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## **Time to review the Integrity in Public Life Act**

The Integrity Commission of Trinidad and Tobago is seeking to review and strengthen the Integrity in Public Life Act (IPLA) in an attempt to make the Commission more effective in its fight against corruption. The objectives of the Commission's proposals are threefold:-

- Uncovering corruption
- Maintaining oversight on persons in public life and
- Winning wider public support.

Chairman Kenneth Gordon at a news conference unveiled the Commission's recommendations on September 13, 2012.

One week later, the Commissioners held a public consultation at the Hyatt Regency on for over 150 key stakeholders who head business groups, state boards and government agencies. Additionally, members of the Commission presented proposals for reform of the IPLA to the Trinidad and Tobago Transparency Institute (TTTI), the Chief Secretary and a team from Tobago House of Assembly and representatives of the Auditor General department.

Chairman Gordon restated the importance of collaboration. He said: "The problem which confronts us is one which requires coordinated and committed national action and we look forward with great interest to your comments." The Commission is committed to collaborate and dialogue with persons at all levels as we review and strengthen the Integrity in Public Life Act.

The Commission is treating the revision of the Integrity in Public Life Act (IPLA) as an issue of priority and intends to hold a series of public consultation throughout the country.

The following is a summary of recommendations which the Integrity Commission wishes to include in the Integrity in Public Life Act:

- **Financial disclosure**
- The electronic submission of declaration forms

- The issuance of acknowledgement letters, with the caveat that the declaration be subject to audit
- To levy fines and penalties on organizations that fail to comply with the Commission's request for and /or confirmation of information in respect of the audit of a declaration
- The power to levy fines and penalties on declarants who do not file declarations
- Amend declaration forms to make them more effective at uncovering corruption and conflicts of interest including disclosure of contributions to political parties
- An increase in the minimum limit for disclosure from \$10,000. to \$25,000. per asset/liability excluding investments and credit card balances
- The statement of net worth should be made mandatory instead of at the discretion of the declarant
- More specific criteria and guidelines for the setting up of a Blind Trust as stated in section 22(b)
- Section 22 (b) to be amended to include a sanction for failing to comply with the Commission's instructions to place assets in a Blind Trust
- Provision for restraint orders to be imposed upon the use of the proceeds of Blind Trust in certain circumstances

**Create a specific portion of the Act to focus on the examination of public bodies**

- There should be penalties for breaches of the Code of Conduct
- Review the role of the Tribunal in the examination of declarations and widen its applicability to investigations
- Facilitate the confidential reporting of corrupt practices in institutions by public officers
- Spell out the enforcement of the powers to summon witnesses in investigations
- Enhanced provisions for the protection of whistle blowers
- Widen the investigative powers of the Commission to include search and seizure
- Review the Schedule of Persons in Public Life
- Remove constraints that prevent the application of the IPLA to judges and magistrates
- Review the list of persons exercising public functions to include all organizations that handle public money
- Amend the IPLA to facilitate the exchange of information with other crime fighting agencies

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