

MINISTRY OF TOURISM

**LAUNCH OF THE CARPHA REGIONAL
TOURISM AND HEALTH PROGRAM &
AWARENESS SESSION FOR
ACCOMMODATION PROVIDERS IN
TRINIDAD**

FEATURE ADDRESS

**THE HONOURABLE SHAMFA CUDJOE
MINISTER OF TOURISM
TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO**

**Date: Friday September 23, 2016
Venue: Hyatt Regency Trinidad
Time: 10.00am**

- Mrs. Vidiah Ramkhelawan, Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Tourism
 - Mr. Richard Duncan, Chairman of the Board of Directors and other Board Members of the TDC
 - Mr. Warren Solomon, Chief Executive Officer (Ag.), TDC
 - Dr. Lisa Indar, Director Tourism and Health Programme, CARPHA
 - Mr. Tomas Bermudez, Country Representative, Inter-American Development Bank
 - Mr. Brian Frontin, Chief Executive Officer, Trinidad Hotels Restaurants and Tourism Association
 - Mrs. Tenisha Brown–Williams, Industry Standards Specialist, TDC
 - Management and Staff of the TDC and Ministry of Tourism
 - Heads of Tourism Stakeholder Organisations
 - Industry Partners
 - Specially Invited Guests
 - Members of the Media
 - Ladies and Gentlemen
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INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

Protocol having been established, I do wish all present a hearty good morning. Last year, International tourist arrivals grew by 4.6 %, almost 1.2 billion arrivals. Commerce generated by this sector surpasses that of manufacturing and energy sectors.

The Caribbean is the most tourism-dependent region in the world, as many of our member states depend on the sector for economic survival.

The government of Trinidad and Tobago has identified the tourism sector as a key driver in our efforts to generate economic activity and diversify the national economy. The sector provides tremendous opportunity, generates revenue, foreign exchange, creates jobs, alleviates poverty and attracts investment to the country.

But even as we hail the industry for what it promises to offer, we must be true to ourselves by admitting that we as a country have been “sleeping” on the sector, and many of the investments that could have and should have been made in our healthier and wealthier days were not made.

We are in many respects, playing catch up - trying to gain ground in a more competitive and ever changing global economic environment. Today, our efforts to diversify are challenged by the problems related to the need to establish basic framework and infrastructure to adequately bolster the sector, and further compounded by the limited availability of revenue to effectively and expeditiously expand the sector due to our prevailing economic circumstances.

Times like these require us to be innovative, collaborative, responsible and resourceful in all that we do to ensure our advancement and, more so, our very survival.

That brings us to the timeliness and appropriateness of this CARPHA/CTO project.

The tourism industry is one of the most dynamic industries in the world. It is not just about being in the game but staying relevant in the game. It is a constant battle to become, and remain, the top of mind destination. This industry is about competitiveness ... it is about sustainability.

As we seek to position and posture ourselves to derive the maximum benefit of our investment, and as we take advantage of the opportunities that abide in this most promising, reliable, sensitive, yet resilient sector, Health plays pivotal role.

Every day, nearly 100,000 flights carry 8.6 million passengers and \$17.5 billion of goods to their destinations. Within this context, the Caribbean Tourism Organisation (CTO) stated that, for the first time since it began keeping records, the Caribbean outperformed every major tourism region in the world in setting new arrival and spend records in 2015.

International tourist trips to the Caribbean grew by seven per cent (7%) to 28.7 million visits, much higher than the projected four to five per cent growth. This unprecedented volume of persons travelling and the speed of international travel, have made the region susceptible to emerging and re-emerging infectious diseases.

This risk is exemplified by the SARs and H1N1 outbreaks, and more recently, by the emergence of Chikungunya in 2013, and Zika virus in 2015.

Ladies and gentlemen, these unprecedented levels of visitor arrivals have heightened the risk of disease transmission among all individuals; both visitors and locals throughout the region. Because of our closeness and interconnectivity, one outbreak on one island can be catastrophic to all of us.

