

REMARKS BY SENATOR THE HONOURABLE LARRY HOWAI

MINISTER OF FINANCE THE ECONOMY

HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT ASSOCIATION OF TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO (HRMATT)

“HR UPGRADED...V2K13 AND BEYOND”

HILTON HOTEL, PORT OF SPAIN

MONDAY 13TH MAY, 2013.

Thank you Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Nigel Marquez, President of the Human Resources
Management Association of Trinidad and Tobago;

Mr. Gregory Camejo – Vice President of the Human
Resources Management Association of Trinidad and Tobago;

Members of the Head Table and other distinguished
members of staff;

Specially invited guests;

Members of the media;

Ladies and gentlemen,

Good morning.

I am delighted to join you this morning on this, the opening day of the 9th Biennial Conference of Human Resources Professionals, themed “HR Upgraded...v2K13 and Beyond.”

However, before I begin, I would like to take a moment to congratulate the Human Resource Management Association of Trinidad and Tobago, as well as the various supporting organizers and sponsors of today’s conference. These forums facilitate very meaningful conversations between the State and stakeholder interest groups, which are vitally important as we share perspectives and valuable insight for the benefit of our respective professions and the wider society. To this end, I am indeed grateful for your invitation to participate.

I also wish to acknowledge Professor David Ulrich, an international scholar, consultant, and management coach of note in the area of business management and leadership, who has joined us for this year's event. His reputation for sound analysis and critical thinking will certainly be helpful in progressing our understanding of human resources and associated best practices internationally.

Ladies and gentlemen, apart from public institutions and processes, human resources are at the core of our nation's economy. I am quite eager to share my thoughts on a subject I find rather intriguing – the role of human resource management in transforming economies into competitive knowledge based economies.

This year's Conference of Human Resources Professionals I understand is focused on upgrading our stock of human resources professionals and raising the bar with respect to the human resources profession locally. These foci are quite timely given the unprecedented challenges currently facing the global economy, and the current need to boost productivity and competitiveness if countries are to survive and build momentum in the 21st century.

In our Medium Term Policy Framework articulating Government's policy agenda, we have emphasized human capital development as the single most critical success factor for transforming the economy and the society. As a consequence, one of the largest allocations in our national budget is aimed at building human capital at all levels.

The Government recognizes that investment in our nation's human resources is a prerequisite for capital accumulation. It is also an instrument of social cohesion and for fighting social exclusion and gender discrimination. It is vital to our economy's growth and development since it affords our citizens the opportunity to gain knowledge and skills to facilitate their self-actualization, which will redound beneficially to the wider society in terms of higher productivity levels and increased competitiveness.

From this framework, one of Government's primary objectives is the creation of a knowledge economy. This includes:

1. Transforming the structure of our economy to seek new growth opportunities;
2. Improving levels of innovation, productivity and competitiveness;
3. Fostering closer links between science and technology;
4. Facilitating a greater focus on information and communications technologies to enable increased connectivity locally and overseas; and
5. Making our economic well-being less reliant on the energy sector.

Overall, this strategic paradigm shift moves us to the new creative knowledge economy focused on innovation, ideas, creativity and the imagination of our human capital.

The transformation of our economy requires bold collaborative action of all stakeholders – the State; the private sector; interest groups and civil society. Our thrust towards a knowledge economy would usher in new opportunities for everyone, including the private sector and including human resource professionals locally.

Therefore, ladies and gentlemen, our journey towards economic transformation requires your valued input, at the microeconomic or organizational level. Fundamentally, your strategic human resource management function is the process of linking the human resource function with the strategic objectives of the organization with a view to improving overall organizational performance. For the

knowledge economy however, focus has to be broadened to embrace the new opportunities that lie ahead.

Firstly, the transformation of our economy into a knowledge based one will produce new industries, occupations and organizational arrangements in information and communications technology, biotechnology, food production, pharmaceuticals and others.

Secondly, new types of skills and approaches will be required, with a greater emphasis being placed on analysis, creative thinking, curiosity, continuous learning, rewards for knowledge creation and value-adding, greater levels of open communication, flexibility to change, self-motivation and organization. In my ongoing stakeholder consultations

recently, one group recently emphasized the need to shift from “knowledge of” to “ability to” – increasing analysis and perception and not just formal education for the knowledge economy.

Thirdly, the economy will require new forms of knowledge, and will place greater emphasis on knowledge application and knowledge networks. This will involve building and maintaining knowledge sharing and networks with business partners, education, research institutions and the Government.

