

**Address by the Honourable Allyson West,
Minister of Public Administration, at the Telecommunications
Authority of Trinidad and Tobago's Telecommunications and
Broadcasting Industry Awards and the Long Service Awards
Hyatt Regency,
Port of Spain,**

Saturday December 7th, 2019.

Draft Salutations

- Senator the Honourable Robert Le Hunte, Minister of Public Utilities
- Senator the Honourable Donna Cox, Minister of Communications
- Mr. Claudelle Mc Keller, Permanent Secretary (Ag), Ministry of Public Administration
- Mr. Gilbert Peterson S.C., Chairman of the Board of Directors, Telecommunications Authority of Trinidad and Tobago
- Members of the Board of the Telecommunications Authority of Trinidad and Tobago
- Mrs. Cynthia Reddock-Downes, Chief Executive Officer (Ag) Telecommunications Authority of Trinidad and Tobago

- Chief Executive Officers/ Managing Directors and other representatives of Telecommunications and Broadcasting Companies
- Management and Staff of the Telecommunications Authority of Trinidad and Tobago
- Distinguished Guests
- Members of the Media
- Ladies and Gentlemen

It has been said that if we wish to measure the manner of a man, we should look to his **accomplishments**, his **strength**, his **flexibility** and most important his level of “*stick-to-it-ness*”. It is this ability to stick to or commit to, and press forward with goals that may seem unreachable, that really measures a man and sets him apart from his peers.

I started my address with this analogy, to make reference to the work of the Telecommunications Authority of Trinidad and Tobago (TATT), which for the last 15 years has stuck to it, and in periods of uncertainty has pressed forward. This evening, at, the inaugural Telecommunications and Broadcasting Industry Awards, where we recognize the contributions of our telecommunications and broadcasting service providers, I must first say – Well done TATT! Let’s give TATT a deserved round of applause! Thank you.

Ladies and gentlemen, as far as I am aware, this is the first time, at least within this region, that a Regulator has sought to recognize and reward innovation and excellence within an industry its purview.

Such recognition of our telecommunications and broadcasting service providers is very important, as it highlights and celebrates the outstanding contributions and achievements of our industry players that directly impact the economic, social and technological development of Trinidad and Tobago. Development that has been so well articulated in the Government's Vision 2030 National Development Plan.

This Awards initiative also forms part of TATT's commemoration of its 15th anniversary, having been established by an Act of Parliament in 2004. This evening's ceremony is a representation of TATT's 15-year journey. A journey during which the Authority has grown from strength to strength!

Our local telecommunications and broadcasting sectors, under the careful stewardship of TATT, have come a long way since 2004. For the younger members of the audience this evening, the year 2004 might almost be considered a prehistoric technological time. This was the year in which Facebook and Gmail were launched. YouTube, Instagram, Twitter, WhatsApp, Snapchat, iPhone, Samsung Galaxy phones, App Store and Google Play were not yet on the scene and issues such as the

Internet of Things, cryptocurrencies, Over The Top Services (OTTs) and e-payments were not yet commonplace.

From the start of operations in 2004, TATT has diligently pursued all objectives outlined in the Telecommunications Act, and this has resulted in the shaping of Trinidad and Tobago's current ICT environment. The combined efforts of the Authority and industry players during the last 15 years have placed us in a position where, as citizens of Trinidad and Tobago, we enjoy the offerings of:

- Two mobile phone operators
- Seven fixed line telephone operators
- Eleven fixed Internet service providers
- Thirteen subscription television (cable and satellite) stations
- Thirty-seven free-to-air radio stations
- Six free-to-air television stations
- Six television stations broadcasting via cable

The proof of this success cannot only be seen in the number of providers that dot the sector's landscape, but also by relevant comparative statistics for 2004 and 2018.

Ladies and gentlemen, please allow me to share briefly some facts. In 2004, TATT's first year of operation, telecommunications revenues

totaled US \$357 million. However, by 2018 that figure had more than doubled reaching a total of US \$832.1 million.

As would be expected there was a huge increase in mobile phone subscriptions over that period. As a matter of fact, the figure quadrupled from 539,000 in 2004 to 1.972 million in 2018. The mobile penetration rate therefore jumped from 40.5% in 2004 to 145.1% in 2018

Fixed Internet subscriptions were at 55,200 households in 2004 and that figure increased to 341,300 in 2018. The penetration rate for this technology from 4.2% in 2004 to 25.1% in 2018.

