



Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago
MINISTRY OF FINANCE

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MEDIA RELEASE

TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO SCANS 5 TIMES MORE CONTAINERS THAN THE USA AND 10 TIMES MORE CONTAINERS THAN THE EU

The Minister of Finance, Hon. Colm Imbert, MP, has noted commentary in the media regarding a recent disclosure that the Customs and Excise Division scans **SEVENTEEN PERCENT (17%)** of containers entering Trinidad and Tobago at official ports of entry.

This statistic has led to further commentary from business spokespersons who have complained about the current level of examination of containers by Customs, resulting in an editorial in today's Daily Express calling for righteous anger to be directed at the Ministers of Finance and commentary in other newspapers.

However, if the Express had checked the **July 2021 American Journal of Transportation**, it would have discovered the following published data:

“Customs and Border Protection (CBP) currently scans 3.7% of the roughly 11 million containers entering the US each year. Only about 1% of that total, or 104,000 containers, are checked at ports overseas. Similar figures can be found for the EU. Around 1.5% of all cargo arriving to EU ports is scanned”

In other words, Trinidad and Tobago scans **FIVE (5) times** as many containers entering our ports than the USA and **ELEVEN (11) times** more than the EU.

Further, if the Express had read a paper entitled *“Monitoring container traffic and analysing risk”*, a publication of the European Commission, it would have discovered that only **TWO PERCENT (2%)** of containers are physically inspected worldwide, whereas Trinidad and Tobago physically inspects over **TWENTY PERCENT (20%)** of containers, or **TEN (10) times** the world average.

In all of this, one has to balance the need for trade facilitation against the urgent need to stem the flow of illegal items. If we were to move to 50% or 100% image scanning and/or physical inspection of shipping containers, trade could grind to a halt, with severe adverse effects on commerce. Surely, the Express, as a champion of the business community, understands that.

To combat crime, many countries, including the USA, have pledged for years, and even enacted legislation, to increase their levels of seaborne container scanning but have continuously postponed the implementation of this measure because it runs counter to trade facilitation. Instead, virtually all countries in the world use a risk-based assessment system and intelligence gathered by local security agencies and international security partners to profile importers and identify suspicious or “high-risk” cargo, which is why their level of scanning and physical inspection of containers is so much less than Trinidad and Tobago.

The information necessary to profile importers **is at the core** of the solution to the issue raised by the Express, not outrage against the Ministers of Finance because the Customs and Excise Division has not moved swiftly enough to acquire new mobile scanners, a matter that is far more complex than meets the eye. The Express may recall that in previous years the Public Services Association (PSA) protested against the use of scanners on the grounds that they would cause radiation poisoning of Customs Officers, leading to decreased virility. Reluctance by staff to adopt modern technology remains a real, not virtual, challenge.

We are already way above the world average in terms of container scanning and inspection and the same business spokespersons would scream to the heavens if the Customs and Excise Division exponentially increased scanning and physical inspection of containers since this would inevitably lead to even more delays on the ports.

In addition to better equipment, therefore, what is needed is better intelligence gathering and better profiling of importers.

These pertinent facts aside, the Minister of Finance is acutely aware of the very harmful impact of crime and criminal elements, and continues to do all that is legal and within his power to ensure efficiency and focus in the Customs and Excise Division.

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The Honourable Colm Imbert M.P.
Minister of Finance