



ADDRESS BY

THE HONOURABLE CAROLYN SEEPERSAD-BACHAN

MP FOR SAN FERNANDO WEST

MINISTER OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

AT THE "MEET THE CTU" MEDIA EVENT

AT THE COURTYARD MARRIOTT

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Ministry of
Public Administration

Salutations...

On behalf of the Government of Trinidad and Tobago and as President of the Caribbean Telecommunications Union, the CTU, I am pleased to welcome the many media representatives who have taken the time to participate in this special event celebrating the CTU's 23rd Anniversary.

The national and regional media are extremely important stakeholders in the CTU which, by its very nature, champions in creating an enabling environment from which all the mass media operate and on which you build. In this sense you are not merely stakeholders but you are our partners in the progress of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) in our region.

Without the infrastructure that the CTU provides, harmonises and coordinates, we would not have the linkages that

increasingly bring the Caribbean closer together. In a way ICT is increasingly becoming the bond that binds the physically separated Small Island Developing States of the Caribbean together.

The partnership with the media has become even more important in today's volatile environment. While the unfolding events provide good stories for the media they are also a source of threats and challenges to our social and economic stability.

We have the continuing fallout from the global economic crisis. We have climate change, trans-border crime, declining agricultural production, and the decline of the tourism industry. All these reduce our competitiveness at the global level and threaten our social and economic viability both at the regional and national levels.

Our national governments and CARICOM itself are fully aware of these threats and believe that ICT provides a window of opportunity that can help us to carve out a place in the new world order that is evolving. The ability to create, share and use knowledge must become the driving force in shaping our future development as nations and as a region.

Given the fragility of tourism, the negative impacts of climate change on agriculture, and the fact that oil and natural gas are non-renewable resources, the need to move to knowledge based societies and economies is inevitable and urgent.

While individual Caribbean countries have for the most part increased their investments in ICT, there is an urgent need to ensure that we adopt a coordinated regional approach to our ICT for Development agenda that involves all societal stakeholders: governments, private sector, and civil society including the media.

As a region, much of the policy framework needed to effectively leverage ICT for the region is now in place. A Caribbean Regional Digital Development Strategy (RDDS) was recently agreed to by all CARICOM countries thanks to assistance from the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), with help from the CTU itself, the Caribbean is in the process of harmonizing its legal and regulatory framework for telecommunications and ICT.

However, much still remains to be done in advancing the Regional ICT-based developmental agenda. Most of the indicators and the evidence show that there are several areas on which we must focus if we are to improve our global competitiveness through the effective use of ICT. Even though this room is full of knowledge workers or people who make their living by their heads and not their hands only, we need to do more, much more in ICT.

The biggest problem is that many of us, including our policy makers and stakeholders, have a fundamental lack of awareness and understanding how ICTs may be used to transform our economies. Many of us cannot make the connection between ICT and how it can enhance and improve the lives and quality of life of the people of the region.

This is why, compliments to the CTU in the creation of the Caribbean ICT Roadshow, to demonstrate the importance of ICT and to raise the level of awareness nationally and regionally. This awareness is the foundation on which we can grow our ICT resources. This awareness of the power of ICT to transform our societies and our economies is the key to the future development of ICT in the region.

All of you from the media who have joined us here today have a vested interest in ICT. You work in environments that are

increasingly ICT based. You gather and share information using ICT. Your organisations exemplify ICT.

This is why we have invited you here today as a very special sector that can both help us to develop ICT and, as well, to get the people of the Caribbean both to understand what ICT is and what it can do for all of us. ICT has the power and potential to transform the lives of the people of the region and all of us who are its stakeholders must spread this message right across the region.

I ask you then to pay special interest to the programmes and projects of the CTU. These range from public awareness and education initiatives, such as the Caribbean ICT Roadshow. The Roadshow is geared towards all members of society and has a mix of programmes designed for different interest groups including the policy-makers.

