

REMARKS BY

CARL A. FRANCIS  
PERMANENT SECRETARY  
ON BEHALF OF  
SENATOR THE HON. MARIANO BROWNE  
MINISTER OF TRADE & INDUSTRY

AT THE

**“BREAKFAST OF OPPORTUNITIES” -  
CARIBBEAN GROUP OF YOUTH BUSINESS  
PROGRAMMES**

7:30 AM,  
FRIDAY 17<sup>TH</sup> JULY, 2009

CROWNE PLAZA  
PORT OF SPAIN

- Mr. Richard Young, Chairman, Youth Business Trinidad and Tobago,
- Mr. Garland Samuel, Executive Director, Youth Business Trinidad and Tobago,
- Mr. Steve Metcalfe, Communications, Youth Business International,
- Mr. David Clarke, Founder Caribbean Business Trusts,
- Ms. Marcia Brandon, Executive Director, Barbados Youth Business Trust,
- Specially Invited Guests,
- Ladies and Gentlemen.

It gives me great pleasure today to speak to you this morning at this very important event for the discussion of business opportunities for the youth of our region. I make these remarks this morning in the absence of Senator the Hon. Mariano Brown, Minister of Trade and Industry who is unable to be here as he originally planned, due to commitments that arose out of the country. He has asked me to convey his regret for not being here and has also asked me to convey his best wishes for the success of your event. He is away discussing issues pertinent to regional trade which would certainly create a trading environment that leads to further opportunities for the development of our region's youth.

In reviewing your programme, I note that participants include representatives from Barbados, Jamaica and Belize Youth Business organizations, as well as Youth Business International. This session is therefore a meeting of minds, no doubt to share experiences and expertise towards the development of our young people at the national, regional and global levels.

Let me say at the outset that there is no greater task for a nation than the development of its young people. Its young are its replacement factor and must be developed to carry the baton when the current sprinters come to the end of their running potential. Indeed the task is always for them to run the race better than their predecessors have run before, to better performances and to break records. I am sure that today is about setting the stage for many a record to be broken and many a performance to be bettered.

Some may argue that the next generation may be in a precarious position given the current trends. Many of us are also quite concerned about the underperformance of our male youth. However, we cannot sit idly by and allow the current trends to be perpetuated. We see many of our young people engaging in dangerous activities, or being profoundly materialistic, or having questionable values and we recognize the need to take action that is either pre-emptive or ameliorative.

As parents, older siblings, elder representatives of the community, etc., many of us must re-examine our level of interaction with our

youth, the effect of our own conduct on them and the messages which we constantly convey. We must better help our youth to take their place as leaders of tomorrow, for tomorrow promises to be challenging by all accounts.

This is why the work of Youth Business International and the local arm in Trinidad and Tobago is so critical. By providing young persons access to resources and guidance, you are creating the framework for them to achieve their greatest potential. What strikes me in particular about the programmes to be offered, is not just the financial backing provided or the partnerships with the local business community, but the mentorship element of the initiative.

I will not be surprised if this component of the programme has the greatest impact on participants. The literature has shown that mentoring from the first entry into the school system, through tertiary education and within the business environment, creates value of exponential proportions.

According to the most recent data, 18 percent of our population fall between 20 and 29 years of age and their contribution to the total labour force in Trinidad and Tobago is just over 30 percent. This demonstrates the importance of the role of young persons in the sustainable economic development of the country. When I speak of sustainable economic development, I speak of one of the primary responsibilities of the Ministry of Trade and Industry. We have been mandated to generate economic growth by promoting and developing

trade and trade-related activities, driving industrial diversification and investment, particularly in the non-energy manufacturing and services sectors. This also includes ensuring that the necessary regulatory framework and enabling environment are in place to facilitate trade, investment and business.

How does this relate to Youth in Business? How does the Ministry's mandate impact on the issues that are on the agenda of today's session? You would recall that along with our public and private sector stakeholders and various trade related institutions, we have responsibility for the business environment in which you function or will function. In addition, since we support and advance trade and investment and the development of business, the welfare of our youth and the manner in which they are groomed continues to be of extreme importance to us.

