



Joint Select Committee on Foreign Affairs

Summary of Proceedings **Public Hearing Summary**

Wednesday January 24, 2018 at 2:42 p.m.

Topic:

An Inquiry into Regional Integration and the Strengthening of the CARICOM Institution

Objectives of the Inquiry:

1. To investigate CARICOM's efforts to encourage regional integration;
2. To assess whether regional integration can feasibly occur with a particular focus on any successes thus far and any challenges;
3. To assess Trinidad and Tobago's stance on regional integration;
4. To understand the current policies that facilitate regional integration;
5. To examine the efficiency and capacity of CARICOM;
6. To determine CARICOM's plans and strategies for strengthening its organs and the institution as a whole;
7. To determine the challenges, successes and opportunities of CARICOM; and
8. To determine the extent to which CARICOM has implemented any recommendations, and the successes of such recommendations, if any.

Venue: The J. Hamilton Maurice Room, Mezzanine Floor, Office of the Parliament, Tower D, the Port of Spain International Waterfront Centre, 1A Wrightson Road, Port of Spain.

Committee Members:

The following Committee Members were present for the meeting:

- Ms. Marlene McDonald – Chairman
- Mrs. Paula Gopee-Scoon, MP– Vice Chairman
- Ms. Shamfa Cudjoe, MP – Member
- Mr. Avinash Singh – Member
- Mr. Rodney Charles - Member
- Ms. Anita Haynes - Member

Witnesses who appeared:

Ministry of Trade and Industry

- Mr. Norris Herbert Permanent Secretary
- Ms. Trudy Lewis Senior Economist
- Ms. Dana Iles State Counsel III
- Mr. Kriyaa Balramsingh Economist II

Ministry of National Security

- Ms. Vashti Shrikensingh-Jitman Permanent Secretary (Ag.)
- Ms. Charmaine Ghandi-Andrews Chief Immigration Officer (Ag.)
- Mr. Richard Lynch Deputy Director, International Affairs Unit
- Mr. Zeke Beharry International Affairs Coordinator, International Affairs Unit

Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries

- Ms. Angela Siew Permanent Secretary
- Ms. Elizabeth Mohammed Director, Fisheries Division
- Dr. David Kangaloo Chief Veterinary Officer
- Ms. Deanne Ramroop Deputy Director, Research

Key Issues Discussed with the Ministry of Trade and Industry (MoTI):

- The different types of integration such as customs unions, free trade areas, and common markets;
- The participation of the MoTI in the Council for Economic Trade and Development (COTED) and its other sub-institutions;
- Trinidad and Tobago has been a key actor in the movement for regional integration and has been facilitating and encouraging external trade within its borders;
- Trinidad and Tobago was one of the first countries to adjust its common external tariff and has consistently made adjustments in line with policies and tariffs agreed at the regional level;
- Some of the challenges CARICOM countries face in facilitating regional integration include the adjustment of respective laws to implement agreed decisions and policies, and the contradiction of nationalism versus regionalism;
- The total cost of Trinidad and Tobago's direct and indirect support to CARICOM is difficult to determine since the Ministry has not undertaken any such quantification, however, Trinidad and Tobago is a major beneficiary in the area of goods;
- Trinidad and Tobago contributes approximately 23% of its budget to the regional institutional arrangements;
- There are other areas in which Trinidad and Tobago can get involved in order to further regional integration;

- Trinidad and Tobago benefits from regional integration particularly in the economic aspect since much of Trinidad and Tobago's trade exports and manufacturers trade heavily in the CARICOM region;
- The measures that can be taken to move Trinidad and Tobago to the next level in terms of strengthening its position in CARICOM and furthering regional integration;
- CARICOM's competitive edge has diminished significantly and there is need for CARICOM to treat with external competition;
- CARICOM's failure to complete the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA) provided a hiatus from greater external competition;
- The need for CARICOM countries to balance between national and regional interest to obtain the competitive edge;
- The percentage of Trinidad and Tobago's trade regionally and outside the region;
- The percentage of Trinidad and Tobago's exports to CARICOM as a percentage of total exports stood at 10.1 percent for 2016 while the percentage of Trinidad and Tobago's total imports from CARICOM stood at 1.4 percent;
- Trinidad and Tobago's efforts to trade with Guyana;
- The attractiveness of regional integration given the background of trade liberalisation;
- Since 2001, there have been some improvements in the area of services and the categories of skills as it concerns the CSME;
- The improvements/progress made with regards to the movement of people since the Treaty of Chaguaramas, 1973 and whether there is need to amend the document;
- The strategies directed at the youth to promote Regional Integration;
- Apart from tourism, the direct and indirect benefits of having direct flights from Trinidad and Tobago to Cuba;
- The exploration of the possibility of having Trinidad and Tobago as a transshipment area;
- Matters currently before the CCJ; and
- The status of Trinidad and Tobago's payments to regional groups such as CARICOM and CROSQ.

