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## **Opening Remarks**

**The Honourable Bridgid Mary Anisette George, MP  
Speaker of the House of Representatives**

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**Workshop of the Public Accounts Committees  
of the Caribbean (PACC)**

**Hyatt Regency, Port of Spain**

**November 23 & 24, 2015**

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I thank you Master of Ceremonies,

**SALUTATIONS:**

- The President of The Senate of Trinidad and Tobago Christine Kangaloo;
- Visiting Members of Parliament from other Caribbean Jurisdictions, and I acknowledge in that regard, the Parliaments of
  - Bahamas;
  - Barbados;
  - Belize;
  - Bermuda;
  - British Virgin Islands;
  - The Legislative Assembly Of The Cayman Islands;
  - The Parliament of Grenada;
  - The National Assembly of The Co-Operative Republic of Guyana;
  - The Parliament of Jamaica;
  - The Parliament of Nevis;
  - The Participant and Observer Delegates from the Parliament of the Republic Trinidad And Tobago
  - The Technocrats of the World Bank
  - The Technocrats of Government
  - The Media
  - Ladies and Gentlemen.

**GOOD MORNING!** And to our Visitors, Welcome to the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago.



It is my pleasure to join you this morning, to bring opening remarks on the commencement of this workshop. I extend gratitude to the World Bank for having offered to facilitate this workshop, which provides a platform for awareness and dialogue, aimed at mitigating the challenges of oversight experienced by democratic parliaments in general and in particular, the parliaments of the Commonwealth Caribbean.

This workshop is expected to focus on the operations of the Public Accounts Committees of the Caribbean region and has among its objectives:

- Sharing of our experiences, knowledge and practices for the purpose of setting standards and improving the committees' performance;
- Defining a strategic objective vision for a proposed regional network; and
- Explore with the guidance of our development partners the key stones for the birth and maturation of this proposed regional network.

For the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago this workshop is well timed as the ceremonial opening of our 11<sup>th</sup> Parliament took place exactly two (2) months ago to the date and, in main, ushered unto our parliamentary benches first-time parliamentarians and, although our participating delegates to this workshop are seasoned parliamentarians, this workshop serves for our observer members as an induction and submersion of their role and responsibilities in the oversight function of parliament. To say that PACs are essential structures, in support of a claim to having a functioning democracy is now trite.

Your presence here representing your various nation states, all democratically elected parliaments, speaks for itself as evidence that you accept that the oversight of government is an inherent responsibility of parliament. But the existence of PACs is not an end in itself.



PACs must be effective! PACs must be efficient! PACs must be successful! But what constitutes effectiveness, efficiency and success?

There have been, several published works by esteemed experts, on the parameters of effectiveness efficiency and success. As early as 2007, in an issue of *The Parliamentarian* Dr. Staphenurst and Mr Pelizzo, have provided us, with seventeen (17) bullet points, in the evaluation of “*An Ideal PAC Committee*”. Admittedly that short list may have equipped us with easily identifiable factors.

However, our experience here in Trinidad and Tobago, and I venture to suspect in the other Commonwealth Caribbean jurisdictions, may, for convenience, be summed up in the phrase “*Easier Said (Or More Appropriately) Easier Written Than Done!*”

The pitfalls to effectiveness efficiency and success have been identified to reside in the areas of:

- Defining the role and functions of the PACs;
- The structure of the committees;
- The resources available to the committees;
- The power and processes of the committees;
- The practices of the committees; and
- The availability of members to meet the demands of in-depth oversight required of the committees.

Of course when we place our microscopic lens over the Commonwealth Caribbean we must superimpose the issues related to the size of our parliaments, and the part-time status of our non-executive Parliamentarians. It is imperative, that we overcome our challenges. We must strive for and attain, effectiveness, efficiency and success because we appreciate that effective, efficient and successful PACs, play a pivotal role in promoting good governance



and in the elimination of waste and corrupt practices, in the activities of government.

As parliamentarians, and specifically as members of the PACs entwined in our duty to represent and serve our electorate is our ability to monitor and review the actions of the executive? In a paper entitled, *Effectiveness and Efficiency of Public Accounts Committees* in enhancing oversight and accountability by Makhado, Mashela and Mokhari (2012) the authors concluded as follows:

“If PACs plan their oversight effectively, it will strengthen accountability which could also promote efficient use of public resources in this context, the most important element of oversight is to promote accountability in the use of limited public resources for effective service delivery to the public and to restore public confidence over government.”

The said authors opined in the aforesaid article that:

“Effective oversight...refers to action taken or mechanisms existing to oversee “financial and non-financial “performance of government departments and public entities. It further entails, overseeing the effective management of government departments by members of cabinet in pursuit of improved service delivery to citizens.”

Yes! The task of oversight may be viewed as awesome but we must not be daunted by the challenges. Sharing our varied experiences must provide us with solutions which may be adopted or adapted to our individual scenarios. The establishment of a permanent structure-a network- shall provide for a well-resourced mechanism for continuous collaboration in an organized and structured way. The existence of a viable network shall allow for capacity development and the creation of institutional memory. We owe it to our region



and to those who shall come after us to make strides in the establishment of a network.

In closing, I say let the conversation begin! I wish you, the participants, fruitful deliberations and you the observer stimulating thoughts during this two (2) day workshop which shall redound to the benefit of the citizens of our nation states.

I thank you.