Internet subscribers are now at 82% of the population.

Subscription television penetration rose from 103,400 in 2004 to 234,700 in 2018. The penetration rate in 2004 was 7.9 in 2004 and 17.3 in 2018.

These figures reflect TATT's collaboration with service providers and the granting of concessions which has led to increased access and lower prices allowing the average man in the street to avail himself of the latest digital technologies. Our consumers have been exposed to a proliferation of new technologies and services, increased choice of operators and lowered prices. Who could have envisioned that in 2004?

It is evident, ladies and gentlemen, that the Government and TATT have been successful in encouraging both the local and foreign investment needed to facilitate the availability of affordable telecommunications and broadcasting services to all.

We have a growing telecommunications and broadcasting sector demonstrated by mergers and acquisitions in the fixed, broadband, and subscription television markets, including several new entrants and the diversification of providers into plural markets.

It is expected that TATT's future accomplishments will be an integral part of the Government of Trinidad and Tobago's (GoRTT's) National Information Communication Technology (NICT) Plan - the ICT Blueprint for 2018 to 2022. The primary aim of which is "Empowered Citizens, Competitive Businesses and Transformational Government".

The existing competitive telecommunications and broadcasting landscape that has been facilitated by TATT, is a key enabler of the Government's agenda for sustainable Information Communications and Technology (ICT) development and the resulting socio-economic gains, particularly in the area of connectivity and broadband access.

A prime example is TATT's initiative to make spectrum available for broadband wireless access and the opening of the market to new fixed broadband service providers that has driven the Government's broadband agenda. Consumers' almost insatiable demand for high-speed connectivity and mobile connectivity is driving the global investment in telecommunication infrastructure.

The work of TATT is also evident in improving connectivity – the continued deployment of ICT infrastructure to support connected people, businesses and government. Most notably is the Government's TT Wi-Fi initiative – which seeks to provide access to free and secure public Wi-Fi for citizens in Libraries, waiting areas in hospitals and Health Centres, Transport Hubs, and underserved areas. TATT is fulfilling Phase II of this initiative by utilizing its Universal Service Fund (USF).

I also wish to mention another USF initiative - the Persons with Disabilities (PwDs) Subsidized Accessible Devices Project. This project aims to provide mobile devices with assistive features for the visually-impaired and hearing-impaired at a subsidized cost. TATT will subsidize up to \$540 or 90% of the first \$600 of the cost of the device.

The objectives of this project are to:

1. ensure that PwDs have access to basic telecommunications mobile services;

2. make ICTs more affordable to PwDs;
3. reduce the digital divide by promoting digital inclusion of PwDs;
4. enhance the quality of life by enabling those with disabilities to participate more fully in society— at school, work and in civic life;
and
5. enable independent living for persons with disabilities.

The project initiative will be rolled out in two phases. The Pilot Phase, carded to run from December 2019 to March 2020, will see the provision of mobile handsets to 100 PwDs who are visually and/or hearing impaired. The second or Full-implementation Phase (after March 2020) will entail the provision of mobile handsets to 100% of the targeted PwDs.

I would like the audience to give all our providers, even the ones who could not participate, a huge round of applause. You have done exceptionally well. You have brought to us the ability to communicate with friends and family with ease and at affordable prices, we can now be entertained in our own homes if we choose to do so and we can conduct research on any topic at lightning speed. Our business sector and budding entrepreneurs can participate and succeed in a global market-place that continues to grow and change as quickly as the technology that empowers it.

I also wish to congratulate not only the members of staff who will be receiving 15- and 10-year awards, but all of the Authority's staff for their sterling performance and contribution over the last 15 years.

Last but not all least, I wish to commend all of the previous TATT Boards for building on the work of their predecessors. You have done exceptionally well. Thank you!

On behalf of the Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago I commend the current Board, Management and staff of TATT and all industry participants. Continue to innovate. Continue to excel. Keep up the excellent work.

As I close, I challenge you TATT to continue to develop strategies and pursue initiatives that will ensure the achievement of your vision — “*A leading ICT regulator, enabling an empowered and connected society.*” The deployment and availability of high-quality ICT services is a substantial factor in enabling emerging economies to attain higher levels of development. TATT therefore has a significant role in ensuring that persons in Trinidad and Tobago are connected to each other and the rest of the world; and are able to access ICT services to facilitate social, economic and financial inclusion and development.

Ladies and gentlemen, I thank you for your attention and do enjoy the rest of the evening's proceedings.