



# **Ministry of Community Development, Culture and the Arts**

## **Formal Opening of the Handicraft Symposium**

**Tuesday 11<sup>th</sup> July, 2017**

**9:00am**

**Hilton Trinidad**

## **Opening Remarks**

### **Address**

**Presented by:**

**Dr. the Honourable Nyan Gadsby-Dolly,**

**Minister of Community Development, Culture and the Arts**

## **SALUTATIONS:**

- Ms. Angela Edwards, Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Community Development, Culture and the Arts
- Ms. Susan Corbett, Director of Community Development
- Representatives from the Ministry of Community Development, Culture and the Arts
- Presenters
- Specially Invited Guests
- Artisans
- Members of the Media
- Ladies and Gentlemen

“When we are no longer able to change a situation, we are challenged to change ourselves.” These are very apt words written by Viktor E. Frankl in his book *Man’s Search for Meaning*. Since mid-2014 our country continues to be challenged with the effects of the negative economic impact of the sharp fall in oil and gas prices as well as the decline in the production of both crude oil and natural gas. This is new paradigm is therefore forcing Trinidad and Tobago to diversify its sources of income. It is this Government’s belief that our creative industry and for the purposes of today the handicraft industry, is one such source that can help bring change to our current economic situation on both a micro and macro level.

The Handicraft Industry plays a vivacious role in representing the culture, traditions and heritage of our country. It is a substantial medium to preserve rich traditional art, heritage and culture, traditional skills and talents which are associated with our lifestyle and history. Since this sector is labour intensive, it can provide employment opportunities, enhance living standards thereby making a more positive impact on economic development of the state. It can also be a viable medium for foreign earnings.

When we looked at countries such as Colombia and India, the handicraft industry has been successful in contributing to the economic growth and development of those countries. According to a World Intellectual Property online Magazine article entitled *Arts and Crafts Columbia*, close to one million people in Colombia

earn a living directly or indirectly from the country's vibrant arts and crafts sector. A significant contributor to the national economy, the sector counts some 350,000 artisans, approximately 60 percent of whom are from rural and indigenous areas.

India is one of the most diversified countries in terms of culture, heritage, traditions and the handicraft industry in India have a long history allowing India to emerge as one of the major suppliers of handicraft products. This sector plays an important role to India's economy as one of the largest employment generators with state and regional clusters contributing significantly to handicrafts export.

Here at home, it cannot be ignored that the handicraft sector in Trinidad and Tobago has been constrained. It has been disadvantaged by its inadequate access to credit, inadequate availability of raw material, high cost of materials and limited access to regional and international markets. Today, the Ministry of Community Development, Culture and the Arts has provided you, our artisans, with a platform to brainstorm and to discuss the best ways to improve the business environment in an integrated manner. As partners we need to examine how to create more markets and opportunities for Handicrafts made in Trinidad and Tobago; how to encourage and foster entrepreneurship in this industry as well as what should be the Ministry and by extension the Government's role in facilitating this success. The ultimate output from this two day Symposium

should be a list action priorities to commercialize our traditional handicraft and the strategic plan to move forward.

Handicraft can be a major source of foreign currency, employment and one of the major industries for regional and international markets. However, this will mean looking at both local and foreign investors to support this industry with concerted and collective steps at multiple levels including, easier access to credit, support from the corporate sector and strategic marketing to domestic and foreign markets.

It is time we find the appropriate avenues to promote this industry, recognizing it as a producer of competitive products for the international market. We have always encouraged handicraft producers to participate in overseas exhibition such as Carifesta but this is not enough. These next two days must explore other avenues and new markets to enter.

As a Ministry we will continue to build the skills sets needed for this industry. Through our Community Education (Skills Training) Programme, we encourage our citizens to hone their skills in our craft programme and further provide the avenues for participation in our sales and exhibition days held in different communities and districts. In the coming months the Ministry will open a craft market in St. Ann's where we will also invite the corporate sector to partner with us as we push this industry further.

Another step will be the development and distribution of handicraft directory. This will be a repository for our artisans and exposing them to potential buyers. It is time that you our artisans, take it one step further and use the opportunity to e-commercialised the industry, taking our handicrafts online to make our products directly accessible to the international customers and market. E-commerce will afford us the opportunity to build our brand internationally and a promissory distribution channel to market and sell our craft products.

Ladies and gentlemen, this forum will truly be a meeting of minds. Its main objective is to outline the way forward for the Industry and the opportunities available. It is up to us to move from this meeting of minds to collaboration of hands – hands that would work to push the movement of Craft Towards Diversification and Development of our Economy.

I thank you for your presence and wish you all a successful and collaborative two days. I look forward to valuable contributions and strategies put forward.

Thank you