



ADDRESS BY  
THE HONOURABLE CAROLYN SEEPERSAD-BACHAN  
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AT THE PREPARATORY MEETING OF  
THE CONNECT TO THE AMERICAS SUMMIT  
CARLTON SAVANNAH  
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*"Connecting the Unconnected by 2015"*



Ministry of  
Public Administration

Salutations...

I am delighted to join you here this morning. I wish to begin by expressing my sincere appreciation to the International Telecommunications Union (ITU) for hosting this preparatory meeting for the CTA (Connect the Americas) Summit.

The ITU has planned a number of regional summits in the Americas, Africa and the Arab, Asia-Pacific and independent States to implement its '*Connect the World*' initiative. As we heard from Cleveland a moment ago, this year in July is our turn for the Americas.

This initiative focuses on the theme "***Connecting the Unconnected by the year 2015***".

The overall objective is to mobilize the human, financial and technical resources required to close Information and

Communication Technology gaps in the various regions within the next three years.

In the Caribbean region, I am of the firm conviction that if we can align our strategies appropriately we will be much better able to seek the public interests of our countries together while at the same time seek the interests and development of the entire region.

We are all aware of the significant challenges we face as a region as our Governments seek to integrate our region economically. These challenges are not insurmountable and should in fact be the impetus to drive our actions to work together, strategise together and build together.

As nations of the Caribbean we share common goals and objectives which are geared towards bridging divides, uniting communities and enhancing the access and delivery of services and creating an ICT technologies physical and legislative

infrastructure that supports collaboration, partnerships, efficiency and sustained development.

This is where our goals must remain aligned and even be strengthened as economic integration in the Caribbean family of nations and all of its implications and benefits will be in the coming years reliant more and more on our ICT infrastructure to ensure compatibility and sustainability.

Today's meeting therefore gives us the opportunity to forge new partnerships between the Public and Private sectors to narrow the digital divide that exists in our countries. This conference preparatory meeting convened here today is therefore quite timely insofar as the identification of projects are concerned in the five thematic areas which were adopted at the World Telecommunications Conference in 2010, which include:

- Emergency Communications

- Digital broadcasting
- Broadband access and uptake in urban and rural areas
- Reduction of broadband access costs
- Human capacity building on ICTS with emphasis on persons with disabilities and persons living in rural and deprived areas.

My understanding is that 25 projects have so far been proposed and I am sure they are all relevant.

In Trinidad and Tobago, significant work is currently underway in all of these areas. We recognise that broadband presents strong opportunities for the provision of more efficient healthcare, improved education, enhanced Government services and more competitive business services.

So important has broadband become that the ITU has established a Broadband Commission for Digital Development.

At the Commission's website, it gives an overview of its mission which is to:

*'...boost the importance of broadband on the international policy agenda and believes that expanding broadband access in every country is key to accelerating progress towards these goals by the target date of 2015.'*<sup>1</sup>

The Commission has specifically highlighted the importance of Broadband Internet by describing it as *'a revolution in how services are delivered, industrial processes are managed and research is carried out'*.

It also states that it is *'essential that countries and communities everywhere are enabled to take advantage of this revolution. If they are not, they will lose the opportunity to reap the economic and social benefits that broadband brings'*.

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<sup>1</sup> Adopted from the website <http://www.broadbandcommission.org/about/overview.aspx>

As it moves to fulfil its mandate, the Broadband Commission has established the following targets:

- Making broadband policy universal by 2015
- Making broadband affordable by 2015
- Connecting homes to broadband by 2015
- Bringing more people online by 2015

Here in Trinidad and Tobago, “***Connecting the Unconnected by 2015***” represents one of the main People’s Partnership Government priorities through the promotion of Information and Communication Technology (ICT).

It is our firm conviction that ICT is critical to the diversification of our national economy and key to the strengthening of our country’s competitiveness and viability in the global market as an individual nation and as a CARICOM family of nations.

The guiding philosophy of the Government's policies, as you know, is identified in the seven interconnected pillars aimed at reviving, developing and sustaining the economy of Trinidad and Tobago.

It is very noteworthy that among those development pillars, the ICT sectors are targeted to play a significant role.

