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Address by Mr. John Martin, Chairman of the Integrity Commission, at the Seminar on
“Integrity, Ethics and Leadership” at the Hyatt Regency Ballroom, September 17, 2008.

Your Excellency, Professor George Maxwell Richards, President of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, The Honourable Barendra Sinanan, Speaker of the House of Representatives, Senator the Honourable Brigid Annisette-George, Attorney General, Senator the Honourable Mariano Browne, Minister in the Ministry of Finance, The Honourable Orville London, Chief Secretary of the Tobago House of Assembly, Ms. Lynette Stephenson, Ombudsman, Mrs. Sharman Ottley, Auditor General, Permanent Secretaries, Members of the Integrity Commission, Chairmen and Members of the Boards of Statutory Bodies and State Enterprises, other distinguished guests, members of the media, Ladies and Gentlemen.

On behalf of the Integrity Commission I am honoured to welcome this august body to this our first seminar. This seminar has been organized as part of our mandate to educate the public in the understanding of the standards of integrity. We thank you for accepting our invitation and we know that it has meant the rescheduling of some important activities in order to be here and we do appreciate your presence and participation. Let us use today's seminar as a means of getting to understand the requirements of the Integrity in Public Life Act as well as getting to know more about the Integrity Commission and its operations.

Section 138 of the Constitution of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago provides for the establishment of an Integrity Commission. Included among the functions of the Commission are the receiving of declarations from persons in public life, the supervision and monitoring of standards of ethical conduct to be observed by such persons as well as the receipt of complaints and the investigation of conduct, practices and procedures which are dishonest or corrupt. Parliament by Chapter 22:01 of the Laws of Trinidad and Tobago provided the Integrity Commission with the legal directives and instructions for it to achieve its mandate. In passing the Integrity in Public Life Act, 2000 the Parliament was responding to a demand from the public of Trinidad and Tobago for the principles of ethics and accountability to be the foundation on which persons in public life operate.

In looking at various definitions of integrity, certain key words or phrases continue to be used:-

- Strength of character, straightforward, walking the talk, honest, committed, clear and uncompromised value, clarity about what is right and wrong, mature and wise principles, freedom from corrupting influence or motive.

The task then of Persons in Public Life, who are the leaders in different spheres of business operating on behalf of the State, is to lead their respective organizations in alignment with the goals of the nation as outlined by the Government of Trinidad and Tobago in its Vision 2020 Statement. What then is required of you, our leaders?

Leadership as described by many management gurus involves certain basic tenets:

- inspiring individuals to achieve their highest potential;
- motivating people to perform and accomplish the organization's goals.

But is that all that is required, bearing in mind the strong demand for ethics and integrity in the conduct of our nation's business? I daresay no. Our leaders must lead with integrity which therefore goes a stage further. It implies:-

- Matching one's words with one's action i.e. leadership by example;
- Consistency in style and treatment of stakeholders and practicing what one preaches in the enforcement of principles and disciplinary standards
- Lack of undue concern for pomp and popularity but rather a willingness to serve and ensure performance;
- Performing all tasks to the best of one's ability;
- Having the strength of character to admit an error or failure despite the consequences.

The need then is to make our State Enterprises and Statutory Bodies organizations that are led by persons displaying these basic tenets of integrity so that the organizations themselves would operate in a highly ethical manner. Generation of profits to increase the nation's wealth is important but must not be the only focus of these state funded organizations. They must operate efficiently and effectively while being the embodiment of good corporate values and ensuring strict adherence to the laws of the land as well as established policies and procedures that form the framework for good governance. So for example, our State Enterprises will not change prices of items and commodities to suit the client, they will not pollute the environment but rather spend a small percentage of their profits to convert their waste products to non toxic substances, they will be customer focused, they will ensure transparency and fair play in their employment and tendering practices, to name a few.

In its mission statement, the Commission has indicated that it sees itself as the leader “in promoting integrity, reducing corruption and increasing legal compliance among persons in public life, so that public resources are used fairly and for the benefit of all people of our nation”. Therefore, the Commission must itself be a role model for ethical behaviour in public life, the promotion of ethics and morality in public life and in all spheres of activity and the necessary education such as this seminar in support of integrity. The Commission’s core values which underlie its mission statement are openness, accountability, confidentiality (as it relates to declarations and investigations), fairness, impartiality, reliability, adherence to the law, honesty and transparency.

