

CUSTOMS AND EXCISE DIVISION



INTERNATIONAL CUSTOMS DAY 2014

FEATURE ADDRESS

Presented by:

**SENATOR THE HONOURABLE LARRY HOWAI
MINISTER OF FINANCE AND THE ECONOMY**

**GRAND BALLROOM, TRINIDAD HILTON
SUNDAY JANUARY 26, 2014**

SALUTATIONS:

- Senator the Honourable Vasant Bharath, Minister of Trade, Industry & Investment
- The Honourable Rudranath Indarsingh, Minister in the Ministry of Finance and the Economy
- Mr. Vishnu Dhanpaul, Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Finance and the Economy and other Ministry officials
- Mr. Stephen Williams, Commissioner of Police and Mrs. Williams
- Mr. Ammar Samaroo, Ag. Comptroller of Customs and Excise Division and Mrs. Samaroo

- Mrs. Roselyn Doobraj, Comptroller of Accounts and Mr. Doobraj
- Mrs. Allison Raphael, Chairman of the Board of Inland Revenue and Mr. Raphael
- Members of the management team for the Customs and Excise Division
- The 2014 Long Service Awardees
- Staff of the Customs and Excise Division
- Specially Invited Guests
- Ladies and Gentlemen

Ladies and Gentlemen, let me begin by saying what a privilege it is to be here to participate in the commemoration of International Customs Day.

Today we join with the global community in celebrating the work of Customs' administrations who not only collectively process approximately 98 per cent of the world's trade but who are also continuously vigilant in their efforts to combat illegal activities on an international scale.

The 2014 theme for International Customs Day is “Communication: sharing information for better cooperation.” From a governmental standpoint, public engagement is an important part of the policy-making process.

Ladies and Gentlemen, the engagement with the public is something that we have been doing all along. But over the years, we have increasingly intensified our efforts to engage on a wide range of issues with as many stakeholders as possible. We have done so through various platforms, such as dialogues and town hall meetings.

The communication component is critical for the Division as it allows the Division to engage and inform its various stakeholders about the changes that are taking place, particularly, in the way which the Customs and Excise conducts its business and the efforts that are being made to take its operations to the next level of excellence.

Ladies and Gentlemen, as the line Minister with the responsibility for Customs, I wish to take the opportunity to congratulate the Division for the great strides over the recent years in achieving greater visibility via a number of communication tools such as public information publications, increased media outreach and a revamped website which allows for greater dissemination of information on matters relating to Customs' administration.

But, while it is vital that we seek to inform and educate to our stakeholders, it is also imperative that we focus on how we communicate with our partners and stakeholders, how we listen to their feedback and how we respond.

This will go a long way in encouraging stronger support for the work of the Division and can guarantee greater buy-in and support from the public at large.

Over the years, the public perception is that we focus on pressuring the small man while the ‘big fish’ get away; that the Customs Division has become corrupt and inefficient.

We have to move away from these notions and build a new image and culture for our organization. We must build an image of professionalism and efficiency. While our enforcement role must be heightened, we must also be known for the courtesy and tact with which we deal with the public and for the efficacy of our enforcement efforts.

On the Government's part, we must provide the Customs Division with the tools to carry out its job. These include a facilitative environment, technology, manpower, training and the right kind of leadership.

Over the past year, we have done just that. We have amended the Customs Act to allow for the exchange of advanced cargo and passenger information which facilitates faster clearance from our air and seaports. We have completed the implementation of our ASYCUDA and SEW systems and are well advanced in integrating both.

I would like to commend my colleague, the Honourable Minister of Trade, Industry and Investment for making this a reality. I expect that the full integration will be complete by the end of February. Preliminary work has commenced on the outfitting of the Customs House and I expect that I would be able to hand over a fully outfitted building to the Customs and Excise Division before the end of this year.

We are also addressing the manpower shortage. Advertisements were placed in the media last year and we expect to have many of the vacant positions filled in the coming months.

In the short term, we have assigned 60 new persons to the Division and I expect that these persons will be in place by the beginning of March, once all the necessary administrative processes are completed. This will contribute to a significant improvement in the operations of Customs over the next coming months.

The need to enhance our capabilities to protect our goods and the integrity of trade in Trinidad and Tobago has to be strengthened and, again, the Minister of Trade, Industry and Investment has arranged for a large X ray scanner from the Government of China which has been delivered and will be in place in the next month. We have also arranged for four (4) mobile container scanners to be delivered from the United States and these are expected to arrive in Trinidad and Tobago by the end of July 2014. These mobile container scanners will improve our ability to closely monitor shipments both entering and leaving our ports.

We are also developing new training programmes to enhance the capability of our Officers and their sensitivity to the concerns of the travelling public and legitimate business enterprises.

We intend to continue with these and other initiatives aimed at achieving our vision of accomplishing our objectives using globally competitive benchmarks.

To our Honorees, I wish to communicate my heartfelt congratulations and sincere appreciation for our years of service to the Division and wish to encourage you to maintain your high level of commitment and dedication as it will serve as an example to others and will create significant value for our nation.

Ladies and Gentlemen, I thank you.