Pillar 4 identifies a key role for ICTs for '***Connecting Trinidad and Tobago and Building the New Economy***'.

Achieving this therefore requires a more connected society and the development of a nationwide broadband network to facilitate connectivity to the Internet, access to government e-services, e-education facilities, e-health and the development of e-commerce.



Pillar No. 5 speaks to the building of a ***'More Diversified and Knowledge- Intensive Economy'***.

Again importance is placed on connectivity with an emphasis on the diversification of the economy. Through this level of connectivity the innovative and creative spirit of our people can be maximized and the fullest value extracted.

Ladies and gentlemen, we could be looking at finally waking the sleeping economic giants in the arts and cultural sector, technological sector, services sector, niche manufacturing, energy, fashion and a host of other areas previously under-explored.

And we have a sufficiently solid platform to begin with. No longer is access to computers, mobile phones and the Internet regarded as a privilege. It is now being argued that access to

technology is an inalienable human right - just as is access to food, water and education.

As you are no doubt aware, Finland has become the pioneer of this trend of thinking and last year, passed legislation that will provide every Finn with the legal right to access to a one (1) megabit per second (Mbps) broadband connection. The Finnish Government has further vowed to connect every citizen to a 100Mbps connection by 2015.

The United Kingdom, through its *Digital Economy Bill*, hopes to accelerate the realization of universal broadband access within its borders this year.

Within the Caribbean, emphasis has also been placed on the promotion of broadband services to citizens. Based on data received from the ITU in 2010, Dominica has recorded broadband penetration of 47.1,

- St. Kitts and Nevis at 25.0,
- Barbados at 20.6,
- Antigua and Barbuda 17.2,
- St. Vincent and the Grenadines 11.4,
- St. Lucia at 10.7,
- Grenada at 10.1,
- Bahamas at 7.1, and
- Jamaica at 4.3

Here in Trinidad and Tobago, we have recorded approximately 192,000 fixed Internet subscribers with over 190,000 being subscribers of fixed broadband Internet services, as at the end of 2011.

Broadband Internet therefore accounted for 97.8% of fixed Internet subscriptions in our country. In terms of penetration levels, fixed broadband Internet household penetration

measures 52%, meaning that 52 out of every 100 households have access to broadband Internet services.

Broadband penetration continues to climb steadily and there has been an 89% increase in subscriber growth within the period 2006 to 2011.

This growth is largely attributed to the fact that there are currently seven operators who provide broadband services to the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago. Therefore as with most markets, competition among players leads to improved quality of service and more affordable prices for consumers.

May I make plain that this is key to Trinidad and Tobago's forward economic development policies – high performance, efficient, competitive and reliable economic machinery.

When the markets were first opened in 2005, the maximum Internet speed accessible for residential customers was 256 kilobits per second.

Today, customers are demanding higher broadband speeds as evidenced by an increase in the number of subscriptions to Broadband speeds from 2Mbps to 10Mbps of 23%.

This is significantly higher than the increase in the number of subscriptions to Broadband speeds from 256Kbps to 1Mbps of 8%.

It must be mentioned that in 2012, residential subscribers now enjoy Internet speeds of up to 100 Megabits per second.

Ladies and gentlemen, the demand for ICT related entertainment and social networking also continue to grow

steadily. Our entertainment appetites have changed over the decades resulting in radical changes in the entertainment menus online entertainment in the form of games and movies.

Social networking has also gone electronic as there has been the growing trend to expand and keep alive social interactions and enhancement through social networking websites. This has significantly increased our desire for faster broadband speeds.

To the added benefit of consumers, broadband Internet prices have decreased by more than 84% since 2005. In fact, as at the end of 2010, the International Telecommunications Union ranked Trinidad and Tobago *as having the lowest monthly fixed broadband Internet subscription of approx. US\$12, when compared to other countries within the Caribbean region.*

Furthermore, according to the 2010-2011 Global Information Technology Report published by the World Economic Forum,

*Trinidad and Tobago ranks 14<sup>th</sup> as having the lowest fixed broadband Internet tariffs in the world!*

However, even with the affordable price of broadband Internet services, there still remain communities throughout our country that do not yet have access to this basic telecommunications service. This was evidenced from the results of a Digital Divide survey conducted by the Telecommunications Authority of Trinidad and Tobago in 2007.

