



Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago
Ministry of Tourism

Remarks by

Ms Vidiah Ramkhelawan
Permanent Secretary
Ministry of Tourism

at the

Capacity Building Sessions for National Security Officers

Ministry of Tourism Conference Room
Level 9

Thursday 24th May 2018

9:00am

- Mr. Derek Craigwell – Assistant Chief Immigration Officer-
Ministry of National Security
- Ms Belinda Charles – Manager, Stakeholder Relations Unit–
Ministry of Tourism
- Ms Shirlene Nibbs – Managing Director – Nibbs and Associates
- Officers of the Ministry of Tourism
- Participants
- Ladies and gentlemen

Good Morning

I am pleased to welcome you to the Ministry of Tourism. Officers, today you have been brought together, to participate in our specialised Tourism Capacity Building Session for National Security Officers.

This workshop is an initiative of the Ministry of Tourism's Caribbean Small Tourism Enterprises Project (STEP), in collaboration with the Ministry of National Security.

Initially this training programme targeted Immigration and Customs Officers. However we were asked to expand the training to other officers of the Ministry of National Security. In this regard, training has now been extended to special branch police, sea and air port officials, detectives and members of the Organised Crime and Intelligence Unit.

Our key objectives are to sharpen the service-quality capacity, and to promote a more visitor-centred approach, when interacting with visitors to our country, without compromising the security and safety mandates of your profession.

In 2012, similar training was conducted for officers both in Trinidad and Tobago under the Tourism Oriented Policing and Protection Services programme (TOPPS).

Also utilised in the United States, TOPPS units do more than protect visitors and the destination; they also make a positive tourism image statement.

TOPPS units are officers who have studied both security and the basics of tourism science. They understand that their job is not only to protect the visitor, but also the local visitor industry.

Coming out of that training in 2012, the TOPPS initiative was implemented in Tobago.

Ladies and gentlemen, I assure you that those of you here today, and your colleagues who will attend tomorrow's session, will benefit from training not only in the safety and security of our visitors; but also in creating an overall positive experience for our guests.

From a tourism perspective, many of you are our front liners. **You** play a critical role in establishing a good first impression of Trinidad and Tobago.

Consider for a moment that the first person the visitor sees, when she or he arrives at an international airport, is an immigration officer. What first impression do you give to that person?

Do you say “welcome to my country” or is the visitor confronted by grim-faced officials, who appear bored with their job, and give the impression that they only wish that fewer visitors had arrived? I also ask you to remember that visitors include returning nationals and our CARICOM neighbours.

Similarly, when a visitor needs directions, has a problem, or is faced with a crisis; it is often the security professional to whom the visitor turns. Are our security professionals empathetic or do they give the impression that they could not care less about the visitor’s wellbeing?

These are some of the issues and scenarios which will be discussed during the day’s training. You will also have the opportunity to share **your** experiences, and together we can fine-tune an approach which satisfies the security needs of our country, and advances our national tourism goals.

In addition, our facilitator will share with you the latest intervention strategies, and case studies on safety and security initiatives, which have proven successful in other island destinations.

At the end of the session, it is our hope and goal that you will see yourselves not merely as security professionals; but also as tourism ambassadors.

It therefore gives me great pleasure to officially open this training course, and I trust that each of you will fully participate in the day's activities.

I am confident that the information shared will be most beneficial to you, as we seek to develop our tourism sector **and** to ensure the safety and security of our citizens and visitors to destination Trinidad and Tobago.

I thank you.