



**MEDIA RELEASE
STATEMENT OF THE INTEGRITY COMMISSION**

IN RESPONSE TO QUESTIONS POSED BY A MEMBER OF THE MEDIA

22 November, 2021: The Chairman of the Integrity Commission has recently had an enquiry made of him by a member of the media, regarding, among other things, a turnover of staff at the Commission.

While the Commission completely understands that the public has an interest in what takes place within the organisation, it must nevertheless be mindful of engaging in a public discussion as to what takes place during the day-to-day management of its affairs. Accordingly, the Commission has decided to make this general statement on the various issues which have been raised with the Chairman.

Members of the Commission, upon their appointment, each undertook to discharge their duties and responsibilities in accordance with the provisions of the Integrity in Public Life Act. No member has received directions from anyone, upon taking up such appointment, as to what he or she is to do, once appointed. Members are guided by the duties and responsibilities prescribed in the Act.

The Chairman of the Commission, upon his appointment, raised with his fellow Commissioners, the many concerns, and negative opinions, which had been canvassed in the media by various concerned citizens over the years, regarding the effectiveness of the Commission in discharging its statutory functions. Among those expressing concerns over the years, is the current Prime Minister of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, who expressed certain views when he was Leader of the Opposition. No greater weight has been given to those views, than to those expressed by other concerned citizens over the years.

In response to matters raised by the Chairman, Commission members unanimously agreed to review the general operations of the Commission's main statutory functions, namely the overseeing of the filing of declarations of income, assets and liabilities, the filing of statements of registrable interests by persons in public life and the investigation of complaints of acts of misconduct by persons in public life and persons exercising public functions. The agreed objective was to ensure full and complete compliance with the provisions of the Integrity in Public Life Act. The previous Commission had already identified concerns regarding non-compliance, by persons in public life, with the provisions of the Act, and had formulated a policy for addressing those concerns.

Commission members examined the Commission's organisational structure to determine what better optimal use could be made of its human resources and reviewed the Commission's organisational processes and the existing organisational culture as regards performance-based production. Various areas of improvement were identified, and the Commission has spent the greater part of 2021 trying to transform the organisation so as to ensure fulfilment of its statutory mandate.

The Commission has had to work with an annual budget which since 2015, has been reduced by around 60%. The Commission recognises that working with reduced financial resources is not a challenge which is unique to the Commission. The reality, however, is that the staffing complement of the Commission's Compliance Unit had been reduced from 2017 by almost 70%. Despite the said constraints, the Commission has successfully filed *ex parte* proceedings in 2021 with respect to over 500 outstanding declarations from 2014 in pursuit of its objective of ensuring full and complete compliance with the provisions of the Integrity in Public Life Act.

The Commission has since increased staffing in its Compliance Unit and has restructured the Investigations Unit with the introduction of a mixture of young professionals and experienced investigators.

The Commission has sought to involve staff in its change management philosophy and to remind them of the serious nature of the statutory mandate entrusted to the Commission. In the course of implementing the said change in organisational culture, the Commission has solicited the views of the Head of the Public Service and the Chief Personnel Officer and has sought and obtained the advice of the Solicitor General, so as to ensure that its actions are consistent with the laws of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago. The Commission believes that all of its actions and decisions are consistent with the advice which it has received.

The Commission has received buy-in regarding its organisational changes from some members of its staff, but not from all. Six members of staff who were on short term contracts have left the organisation of their own free will. The contract of one short term employee was not renewed due to organisational changes. The Commission has, in one instance, been constrained to request the re-assignment of a member of the Public Service, who was only recently assigned to the Commission. This was due solely to the organisational changes which the Commission has made. Regrettably, the Commission was also constrained to initiate disciplinary proceedings against another member of the Public Service.

Change management is never an easy process. The Commission respects the right of persons who are uncomfortable with change, to choose a course which does not involve adjusting to the unfamiliarity of a changed environment. But change is necessary, if improvement is to be made in discharging the Commission's statutory mandate.

The course upon which the Commission has embarked in the last 11 months has, at all times, been collectively made and unanimously agreed upon by its members. As a single united body, the Integrity Commission stands firmly behind its decisions. The Commission's members are striving to discharge their duties and responsibilities faithfully, in accordance with their oath, and with the provisions of the Integrity in Public Life Act.