The Government holds the view that broadband Internet is a basic service that should be available to all citizens of Trinidad and Tobago to enjoy.

For this reason the Telecommunications Authority is in the process of conducting another Digital Divide survey. The results will be available shortly and will serve to further identify those communities which lack the infrastructure for accessing

broadband service, as well as other essential basic telecommunications services.

The results of the survey will inform the Government's ***Universality Plan*** which seeks to facilitate accessible and affordable basic telecommunications service, including broadband service, to all citizens of Trinidad and Tobago. *Let me repeat, including broadband service to all citizens of Trinidad and Tobago.*

Based on the statistics mentioned earlier, it is evident that some progress has been made towards the achievement of the targets set by the Broadband Commission.

However, much work needs to be done and several strategies and initiatives are currently being undertaken by the Government and its agencies to further deepen the penetration of broadband services in our country.



For instance the Telecommunications Authority has drafted a *National Broadband Plan* which deals specifically with the development of broadband infrastructure to stimulate intermodal competition, that is, facilities-based competition in the delivery of broadband services.

I want to state, however, that this approach seeks to retain a pro-competition policy in the delivery of services and proposes a public-private partnership (PPP) approach in the build-out of broadband infrastructure.

Another issue that requires our urgent attention and action is the impending switchover from analogue to digital broadcasting. TATT has published a draft framework for migration from the existing analogue environment to that of a fully digital 'free to air' television broadcasting environment – the so called *Digital Terrestrial Television*.

Urgently required, however, is decisive and focused action in order to prevent significant spectrum interference problems given the close proximity of neighbouring countries across the region.

It is also important for us to take a regional approach in the adoption of standards in order to benefit from economies of scale.

It is my expectation that some of the insights gained at this meeting will be factored into the plans to be implemented to achieve deeper ICT penetration and in particular, broadband penetration, in Trinidad and Tobago.

My reason for sharing this with you is to illustrate the remarkable benefits we have gained from purposeful strategies and also place on the table for discussion – how could ICT

development collaboration among all of the Caribbean family of nations create even greater benefits for all of our people?

A single, cohesive, regional approach will not only strengthen our ability to take our place in the global knowledge economy, but also introduce the element of economies of scale.

Our ability to attract not only foreign direct investment, but also the right foreign investments into our region will be greatly enhanced.

Our ability to ability to fast-track ICT development in our region will also be enhanced by this partnership approach underlined by the very simple principle of ***strength in numbers***.

It is important to note, however, that when we speak to business development of ICT services, it is not enough to deploy

initiatives pertaining to liberalisation and the removal of custom duties. To often we get bogged down in those discussions.

What is required is a structured approach involving strategies, policies, programmes and incentives for investment in the sector. Development programmes for this sector should define targets, the resources required and a governance structure to manage delivery.

In addition, our regulatory frameworks should now be geared towards liberalisation. We need to move our regulatory focus from licensing and ex-post reactionary regulation, to a market supportive mix of ex-ante and ex-post frameworks that support innovation in service delivery.

Trinidad and Tobago has initiated extensive work in these areas, but there is an urgent need for a regional approach in

this regard to avoid the risk of dissipative intra-regional competition given the increasingly competitive environment and growing development challenges in opportunities faced by our countries, it is now more than ever that we must enhance our collaboration.

Our future economic and social development depends on us making the right decisions at the right time with the right partnerships and the right strategies. The time is now for us to invest and partner for investments to ensure that tomorrow's ICT world includes not only us, as individual stakeholders, but also as regional leaders in this sector.

Our decisions today will impact the lives of millions of people so we must also do what is good and right for those who will come after us in the years to come.

In closing, I wish to thank the ITU for having this meeting in Port of Spain. The theme adopted for the meeting is well suited to the challenges that we all face.

I am, however, confident that your discussions will provide a solid framework for how we move forward, and how we overcome these challenges.

I wish you all success in your deliberations and i thank you.