Perhaps what is of great importance to all of you here today is confidentiality. Your concerns about confidentiality have been heard and I can assure you that this was the primary consideration during the design and staffing of the Integrity Commission. All staff at the Commission including the Commissioners take an oath of secrecy; the penalty for this breach is \$250,000.00 AND 10 years imprisonment. In addition, the staff employed for processing and documenting the information are qualified professional accountants so that a breach of the Act would also impact on their professional membership. There is no electronic access to the files so that issues of hacking do not arise. No copies of information are made available to anyone not even the declarants themselves; much to their dismay and that is merely to ensure that nothing provided to us, and stamped as received by us, would re enter the public domain.

The Integrity Commission has been in operation for eighteen years and there has never been a breach of confidentiality.

Our adherence to the rule of law is exhibited in the procedures applied in ensuring compliance with the requirements of the Act for persons filing their declarations. The Law requires the Commission to examine declarations and can then request from the declarant any information or explanation which would assist the Commission in its examination. This is an essential stage because only when the Commission is satisfied that a declaration is fully made can it issue a Certificate of Compliance. When an individual does not file his or her declarations or does not provide the information requested, the Commission is duty bound to take further action with which you are all familiar; publication, applying for an ex parte order of the court to compel the declarant to file etc. All these are costly and time consuming activities which can be avoided by simple adherence to the law by all concerned. The Commission has the courage to do what is right but cares about the outcomes for individuals and hence seeks to achieve compliance by assisting rather than applying the full force of the law. If any of you experience difficulty in filling these forms you only need to call our office and one of our analysts will be only too happy to assist.

You, the declarants are our clients and all our declarants are treated with the same level of respect and we are committed to assisting all of you in ensuring compliance with the Act. Our Compliance Division comprises professionals who provide tremendous support to all declarants seeking assistance to comply with the Act.

We recognize the difficulty which some of you face in providing the information in the specific format required but I would like to assure you that there is an on going review of the process so that as far as possible only material issues in your declaration are addressed. Like all other independent institutions of this nature, any lack of integrity displayed by the staff would result in the loss of trust in the institutions and hence we seek to ensure that the members of staff display the highest level of professionalism and integrity.

Because of the details required in compiling this data and the deadlines for submitting same, the Integrity in Public Life Act 2000 became synonymous with these declarations. However, a broader, all encompassing aspect of the Act is not as well known as the requirement for filing these declarations. This is outlined in Part IV of the Act, the Code of Conduct. This Code of Conduct applies to all persons in public life and those exercising public functions.

The call then is for everyone who receives an income from the public purse to subscribe to this code of conduct and have their behaviour patterned from it. In fact I would exhort all citizens of Trinidad and Tobago to adopt the principles embodied in this Code.

The Code of Conduct seeks to protect public office and positions of public trust from being abused by office holders. It requires these persons to:

- Be fair and impartial in exercising public duty
- Afford no undue preferential treatment to any group or individual
- Arrange one's private interests whether pecuniary or otherwise in such a manner as to maintain public confidence and trust in the integrity of the office holder

If adhered to, this Code of Conduct will assist in providing citizens with a strong Trinidad & Tobago resting on strong, ethically based institutions. The aim then is for us to become aware of our moral duties and responsibilities. Our behaviour must be right, not from a purely legal aspect but also from a moral point of view so that we can earn respect by the display of integrity in all our activities. This is summarized in the Key message of the Integrity Commission which is "DO THE RIGHT THING ALWAYS" and I may add, even if no one is looking.

As the statistics have shown, there are and will continue to be good people in every society and ours is no exception. However, acknowledging that corruption is a symptom of poor administration and mismanagement, the Code of Conduct seeks to prevent public officials from exploiting weaknesses in the management systems to put self above the good of the nation, which is contrary to the essence of what is public service. The Code of Conduct seeks to support honest public officials by putting in place an ethics infrastructure which provides guidance for proper conduct and also punishes misconduct.

It states that:

“A person to whom this part applies shall not:

- Use his office for the improper advancement of his own or his family’s personal or financial interests or the interest of any person;
- Engage in any transaction, acquire any position or have any commercial or other interest that is incompatible with his office or the discharge thereof;
- Use public property or services for activities not related to his official work;
- Directly or indirectly use his office for private gain.”

In closing, I would like to compliment all of you present today and your colleagues who were not able to attend today’s session for your willingness to serve our beloved Trinidad and Tobago as persons in public life. It is essential that people like yourselves continue to contribute to the development of the country by giving of your experience and talent to the various institutions in which you serve. Individually and collectively let us pledge to continue to serve this blessed country of ours with integrity.

I thank you.