Side by side with this vision for transformation of our economy we must consider the implications of our current demographic profile on our push for growth. The Trinidad

and Tobago population has remained stagnant at just about 1.3 million persons over the past decade or more. This slow rate of population growth and its accompanying change in the age profile of the population is a cause for concern. The projected change in the age profile will result in significant strain on our fiscal and social resources in the coming years and a meaningful policy must be developed to address this problem. This demographic challenge has been further compounded by our brain drain.

I do recognize the fear that a burgeoning population increases the chances of higher unemployment and social disruption. But it is my view that this concern arises from treating people as liabilities rather than as assets. It takes a

passive and contractionary view of the future rather than an entrepreneurial and expansive approach.

It is instructive to note that in March of this year, the new leaders of China, a country with more than 1.3 billion people, signaled that one of their early priorities is reform of the one child policy. Beijing's reconsideration of the policy is not motivated by human rights but rather economics. For a country like China which does not allow immigration, the best way to boost the working population is to encourage families to have more children.

Similarly, Singapore, a country slightly larger than Tobago, with a population of 5 million persons, has signaled its

intention to increase its population to 7.5 million over the next decade.

In the United States, immigration reform remains high on the agenda. Facebook founder, Mark Zuckerberg recently announced a new bipartisan Silicon Valley group, Fwd. us to focus on immigration reform. As he says, “in a knowledge economy, the most important resources are the talented people we educate and attract to our country”.

I emphasize, that I do recognize the risk that the demographic dividend can turn into a demographic time-bomb as has occurred in some countries where chaotic politics and poor economic planning have limited the extent to which countries benefit from population growth.

As we go forward, an integral part of our economic planning for growth and development must include an insightful and long term view on our nation's demographic profile and a willingness to embrace on a national level population and immigration policies that encourage productive, entrepreneurial and highly motivated individuals to be part of that exciting journey. In addition, and very importantly, we have to reverse the loss of talented and entrepreneurial individuals which has occurred as a result of emigration.

Ladies and Gentlemen, I want to reiterate that the Government remains a committed partner to providing a sound macroeconomic, legal and regulatory framework that is conducive to the development of our human capital, and to

support the private sector and other interest groups. On this journey, Government must “walk the talk” and we must lead by example to ensure that appropriate measures are introduced.

Allow me to briefly mention three initiatives:

1. Government, through iGovTT, is focused on the execution of Government’s enterprise-wide ICT strategies and programmes, and is responsible for the delivery of innovative and integrative public sector ICT solutions and services. iGovTT is currently drafting the second national ICT plan for Trinidad and Tobago, branded as SMARTT;

2. Government continues to focus on curricula reform, new teaching methodologies and greater exposure to technology in the classroom; and

3. The review of the Government Assistance for Tuition Expenses has already begun to refocus the programme on the areas of priority study necessary to support our strategy for economic and industrial development.

Ladies and gentlemen, turning briefly to the human resources function itself, we can certainly appreciate its tremendous evolution over the years. Revisiting the developments of the last 10-15 years, one would appreciate that the function has moved away from solely recruitment, policies and record-keeping. Today, employees now use

multi-functional, wireless technology to do their jobs from virtually anywhere in the world beyond the confines of an office space; technology is now faster, smaller, lighter, more powerful and functional; and there have been major advances in wireless capabilities, information storage, as well as real-time video conferencing. Information technology and business processes have become complementary to the human resources function where a variety of sophisticated skills and disciplines are now needed and expected.

If the past is any indication of the future, the HR function is certainly in for some very interesting developments. Education and training globally will be lifelong, virtual, and the success of companies will be more intrinsically linked to

team-building and team efforts. At the same time, as technology constantly evolves, we can surely expect less face-to-face contact, and more remote and virtual interactions. The speed and efficiency with which business is conducted will be critical for success. The ability to integrate team building and virtual interactions will be highly valued skills among potential and existing employers. This is the culture we ought to harness and build in our organizations and in our nation if we are to transform our economy and become competitive in a dynamic global environment.

Ladies and gentlemen, in closing, let me once again commend the Human Resource Management Association for its work and its tireless commitment to developing and

ensuring appropriate standards of excellence in the practice of human resources management in Trinidad and Tobago. On behalf of the Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, we are grateful for your work over the years, and I hope we can continue the dialogue going forward.

I wish you a productive session over the next two days as we aim to raise the bar for our human resources, our nation's biggest building block to a more diversified, competitive, innovative and transformed knowledge economy. The Government pledges to do its part with the right initiatives and institutions, and I urge you to partner with us on our journey of economic transformation.

Ladies and gentlemen, I thank you!