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## Introduction

Let me first of all thank the management of CANTO for inviting me to deliver the feature address at this organisation's 22<sup>nd</sup> Annual General Meeting. It is truly an honour and a privilege.

I have been asked to speak on the topic *“the importance of the telecommunications and information industries for the transformation of regional economies to bring about prosperity, social and cultural equity”*. However, within this context I intend to make some announcements of public interest on the matters of Mobile Cellular Network Interconnection, and the International & Domestic Fixed Telecommunications markets in Trinidad and Tobago.

I consider the topic given as most appropriate for this occasion as it is an area that is currently also engaging the attention of regional as well as international governments. Many of us would have followed with interest discussions at the World Summit of the Information Society, which took place in Tunis last November and paid close attention to the TUNIS Commitment. This in essence reaffirmed the global commitment to strategic and creative efforts toward the continued development of a global information society based upon access to increased and affordable Information and Communications Technologies (ICT) by all the world's peoples including those in the least developed countries.

Ladies and gentlemen, undoubtedly telecommunications and information industries, which are integral components of the rapidly growing and markedly wealth producing

global ICT sector, have a positive effect on the social and cultural status of nations. I consider ICT as an essential service alongside electricity and running water for commerce, general personal well-being, safety and security.

Information has become critical to all aspects of human activity. Moreover, information that can be accessed by electronic means could empower peoples residing in the remotest part of our globe. Sadly however, there is a wide sector of our global society deprived from accessing information by electronic means. In response to this, mechanisms or actions for reducing these gaps have been proposed on regional as well as international levels.

Thus at that summit in Tunis participants reiterated unequivocal support for the Geneva Declaration of Principles and Plan of Action adopted at the first phase of the World Summit on the Information Society in Geneva in December 2003, which spoke to the development of public administration, business, education, health, employment, environment, agriculture and science within the framework of national e-strategies.

## **ICT Initiatives in Trinidad and Tobago**

Within our region in 2003, Trinidad and Tobago embarked on a National Connectivity Agenda, which was designed to achieve the following:

- Provide all citizens with affordable Internet access;
- Focus on the development of children, and adult skills to ensure a sustainable solution and a vibrant future;
- Promote citizen trust, access, and interaction through good governance; and
- Maximize the potential within all citizens, and accelerate innovation, to develop a knowledge-based society.

This is more than welcomed, as an e-Readiness Assessment conducted while developing the national connectivity agenda, determined that approximately 16% of households in

Trinidad and Tobago then had computers while only 9% of the population regularly used the Internet. That report concluded that some of the factors contributing to such low levels of access to computers and the Internet included:

- High costs of personal computers compared to average income levels;
- High costs associated with Internet Access;
- Scarcity of public Internet access facilities, although a few initiatives have been implemented in some remote areas;
- Limited use of ICTs in the workplace as some employees share computers and few have personal work email addresses;
- Limited competition in the provision of ICT services as a result of delayed liberalisation in that sector, which affects prices and quality of services; and
- A limited number of ICT skilled workers (approximately 3000).

Interestingly, that same study also showed that ICT is preferred by 95% of the population as a first choice career. However the limited number of ICT positions available, affects the actual numbers of persons embarking on careers in this area locally. While funding programmes for education such as the Government Assistance for Tertiary Education and the recently announced Higher Education Loan Programme do exist, the overall cost of ICT certification and training locally is relatively high, particularly for those persons opting to undergo training at private tertiary level institutions.

The potential therefore exists for Trinidad and Tobago to lose its talented ICT professionals to institutions and organizations abroad.

It has been recognised by the leadership in Trinidad and Tobago that the alleviation of factors that hinder ICT training will have positive repercussions for the society in a number of ways including:

- Expansion of the ICT sector locally to create employment opportunities for nationals.

