lifeguard Steering Committee for their valuable support in planning this conference.

We have made good progress on a number of fronts in addressing many of the concerns of the lifeguards. Much still needs to be done, however.

I have been quite impressed with the professionalism, enthusiasm, dedication and insightful strategies developed by the Steering Committee since its formulation in October 2010. I trust that the good relationships that have developed will thrive and serve us well into the future.

With these words, I now have the honour to declare this Lifeguard Conference officially open.

Thank you very much and may God Bless each one of you.

January 24, 2011