Key Issues Discussed with the Ministry National Security (MoNS):

- The MoNS is guided by the Conference of the Heads of Government, other organs of CARICOM as well as the Ministry of Foreign and CARICOM Affairs;
- The regional security architecture through which common issues are addressed;
- There are four regional security agencies namely, CARICOM Impacs and its sub-agencies, the Caribbean Disaster Emergency Management Agency, the Regional Security System, and the Caribbean Aviation, Safety and Security Oversight System;
- Trinidad and Tobago is the Lead Government in CARICOM's quasi Cabinet for Security;
- The Council of Ministers with responsibility for crime and security reports to the lead Government with responsibility for crime and security;
- The impact of deepening ties with CARICOM as it concerns regional integration and what it means for dealing with crime in Trinidad and Tobago;
- Regional Integration facilitates the mobilisation of resources among different States to deal with common challenges. In this context, regional integration has allowed Trinidad and

Tobago to deal with some challenges that are generated from outside of Trinidad and Tobago;

- The success of regional integration is dependent upon the measures used to determine the level of success;
- The costs associated with deportation. Trinidad and Tobago bears the cost of repatriation to the home country in instances where a deportee is unable to do so;
- The procedure applied in dealing with a deportee;
- The length of detention is determined by a number of factors for example, the ability to identify persons, the length of time it takes to source a return ticket, and whether there is a need for escorts;
- The number of deportee's awaiting deportation fluctuates. However, as at January 24, 2018, the number stood at ninety (90) persons inclusive of both men and women;
- The capacity of the detention centre is approximately one hundred and fifty (150) persons with a maximum potential of two hundred (200) persons;
- The cost to keep detainees in detention is approximately three hundred dollars (TT\$300) per day;
- The effect of the cancellation of the OPVs as it concerns the drug trade and the scope of the long-range vessels;
- The adjustments made by the MoNS to its national security policies to advance regional integration includes various initiatives such as being the first country to establish cyber security initiatives;
- The non-discrimination of immigrants who enter Trinidad and Tobago by the Immigration Division;
- The reason behind the influx of Venezuelans particularly in the Port of Spain and Chaguaramas areas;
- Venezuelan visitors are allowed to stay in Trinidad and Tobago for ninety (90) days without a visa provided that they meet the certain requirements;
- In 2016, 39,209 Venezuelans legally entered Trinidad and Tobago and in 2017, 27,611 Venezuelan nationals arrived;
- Before Haitians are allowed entry into Trinidad and Tobago, they must have a visa whereas Venezuelans do not require a visa for entry;
- The lack of resources at the Immigration Division to determine the number of visitors who overstay; and
- The need for a mechanism to monitor the length of stay of visitors.

Key Issues Discussed with the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries (MALF):

- The explanation for the negative balance of trade as it concerns agricultural produce;
- The MALF's plans to increase production and in turn facilitate an increased trade;
- The specific crops produced for trade are generally fruits and vegetables;
- The strategic initiatives pursued by the MALF to reverse the negative balance in trade, which includes training for farmers in marketing and agribusiness for both local consumption and export to CARICOM countries;
- The products in demand by the region include *inter alia* pineapples, watermelon, pawpaw corn, frozen fish fillet, chicken parts, pumpkin, bacon and ginger;

- The strategy utilised by the MALF to earn foreign exchange involves farmers indicating their produce for export through NAMDEVCO or through demand by a particular country or Member State which would indicate the produce it would like to import;
- The Cross Border Initiative with Guyana is driven by the Citrus Growers Association where 200 out of 1000 acres of land was mobilised to grow citrus;
- The MALF's efforts to increase production levels to CARICOM includes training in Good Agricultural Practices (GAPs) through the National Marketing Development Company Limited (NAMDEVCO);
- The MALF's role in enforcing GAPs and driving the process to increase production levels to CARICOM includes the development of standards with NAMDEVCO;
- Insecurity of land tenure, inadequate labour supply, high cost of production, limited use of grades and standards, lack of implementation of Good Agricultural Practices and praedial larceny are some of the issues affecting the low export of agricultural products;
- The MALF has been producing Market Access Documents which provides detailed conditions to facilitate trade in a particular commodity and also provides basic information on the commodity; and
- The MALFs vision for playing a role in regional integration and CARICOM.

View the Hearing:

The hearing can be viewed on our YouTube page via the following link:

<https://youtu.be/D3U1CRgd54Y>

Contact Information:

You may contact the Committee's Secretary at jscfa@ttparliament.org or 624-7275 Ext. 2828/2317.

Committees Unit
January 25, 2018