



**SPEECH FOR SENATOR THE HONOURABLE HASSEL
BACCHUS, MINISTER IN THE MINISTRY OF PUBLIC
ADMINISTRATION AND DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION
AT THE LAUNCH OF THE CARIRI AUGMENTED REALITY
/VIRTUAL REALITY CHALLENGE**

FEBRUARY 18TH, 2021

Good morning everyone.

Mr Hayden Ferreira, Chairman of CARIRI

Ms Vashtie Dookiesingh, Senior Specialist – IDB Lab.

Mr Nirad Tewarie, CEO of AMCHAM Trinidad and Tobago

Mr Meghnath Gosein, Executive Manager, Corporate Services,
CARIRI

Ms Denise Ferguson, Human Resource Manager, CARIRI

Media personnel, Staff of CARIRI and especially to all the
finalists of CARIRI's AR/VR Challenge.

I bring greetings to all of you on behalf of Senator the
Honourable Allyson West, Minister of Public Administration
and Digital Transformation. At the Ministry we are heavily
involved in the movement towards a more digitized economy

and we were thrilled to hear that CARIRI had launched an Augmented Reality /Virtual Reality Challenge like this one. From my understanding, the Challenge was a great success with a variety potential AR/VR solutions being discovered in the areas of entertainment, education and tourism.

I would also like to commend the industrious team at CARIRI for all of the effort that has been driving this extremely impressive venture. Your work in this field not only contributes to CARIRI's vision of "leading and serving through innovation and technology", but allows citizens to realize and develop their innate potential in technology, entrepreneurialism, invention and more. Kudos again to the Board, Management and Staff. Keep up the great work.

As we await the outcome of the Challenge today, we need to look beyond this to even greater things since this is just one of the first steps in our technological revolution here in Trinidad and Tobago.

Policymakers and various stakeholders today face an environment constantly being transformed by information and communications technology (ICT). Globally, more people today have access to a mobile phone than to electricity and the sheer amount of data generated is expanding exponentially. In T&T, it is estimated that social media usage stood at 860,000 persons in 2020. This figure by itself shows the level of connectivity that we are talking about.

In every country around the world, leaders of government and businesses are trying to decide - mainly through their policies and strategies for ICT, Internet access, communications and digital applications - how to promote and structure the digitization of their societies. This is the direction in which the Government of Trinidad and Tobago wants to move the economy. We will all agree that there are many different aspects that can be improved, re-imagined and redesigned to fit in with the National Development Strategy; Vision 2030 and we are steadily aiming to reach the milestone of a more positively connected society, which augurs to the benefit of the key themes outlined in the Strategy.

The general and overall effect of digitization on any country's economy can be highly visible in all spheres, and can be seen in the overall culture of the society catalyzing dramatic economic, social and political improvements. However, every country, whatever its digitization maturity level needs a national agenda, and that is what we at the Ministry have been busy developing.

We all have our part to play in this transformation and we at the Ministry of Public Administration and Digital Transformation are strengthening the infrastructure and facilitating the guidance and expertise needed along the way in keeping with our mandate of providing the proper framework for ICT in our country. We have been engaging several stakeholders along the way to ensure that we are on

schedule for the implementation and delivery of many of these plans and programmes.

Some of these programmes will enable increased access to the internet across Trinidad and Tobago which will grant citizens access to e-services, distance learning materials and even shop online whether they are located in Icacos, Arima, Rio Claro or Roxborough. In addition to the aforementioned, the myriad business and entrepreneurial opportunities afforded by the World Wide Web goes without saying. Our nation's expert and budding augmented reality and virtual reality developers can tap into various industries with their skill and contribute to global enhancements in areas such as medical technology, engineering, the gaming sector, animation, mobile technology development and more.

As we have seen over the last year or so, the need for connections and proper ICT infrastructure has become a necessity. No longer can we say that it would be 'nice to have,' but we know that it is needed in every corner of the country. It is now our responsibility to ensure that our citizens have access to connections in a faster timeframe and the ability to use the technology.

A lot of conversation has been held and will continue to be held on what digitizing the Trinidad and Tobago economy should look like, and conversation is good, however we need to fast track to the implementation stage. This is not an easy task, ladies and gentlemen, but I can assure you here today

that we are working with our blueprint and we are getting it done.

Trinidad and Tobago and by extension the Caribbean region, stands on the threshold of a technological revolution that will essentially alter the way we live, work, and relate to one another. In its scale, scope, and complexity, this transformation, which has been taking place for a while, will be unlike anything that we have experienced before. Although we do not yet totally know just how it will unfold, one thing is clear: our response to it must be integrated and all-inclusive, involving all stakeholders from the public and private sectors to academia and civil society.

It is with this in mind that CARIRI, a leading regional institution, chose to bring this important conversation to the forefront by creating a forum such as the AR/VR Challenge. The 4th Industrial Revolution is taking place and our region must take ownership and control of its destiny moving forward. This revolution ensures that a range of new technologies will combine the physical, digital and biological worlds, and impact all disciplines, economies and industries. We must ensure that we are not left behind.

