

MINISTRY OF TOURISM

**LAUNCH OF THE TOURISM ORIENTED
POLICING & PROTECTION SERVICES
(TOPPS) CONFERENCE**

FEATURE ADDRESS

**DR. THE HONOURABLE RUPERT GRIFFITH
MINISTER OF TOURISM
TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO**

Date: Monday October 11, 2010

Venue: Hyatt Regency Trinidad

Time: 9.00am

- Senator The Honourable Subhas Panday, the Minister in the Ministry of National Security
 - Mrs. Melba Dedier, Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Tourism
 - Mr. Ernest Littles, President of the Tourism Development Company Limited (TDC)
 - Presidents of the various Tourism Stakeholder Groups
 - Conference Delegates
 - Members of the Media
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Good Morning, Ladies and Gentlemen.

It is my great privilege and honour to be here today for the Official Launch of the three day Tourism Oriented Policing and Protection Services Conference.

I wish to congratulate the Tourism Development Company Limited (TDC), the marketing and implementation agency of the Ministry of Tourism, for its bold and proactive decision in identifying tourism policing and security services as a critical issue worthy of attention.

The main objective of organising such a tourism security conference is to provide a much-needed platform for the dissemination of skills, knowledge and best practices in safety and security initiatives that have proven successful in other tourism destinations.

I am particularly pleased this morning to have the Minister in the Ministry of National Security present at this forum as it is solid evidence of his Ministry's commitment, and most importantly that of this Government's, to work with tourism stakeholders to ensure a holistic and integrated development of tourism.

I celebrate the initiative taken today - and I want to also recognise the amazing diversity of representatives here from across Government, the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service, Customs and Immigration, non-government organisations, tourism operators, industry training organisations, - and I am sure many more.

This list clearly demonstrates the wide target market for this conference and its critical importance to the building up of our local tourism industry.

It is my understanding that over 100 persons will be attending this conference today and the other session carded to take place in Tobago from October 14 to the 16.

Over the past two or three years persistent concerns have been voiced about the safety and security of tourists visiting our twin island Republic.

Trinidad and Tobago has been rocked by some horrific acts of violence against visitors; particularly on the isle of Tobago. In Trinidad also visitors to our sites and attractions suffer at times from scams, robberies, harassment and other criminal activities.

This has resulted in several precautionary travel advisories being put out by the United Kingdom, Australia and the United States of America.

In light of this the TDC has established a twenty four (24) hour security presence on some of the nation's tourist facilities; namely the La Brea Pitch Lake, Maracas, Las Cuevas, Manzanilla, and Vessigny. Whilst the security personnel do not carry firearms they do provide the desired visible protective presence.

The Ministry of Tourism also conducts regular security beachfront patrols at Maracas, Tyrico, Mayaro and Las Cuevas.

Moreover we maintain a constant rapport with the Police Stations located in close proximity to our attractions.

The Ministry of Tourism recently concluded a pilot project utilising video monitoring systems at Maracas Beach Lifeguard Quarters for surveillance of sea bathers as well as to assist in the monitoring of the beach front. The feasibility of this project as a possible proactive approach to crime at tourist attractions is now under review.

Whilst our security forces should be highly visible and active in the communities, it is incumbent upon all of us, involved in creating a positive memorable experience for the traveller, to be aware of practical initiatives that can be used to safeguard the person and property of our guests.

The important thing is that a start has been made to working on the challenge of safety and security through this conference. We must recognise, however, that these issues will not be solved overnight.

We are opening up the corridors for discussions and brain storming opportunities. In a way, we are responding to the demands and expectations of our international guests. It is the right response. In fact, it is the only response.

Your main conference facilitator and highly renowned expert on the impact of crime and terrorism on tourism development, Dr. Peter Tarlow, will help to break through the barriers and ensure that Trinidad and Tobago delivers on the expectations of our regional and international visitors ... and our citizens.

Ladies and gentlemen, tourism is acknowledged worldwide as a key vehicle for achieving positive and sustainable economic, social, environmental and cultural outcomes.

One of the major challenges faced in destination development is the area of visitor safety and security.

Well-conceived and properly implemented marketing campaigns can effectively bring in travellers for specific festivals and events. However the sustaining of the reputation of tourism destinations depends, among other factors, on providing a safe and secured environment for a positive visitor experience.

The development of a destination does not end just with the upgrade of tourism infrastructure or the conduct of marketing campaigns.

In this global village of communication with an internet savvy baby boomers market, news of any untoward incident travels quickly endangering the reputation of the country as a safe destination.

I am certain that all of us will recall the devastating impact of the highly covered disappearance of Alabama teenager Natalee Holloway on the economy of Aruba and the recent hunt for alleged gang leader Christopher “Dudus” Coke on Jamaica’s tourist industry.

Furthermore crimes against tourists on one island can negatively affect other islands within the Caribbean region.

Through projects such as this Tourism Policing Conference and our National Tourism Quality Service Improvement Program among others, we have seen the value of involving different stakeholders to work for a common vision.

We certainly look forward to more cooperation and partnerships with all our stakeholders to ensure that our local tourism industry continues to thrive and enhance quality in service delivery.

Ladies and gentlemen, I join with my Ministerial Colleague in the Ministry of National Security in emphasising that Trinidad and Tobago remains steadfast in its fight against the scourge of crime and all aspects of criminal activity.

Moreover, we are committed to safeguarding our citizens and in turn visitors to our shores.

In closing, ladies and gentlemen, I thank you all for coming to this conference and I hope that you take all necessary steps to provide protection to our visitors against crime and provide them aid when in distress.

With these remarks ladies and gentlemen, it is now my pleasure to declare the Tourism Oriented Policing and Protection Services Conference officially open. I wish you well with your proceedings over the course of the next few days.

May God richly bless each and every one of you.

October 07, 2010