While we have several initiatives on our agenda at the macro and micro policy formulation levels, we are also committed to supporting activities which encourage more people to go into business. I speak of young people in this current instance. We are at work on the development of trade agreements, the opening of new markets and the winning of new investments, not only for those who are in business today but those who will take the reins tomorrow -Our youth.

One of our most recent initiatives involves partnering with academia to promote entrepreneurship, through sponsorship of the University of Trinidad and Tobago's (UTT) Annual Business Plan Competition. A

number of young people participated in this year's competition and the business future certainly looks bright for those who participated. The competition was open to students enrolled in programmes in Industrial Innovation, Entrepreneurship and Management at the UTT Centre for Production and its net was expanded to the wider UTT community to ensure that the students' submissions were able to compete with a full range of entrants.

In general, the University of Trinidad and Tobago offers young people a range of industry specific courses in technical and non-technical fields which are geared towards self-enhancement and self-employment. This encourages us at the Ministry of Trade and Industry for it speaks to the development of entrepreneurship, which is the key ingredient for the success of an economy be it first world or emerging. The programmes of the UWI and the wide range of national tertiary educators also point to a higher level of achievement in the years ahead.

We are equally encouraged by the range of other programmes available across the national landscape. At the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources, for example there is the Youth Apprenticeship in Agriculture Program (YAPPA), in which young people between 18 to 25 are introduced to the basics of agri-business as a possible career option. The youth entrepreneurship programmes that exist elsewhere and the efforts to provide youth with on the job training is also testimony to government's focus on development of youth to participate in or to give support to business.

These types of programmes are particularly important, now that Trinidad and Tobago, like the rest of the world is experiencing the effects of a global economic slowdown. We need to encourage more people - youth and citizens of all ages - to go into business, develop entrepreneurial skills, become more self-sufficient and self-reliant. With fifteen consecutive years of economic growth under our belt, the recent fall in oil and gas prices has made it quite clear that our long term economic stability is highly dependent on our ability to diversify the economy.

All of this points again to the critical role which programmes of this nature play in national development. Your effort to drive youth entrepreneurship and reduce youth unemployment is directly linked to the Ministry's mandate and by extension the Government's commitment to ensure that youth participate fully in the development of Trinidad and Tobago, as it seeks to promote entrepreneurship and by doing so transform the economy, making it more diverse and knowledge-based and ensuring that we compete even more successfully on the global stage.

I encourage you to delve deeply into areas such as the non-energy services sector. This sector has been contributing almost 50 percent of gross domestic product over the period 2006 to 2008 and has been growing at an average rate of 5 percent over the same period. In addition to sectors such as finance, tourism and information and

communication technology, there are significant opportunities opening up in the creative industries – film, music, entertainment; food and beverage; printing and packaging and agriculture, as I mentioned previously.

This is a very exciting time to be a young person. The world is yours for the taking, with barriers falling daily it is imperative that you learn as much as possible in the shortest time possible and take advantage of all the opportunities for growth and development which come your way. This is the time, for example, to learn another language, as your competition will not be only on the local but on the regional and international arena. You cannot afford to be unable to communicate in the language of your major marketplaces in this highly demanding global environment. While English remains the language of business, we all know the benefits of transacting with a partner or a competitor in his or her own language. The understanding of language exposes the cultural idiosyncrasies which are often essential to the closing of many a deal.

Ladies and Gentlemen, on behalf of the Honourable Mariano Browne and my colleagues at the Ministry of Trade and Industry, I wish you all success in your deliberations today. To Youth Business Trinidad and Tobago and the Caribbean Group of Youth Business programmes, I wish you continued success as you endeavour to achieve your goals and objectives and contribute to the development of our region as a whole. And to you the youth of today and the

captains of industry and/or administrators of tomorrow, I say the world is there for the taking. Please grasp it with both hands.

I thank you.