



Address by Mr. Kenneth Gordon
Chairman, Integrity Commission of Trinidad and Tobago
at a Forum on the
“Review of the Integrity in Public Life Act”
Hyatt Regency Trinidad
Friday September 21st 2012

Thank you for joining us this morning. We welcome you to the presentation of our proposals to accelerate the fight against corruption.

Our objectives are threefold:-

- Uncovering Corruption
- Maintaining oversight on persons in public life
- Winning wider public support

Commissioner Neil Rolinson will shortly make a PowerPoint Presentation to outline the steps we propose. He was appointed Chairman of the Special Committee that spear headed our Strategic Plan and has worked diligently with his Team since February to bring us to the point where we are ready to consult with you the public. We now seek your criticisms and suggestions.

The problem which confronts us is one which requires coordinated and committed national action and we look forward with great interest to your comments following our presentation. These will then be carefully reviewed and where accepted integrated into the document which will be submitted to the Parliament through the Attorney General.

In a very real way this Consultation is breaking new ground for the public perception of the Integrity Commission does not fit easily into one of dialogue. It's umbrella of confidentiality some would say secrecy

– has not made for easy transparency. But there is a middle road we are intent on finding. One which will on the one hand ensure that we conform with the rigid demands for protecting the confidentiality of people’s affairs. The other that we share with the Community the information that will make it possible to win wider public support when there is a better understanding of how the Commission operates. I nearly said better understanding of the success and failures of the Commission, but then I remember that our failures are already well known.

We were reminded of how such perceived failures are seen by some in the media from comments made by commentators since we launched our public consultation one week ago. It may be instructive to share these with you. Unlike what has traditionally been done in the past which is to stoically accept all criticism without comment, I will begin the search for that middle ground by responding to these comments.

One respected Attorney challenged the Commission’s proposal to widen the net with the caution:

Q. Will the Commissioners themselves be monitored? Who will guard the guards?

A. The answer is that yes, it is recommended in our proposals that the Commissioners too should be required to declare their assets. Their Declarations can be submitted to the President or as Parliament directs. Additionally we have proposed a review and increase in the Schedule of Persons in Public Life.

Q. The impartiality of one of the Commissioners, a relative of the Prime Minister was challenged? Was she recused? Was the question posed.

A. Yes, the Commissioner concerned recused herself from all deliberations on the Vidawatie Newton matter. I emphasise that there was no need for this matter to be addressed by the Commission, the initiative to do so came entirely from the Commissioner.

Q. Using innuendo one daily newspaper referred on a number of occasions in the same article to the recommendations from the Commission as a report from “the two Commissioners” who participated in the Presentation at the Press Conference last Friday.

A. Clearly that newspaper intended to convey the impression that the Commission’s proposals were not the work of the full Commission. Well the answer is that with the exception of one suspended member all Commissioners were involved in the preparation of the document.

Q. A highly respected commentator legitimately requested more information about the reasons for the decision to absolve the Prime Minister from fault in the Vidiawatie Newton matter?

A. Be advised that communication from the Commission to the complainant is always confidential and cannot be released to the Public by the Commission. An outline of the advice given by Senior Counsel has been forwarded to the complainant in accordance with Paragraph 34A (2) (a) (b) of the IPLA. The complainant is of course free to make it public.

Then there was the question about:

Q. The merit/objectivity of the Commission's ruling on the same matter?

A. The Commission was guided by the advice of Senior Counsel in arriving at its decision.

Q. Complaint about bitter and public stand off between Chairman and Deputy Chairman?

A. The “stand off” as it was referred to was between the Commission (not Chairman) and the Deputy Chairman and this is an adjudication of the Court. As much as it is to be regretted, this action was unavoidable given the Commissioners oath of office and our commitment to do the right thing.

Q. Fixing the Integrity Commission before widening the net?

A. Corruption involves the dishonest or preferential use of power or position which has the result of one person or organization being advantaged over another. The Integrity Commission is seeking through this review exercise to bring our anti corruption measures in line with international best practice. The sixteen (16) recommendations speak for themselves. If we are concerned about fighting corruption this cannot await a verification process.

I hope the foregoing makes the point. Whenever there is legitimate criticism the Commission will respond appropriately wherever this can be done without compromising the Commission's wider role, its staff or indeed the guidelines of professional journalism and fairness.

In fact the Commission welcomes the opportunity to respond to such questions. Media reports frequently signal doubts, and doubts raise suspicions. Too often in the past such uncertainty has eroded confidence and this we intend to change.

On behalf of the Commissioners and employees of the Integrity Commission I thank you for responding positively to our invitation to be here this morning. We look forward to your comments on our presentation.

I now invite Commissioner Rolingson to make a Power Point Presentation on our proposals.

INTEGRITY COMMISSION OF TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO

September 21st 2012.