- Ability to use ICTs in one's everyday life which provides opportunity for educational and skill development;
- The opportunity for small businesses to compete in markets traditionally open to larger players via e-Commerce; and
- Easy access to information that is critical for any individual's wellbeing socially and economically

Mindful of the intrinsic link between ICT development and national development our Government has included the following in its strategy to create real and lasting improvements in social, economic and cultural development caused by deployment and usage of information and communication technology:

- The connection of all schools and libraries to high speed Internet and the provision of up-to-date computers; (included in the recently awarded fixed line concessions is an obligation to provide this at a 75% discount off the market rate)
- The provision of e-Government Services via an e-Government portal;
- The implementation and roll out of national broadband infrastructure;
- The implementation of programmes to promote growth of the e-Marketplace;
- The establishment of a regulator (Telecommunications Authority of Trinidad and Tobago) to expedite the liberalisation process and to develop a universality framework that facilitates the provision of telecommunications infrastructure and services to geographically and economically disadvantaged communities; and
- The establishment of an Industrial and Technology Park at Waller Field (Tamana Intech Park) to provide both ICT clusters and a research and development environment (UTT) that will be central to creating the leadership required to shape the next innovative industrial horizon and the quality of life in Trinidad and Tobago.

Today, I will focus on the specific mandates of the Telecommunications Authority of Trinidad and Tobago and eTecK in achieving some of Government's objectives towards a knowledge-based society.

## The Telecommunications Authority of Trinidad and Tobago

The Telecommunications Authority of Trinidad and Tobago was established by the Telecommunications Act (2001) as an independent regulator for the local telecommunications and broadcasting sectors. One of the significant mandates of the Authority was to effect the orderly liberalisation of the telecommunications sector. To date, the Authority has successfully opened up the Domestic Mobile, International and Domestic Fixed Wired Telecommunications (Columbus Communications) markets. Concessions have been approved for two (2) additional mobile operators, seven (7) additional international operators and three (3) additional fixed wired cable TV service providers. While Government has placed a limit to the entry of operators in the Domestic Mobile Telecommunications market, no such limit exists in the International and Domestic Fixed Telecommunications markets. So interest is still welcome in these latter sectors.

**The effect of the above is that residents of Trinidad and Tobago will in 2006 have choices in mobile cellular, fixed line and international telecommunications without monopoly!** Coupled with lower rates, the expansion of the national telecommunications infrastructure and increase in the international bandwidth capacity also increases the possibility to provide affordable high-speed Internet access to a wider sector of the community.

Critical to ensuring that the liberalized telecommunications market operates in an orderly fashion, the Authority is also required to soon establish a regulatory framework, which provides the relevant guidelines to the industry. These guidelines include:

- Authorisation or Licensing framework – to ensure that market entrants are suitably qualified to provide a high level of affordable services to the public. This is available on our web site [www.tatt.org.tt](http://www.tatt.org.tt) ;
- Resource Management – to ensure that spectrum and number resources are efficiently utilised to allow for maximum utilisation based on demand;
- Interconnection – to ensure that all consumers can communicate with each other at affordable and competitive rates regardless of their service provider of choice; (most of the interconnection equipment has arrived and is to be installed while related negotiations among concessionaires are being completed)
- Quality of Service Standards – to ensure that telephone, internet, cable TV and broadcast operators provide an acceptable level of service to consumers (these are enshrined in the respective concessions);
- Consumer Rights – to ensure that the interests of consumers are protected in matters related to billing, repair and other customer services (terms in concessions also); and
- Pricing – to ensure that prices are regulated in markets where effective competition does not yet exist to determine prices.

One of the mandates of the Authority that will have a direct impact on the accessibility of basic telecommunications services including Internet access services by the wider populace is the establishment of a Universality framework. Although Trinidad and Tobago is today the wealthiest country in the English-speaking Caribbean, its Digital Access Index stands at a modest 0.53, which is lower than Dominica which stands at 0.54; Barbados at 0.57, Antigua & Barbuda 0.57, St. Kitts and Nevis 0.60 and the Bahamas which currently stands at 0.62.

In a bid to improve the county's current stance, the Authority will this year conduct an extensive study to determine the areas of Trinidad and Tobago which are under-served, and affirm obligations on concessionaires designed to ensure that all persons in Trinidad and Tobago have access to basic telecommunications services to an extent that is

reasonably practical, and to create incentives for operators to contribute to the expansion of the national telecommunications infrastructure.