We, therefore, have no choice but to develop a sturdy and competent regional network for sharing information and gathering intelligence to provide for better protection of the health of our guests, and, indeed, our residents by extension.

Outbreaks of communicable and food-borne diseases can result in significant loss of revenue to businesses and considerable damage to the destination's reputation. Anybody in the hospitality business would tell you how important it is to give your guests the assurance that it is safe to visit your destination and patronize your business. We have a responsibility to ensure that our guests are totally satisfied, to the point where they come again and invite others to do the same.

Because as our Junior Tourism Minister often says customers are influenced not by what we tell them, but by what they tell each other. We, therefore, have a duty to do all within our power to ensure that we do not just meet, but exceed basic standards, that will secure the health and safety of our guests.

The CARPHA project helps us to cover our bases.

The Integrated Health, Safety and Environmental Management Programme will address the critical link between health and tourism. The project will allow for training, research, surveillance, monitoring and response, and the institutionalising of standards. When our citizens and our visitors know, that we are taking action to have our systems improved, to protect them from health hazards and other unfortunate experiences, we become a much more attractive destination.

This CARPHA programme has two parts: -

- Regional Tourism Health Information, Monitoring and Response Systems, and
- Standards to Enhance Sustainable Tourism

These projects will also be conducted in Barbados, Bahamas, Belize, Guyana, Jamaica and, of course, our sister isle of Tobago. And will run from 2016 to 2018.

We expect to experience significant gains from this mutual cooperation with our Caribbean neighbours:

- Greater understanding
- Strengthened partnership and collaboration
- Deeper association and affiliation at national and regional levels between tourism, health and environment stakeholders.

Further, we foresee a reduction in the number and the cost of outbreaks, and improved health and tourism sectors. It is also through projects and programmes such as these that we stand to profit most from international experiences.

Perhaps, travellers have not yet come to expect sophisticated public health arrangements in a developing Caribbean country.

We aim to change that perception.

This kind of approach transcends the tourism sector and would guarantee much benefit to our communities, our countries, and the entire region. This project promotes a healthier Caribbean, this project promotes a wealthier Caribbean, and God knows right now we need as much wealth as we could get.

Allow me at this time, ladies and gentlemen, to salute Dr. Lisa Indar, she has been the main flag bearers and cheer leader for this project - determined to get all hands on deck, determined to get Tobago on board. And in “true Trini style” determined to kick off this project in Trinidad and Tobago first.

It has not been easy getting everyone on board in a timely and harmonious fashion. We could all admit that this is not a usual marriage. **We often see tourism and culture getting together ... but tourism and health?**

Somewhat far-fetched indeed, but after today's presentations we could all testify and educate our peers on the importance of a union of this nature.

I hope that across the sectors in Trinidad and Tobago we would be able to develop stronger and more meaningful partnerships in order to stimulate growth and sustainability, to promote more profitable, beneficial, effective and efficient operations across all economic sectors, and to foster stronger linkages between all relevant players.

This could only redound to the benefit of our visitors and, more importantly, the citizens of this country who are depending on us to rise to the occasion, play our part in ensuring a decent standard of living and a brighter future not just for industry stakeholders, but each and every citizen of this nation.

We all have a part to play, from the hospitality worker to the health inspector... the school teacher ...to ...members of the media.

Tourism is our business. And it requires a multifaceted, multi-sectoral, multidimensional, focused and robust approach. This CARPHA project exemplifies that approach and I certainly hope that other players in the private and public sector would take note.

The Government of Trinidad and Tobago and the Ministry of Tourism endorse this project whole heartedly. We thank CARPHA, CTO, IDB and all other stakeholders for their diligent work, perseverance and determination to get us to the implementation phase.

I look forward to the fruits of your labour and I wish you every success as you buckle down to the business and get the work done.

Thank you