The CTU's main focus as a regional inter-governmental organization, is to ensure that there is policy harmonization and common approaches across the region in critical areas including spectrum management, ICT related legislation, internet governance, cyber security and other areas of significance.

The CTU also plays an active role in facilitating a coordinated Caribbean response to international telecommunications issues, such as the switchover from Analog to Digital Television; and also in identifying regional positions and coordinating Caribbean positions at international telecommunications meetings such as the recent World Radiocommunication Conference and forthcoming World Conference on International Telecommunications organized by the ITU.

An ongoing coordination exercise is the Connect Americas initiative where the CTU is helping to coalesce the many project

proposals from the Caribbean region into concrete investment opportunities.

It is in this context that I urge you to focus more attention on issues of regional significance that we as Caribbean people must squarely face. Join us in our efforts. It is imperative that the leaders and people of the region buy-in to the importance of ICT to be competitive in today's world. We urge you as our partners in national and regional development and as users of ICT to help us extend our reach to the wider Caribbean.

You can broaden the discussion, you can provide the link between what ICT is, what it means and what it can do for the region. This is not to say that we expect you not to be critical of us or to become mouthpieces for the CTU. What we want is for you to understand how important and imperative it is for the Caribbean people to know what ICT can do for us all.

I especially urge you to support the CTU through sponsorship and participation in CTU events – we are all stronger when we work together. In this regard, I am pleased to announce on behalf of the CTU the results of the fruitful outcome of one such partnership between a media house and the CTU. The CTU working collaboratively with Tempo Networks LLC, based in New York, has put together a production to widen even further the audience to which the Caribbean ICT Roadshow will reach.

TEMPO currently broadcasts in 24 Caribbean islands, with approximately 3 million viewers, and in New York, New Jersey, and Connecticut on Cablevision Channel 1105. At this time, the premiere of the Caribbean ICT Roadshow special, the Dominica Edition, which is where the last Roadshow was held, has been scheduled for Tuesday 22nd and 29th May of this year.

We see this as just the beginning. Let us, together, explore other possible areas of collaboration.

Therefore let me once again say that if we as people of the region and as countries of the Caribbean cannot get this act together now, we would have missed an ideal opportunity. Ladies and Gentlemen, investors are looking on and they want to see a coordinated and harmonized approach.

In closing, let me again welcome the media here as participants, as partners and as stakeholders and not just as reporters. Let me say to you to view objectively the case we are making for ICT. We are convinced that it is the way forward.

Here in Trinidad and Tobago, the Ministry of Public Administration continues its drive to create the supportive environment that will make a connected society a reality. The

Government of Trinidad and Tobago is working with the World Bank in developing a Broadband Strategy and Plan for Trinidad and Tobago. This plan envisages 100% national Broadband coverage in Trinidad and Tobago.

Work continues to ensure that the necessary Regulatory and Legislative Framework are in place. Parliament agreed to the e-Transactions and Data Protection Acts and we continue work on the Audit and Exchequer Act, e-Payments Legislation and Cyber-Security Legislation. The Network Quality of Service, Submission of Information and Numbering Regulations were approved by Cabinet earlier this year and we have submitted other regulations that would help to make broadband available to our entire country by 2015.

In addition, we are about to do a total overhaul of the Telecommunications Act because we would like to provide a

framework that is more holistic towards the ICT sector and most importantly to encourage creativity and innovation.

We believe that we in the Caribbean are still lagging behind many countries as they jostle to find a place in the Information age. Information is the major resource of the times in which we live and for the far, foreseeable future. For you in the media, information is your way of life. Information is your stock in trade. It is how you and the organizations you represent earn your living. You have everything to gain and nothing to lose by advocating for the growth and increasing usage of ICTs in our region.

We need to work together on this especially as the environment is fiercely competitive and time is a luxury we cannot afford. I look forward to your support. I can assure you that if you need to know more or do more about the CTU and ICTs, we are here to help.

Ladies and gentlemen, I thank you.