The Government's SchoolNet and Community Connection Programmes managed by the Ministry of Public Administration and Information are also designed to deliver Internet Connectivity to every corner of Trinidad and Tobago.

## **The Tamana Intech Park**

One of the most significant and, permit me to state, the most impressive of ICT development initiatives in this country is this Technology Park. This park was inaugurated in November 2005, at Waller Field and marked a significant milestone for eTecK, the Government agency responsible for the business development in the non-energy sector including creation and maintenance of industrial parks throughout Trinidad and Tobago.

The development of the Tamana Park is central to promoting the diversification of the country's industrial sector expansion, the modernization of local businesses and the creation of sustainable and meaningful employment opportunities. The park will cater to non-energy based, light manufacturing industries, as well as the core campus of the University of Trinidad and Tobago as the centre of research education and practical integration with manufacturing operations.

Some of the features geared toward attracting investors and potential tenants of the Technology Park include:

- Leading edge, high reliability, scalable telecommunications infrastructure and services;
- Rich ICT cluster environment for networking opportunities, business partnering and business development;
- Top-class research & development resources and trained talent pool at the University of Trinidad and Tobago;
- Governmental support and facilitation to enable business development;

- Full range of ‘onsite’ business-enabling services;
- First class physical infrastructure and transportation network;
- Modern, intelligent buildings and flexible office space; and
- Best practices in maintenance, safety, estate management, environmental care and community partnering.

The park’s impact and influence will therefore stretch beyond its boundaries into the very core of our social and economic development.

## Other Government Initiatives

In addition to the Authority facilitating the growth of the telecommunications environment by way of licensing and regulation, and the Tamana Intech Park creating meaningful career opportunities in ICTs, the Government has also commenced the implementation of a Government Portal, through which citizens will have online access to useful information and services. It is hoped that this will motivate citizens to get online, contributing to the growth of this country’s Internet users. In addition, the availability of business-related services online, such as e-procurement and e-customs, provides an incentive for the industry to invest in ICT.

## The Role of CANTO

Madame Secretary General, in the region’s movement toward transformation of economies to bring about prosperity, social and cultural equity this organization, CANTO certainly has a crucial role to play. This is embedded in your mission statement, which states and I quote “is to facilitate the provision of innovative information and communications for the regional, economic and cultural development of the Caribbean as well as for the benefit of the members through the sharing of knowledge and expertise and through coordination of strategic standpoints and policymaking”.

Through the years since your establishment in 1985 as a non-profit association of telephone operating companies in the Caribbean, CANTO has been fulfilling its objective which you have stated is to establish a forum through which Caribbean

Telecommunication Organizations may exchange information and expertise pertaining to the telecommunications field, generate inputs for orderly growth of the sector, formulate policy and consider matters of mutual interest to its members.

Twenty plus years later the telecommunications sectors in many Caribbean countries have either begun or are in the process of liberalization. I am confident that many organizations in this region could state that your work has contributed to their establishment, growth, development and/or success.

I can assure you that two organizations, the Telecommunications Authority of Trinidad and Tobago (TATT) and Evolving TecKnologies and Enterprise Development Company Limited (eTecK), of which I represent have benefited tremendously from frequent information downloads through your conferences and workshops.

I can state with assurance that your organization has served and I hope will continue to serve as an information portal for many telecommunications organizations in the region and beyond.

Trinidad and Tobago's liberalisation process is well underway and there are many challenges. The rapidity with which the ICT sector is expanding has resulted in the need to constantly upgrade knowledge bases. Similarly, eTecK, now in its mandate delivery stage will from time to time, I am certain, be calling on CANTO to partner in specific areas such as research. It is hoped that your organisation continues to morph alongside the process of liberalization and ICT development within Caribbean states, continually realizing your vision of becoming the leading authority on information and communication in the Caribbean. Ladies and Gentlemen, I thank you.