COVID-19 has shown us that we need to evolve to be able to adapt and survive in the new normal. We have a real opportunity to ensure that we reset our society, in a good way. We now stand on the brink of a change that can propel us forward into a new day. This is one where we can use

technology for our good in every area of our society. We need to start in our schools and work our way up from there.

I was brimming with excitement upon hearing that CARIRI will be hosting a Virtual Training Programme on Coding and App Development soon for our secondary school students, so we can't wait to be a part of that initiative as well. This Programme was born out of their Coding Fundamentals for Secondary Schools programme which they had been running in-person for the last two years with great success and support from Corporate Trinidad and Tobago.

CARIRI has been at the forefront of guiding students to get more involved in ICT since they recognized that there was a

gap to be filled and they stepped in to lend assistance. And with this AR/VR Challenge they once again stepped in to encourage the use of these particular technologies by offering assistance to commercialize the solutions. Drawing on the talent, creativity and innovative spirit of our citizens, participants were asked to showcase their creative capacity in the creation of an AR/VR solution that could be used in any field or sector, including but not limited to entertainment, sports, education, tourism, agriculture, communication, etc. The range of submissions was impressive and shows that our people can compete with the best in the world.

This Challenge provides future leaders with the opportunity to use emerging technologies, showcase their vision for the future, and gain professional exposure while commercializing

the idea. Solutions could have been either AR or VR or a combination of both which would be mixed reality or extended reality (XR). And that is what participants in the Challenge did; they really came up with inspired solutions. People were very creative in their submissions and we can't wait to see what all of these persons can bring to the table in the very near future.

Although Augmented Reality and Virtual Reality have been around for a while, we were not able to get a clear picture of how many persons were interested in this area. This Challenge showed that we have quite a large number of people who are actively researching and developing solutions that incorporate these new technologies as I am told over 80 teams registered.

This new world of AR and VR will definitely become a part of the way we interact with various systems and programmes as they have so many applications. Apart from the games, leisure and entertainment sectors, AR and VR have now become a staple of many other sectors including e-commerce and retail, as you would have seen during the course of the pandemic – the whole online shopping experience is being rethought both locally and internationally to create a more interactive experience for the user.

Another sector where this is being utilized is in Interior Design, Landscaping & Urban Planning which allows you to test ideas and designs and even bring blueprints to life so that better decisions can be made in real time. We can create

entire smart cities and plan our communities in a way that will be sustainable in the long term. Even in the world of Real Estate, AR lets you showcase properties before they have been built or turn 2D blueprints into interactive 3D visualizations.

We have been having much conversation over the future of Tourism and Travel and if we invest in AR-enriched promotional materials and VR experiences featuring 3D videos of locations, we can definitely entice future visitors and empower travel companies to enable clients to buy trips. At museums, galleries and tourist sites, if we add more in-depth information about exhibits or bring them to life on a mobile device, we can ensure a fuller and more enjoyable experience. VR can give visitors even better

educational and cultural experiences and lead to more appreciation for our country and what we have to offer the world. This week would have been Carnival but unfortunately it needed to be postponed, with good reason, but just imagine how we could incorporate AR and VR into this experience so that you never felt that you were missing that experience. All of our shows and competitions could come alive with this technology.

Education and Training - AR technology makes schooling more interactive, engaging, and efficient. And we're not just talking about schools for children, but also for corporate and professional training as well. VR training simulators are used in aviation, automotive, construction, energy, and the medical fields already.

In Healthcare - AR apps are used for a variety of tasks, from helping patients to identify their own symptoms to enabling surgeons to examine inside a patient's body without or before making large incisions.

In Manufacturing and Occupational Safety - Virtual reality mimics real-life scenarios minus the risk, which is always a plus for us.

And in Advertising & Marketing - Creative use of AR can strengthen customer relationships and lead to brand loyalty while increasing the propensity to purchase. Delightful content motivates customers to use a brand's mobile application regularly, and this is what all businesses want

at the end of the day. Unique and fresh AR experiences offer a chance to astonish customers and encourage them to be your brand ambassadors to their family and friends. A virtual experience grabs all of the user's attention, which means advertisers can pitch their message precisely.

There are so many applications for AR and VR and these are just a few. As we keep our goalpost of 2030 in our line of sight, we know that there will be many more and some of these can definitely come from the citizens of this country. There is so much potential waiting to be discovered and with initiatives like CARIRI's AR/VR Challenge, we know that they will be brought to the forefront. So I want to commend CARIRI once again for this effort and look forward to all the other initiatives that they are working on.

So to all of the finalists today, I want to say job well done and continue to push forward with your solutions, keep creating and start sharing with other potential developers and creators. Create a strong community that can come together and solve the big and the small issues that we as a nation face. Our people have the potential to create world-changing solutions and I challenge you and the national community to make that difference.

I thank you.