

**MINISTRY OF TOURISM**

**"A CONVERSATION ON TOURISM"**

**STAKEHOLDERS' MEETING WITH  
MINISTERS OF TOURISM**

**FEATURE ADDRESS**

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

**Date:** Tuesday June 08, 2010

**Venue:** Regency I & II, Hyatt Regency Trinidad

**Time:** 10.30am

- My Ministerial Colleague, Dr. the Honourable Delmon Dexter Baker, Minister in the Ministry of Tourism
  - Mrs. Melba Dedier, Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Tourism
  - Tourism Partners
  - Members of the Media
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Ladies and gentlemen,

I come before you today as a breath of fresh air in tourism and as someone with a commitment to developing the beautiful twin island Republic of Trinidad and Tobago.

It is a commitment that saw me faithfully serving the people of this country for over 20 years; as Member of Parliament, as Speaker of the House of Representatives and as Minister of Information, Communication, Training and Distance Learning.

I stand here today, with my Colleague Minister, proud to be part of a new Government, which is committed to effecting change; and indeed to making tourism an important platform, through which we will create sustainable employment opportunities for all our people, create international relationships, and allow the world a taste of the finer things of Trinidad and Tobago.

I am fully committed to delivering on this promise; working in close collaboration with you our partner stakeholders.

Perhaps many of you may have said to yourselves upon rising this morning; “is this going to be yet another “talk shop” or public relations exercise.

Rest assured, my friends, this is not the case.

Your input here today will be the catalyst for change. Each of you gathered here this morning will be the architect and builder of our tourism industry.

For I can assure you that if there is no buy-in on the part of stakeholders, all of government's efforts to tackle the multi-faceted challenges facing the tourism industry and to propel the sector to the next level will be in vain.

In this regard therefore I wish to express my sincere appreciation to all of you, who have taken the time and made the sacrifice to attend this meeting here today. By attending, you are signaling your desire and intent to work hand in hand with government to bring about meaningful change.

This morning will begin a series of extensive "conversations" to develop an immediate action plan for the sustainable development of our local tourism sector.

This is in keeping with the People's Partnership's Manifesto which is now official government policy.

On Friday June 04 the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Tourism presented quite a comprehensive review of the activities of the Ministry of Tourism and of the tourism industry in general.

Yesterday (June 07) the marketing arm of the Ministry of Tourism, the Tourism Development Company, provided both Dr. Baker and myself with a detailed summary of its operations and future plans.

It is hoped that during the week of June 14 the Chief Secretary and other senior executives of the Tobago House of Assembly (THA) will be meeting with both Dr. Baker and myself with the aim of strengthening the relationship between the Tobago House of Assembly and the Ministry of Tourism at the policy making level so as to ensure the development and growth of tourism in Tobago in a manner consistent with the objectives of the THA and in sync with national policy for the sector.

Ladies and gentlemen, it is a well known and undisputable fact that tourism, both locally and internationally, is a powerful catalyst for economic growth and diversification, job creation and poverty alleviation.

We recognise that tourism is the largest and fastest growing industry in the world. We also recognise that it is growing in prominence across every region of the world, and has significant importance to countries within the Caribbean.

Although the tourism industry has proven to be particularly resilient, we must also keep in mind the various challenges facing the industry. The impact of the global financial and economic meltdown is still being felt throughout the major trade economies.

Indeed some of the main tourism source markets for Trinidad and Tobago, such as the United Kingdom, Europe and the USA, are still sluggish from the global recession and burdened by huge debts and public deficits

Regionally the escalating crime in various Caribbean territories, such as the recent events in Jamaica and the resultant negative travel advisories, has again highlighted the vulnerability of the sector.

The BP oil spill along the Gulf of Mexico arising from the Deepwater Horizon rig explosion, now considered the largest offshore spill in U.S. history, has once again brought into the forefront the costly impact of environmental pollution upon the ever so fragile tourism industry. Already the oil spill has started impacting negatively upon Florida's US\$60 billion tourism business.

I think that we can all acknowledge that tourism in Trinidad and Tobago has not yet reached its full potential. The time has however come for the industry to unleash its true potential and boost economic growth. We need to have a structure where the private sector and the public sector work in partnership.

Therefore it is my intention to take before Cabinet very shortly the installation of an official Trinidad Tourism Standing Committee, comprising key public and private sector players, to guide the development of our local tourism industry.

Over the last five (5) years Trinidad and Tobago has received an average of just over 442,000 international visitors; quite a small share of the overall Caribbean market. Our cruise industry has been growing, with 121,712 passenger arrivals in the 2009-2010 season – again a small share of the Caribbean market. The industry contributes \$TT14.2billion to Trinidad and Tobago's total Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and directly and indirectly provides 88,000 jobs.

New opportunities in the sector must be explored including but not restricted to the development of the recreation, sport, health, leisure, business, festivals, cultural and eco-tourism niches.



Perhaps the most critical task that we will in quick measure undertake is the review of the National Tourism Policy so as to swiftly develop and implement the national tourism sector strategy. The goal of the strategy is, amongst others, to inspire and drive the responsible growth of the tourism industry.

Another area requiring much greater focus is marketing. Trinidad and Tobago must no longer be the best kept secret of the Caribbean. I have mandated the TDC to develop a marketing plan. It is crucial that our marketing efforts are focused on the right markets; and that can only be done on the basis of sound and timely empirical data.

Alongside marketing efforts, the challenge for our industry is to have sites and attractions of an international standard and on par with the best in the world. It is absolutely imperative that facilities are properly maintained. Therefore the TDC must have a Product Development Plan.

I am hoping that by the end of the presentations today from the associations and tourism action groups that we would have crafted a consensus for carrying the tourism industry forward.

The future of our tourism industry is in the most capable hands possible. It is in the hands of all of us - the people - united in our effort to show the world the best we can be.

I sincerely believe that we are on the crossroads to put our industry on a new path in terms of expansion and growth.

Let's make this happen!

I thank you.

June 05, 2010