

**REMARKS BY THE HONOURABLE MINISTER OF
PUBLIC UTILITIES AND THE ENVIRONMENT ON
THE OCCASION OF THE LAUNCH OF
INFORMATIONAL MATERIAL ON THE
ENVIRONMENTAL COMMISSION**

February 23, 2005

Dr. Eugene Laurent, Commissioner, Environmental Commission and Chair of today's proceedings

His Excellency, Professor Maxwell Richards, President of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago

Dr. Winston Anderson, General Council to CARICOM

Her Honor Sandra Paul, Chairman of the Environmental Commission

Her Honor Indira Ramrekersingh, Deputy Chairman of the Environmental Commission and other Commissioners

Mr. Martin Daly

Members of the Media

Ladies and Gentlemen

As Minister with responsibility for the environment, it is a great pleasure to be here to make some brief remarks on the occasion of the launch of the Environmental Commission's logo, website and information material.

I am sure that all of you here this morning will agree that proper management of the natural environment of Trinidad and Tobago is vital to our overall socio-economic growth and the health of our citizens. The environment impinges on every aspect of our lives, from the quality of the air we breathe, to the water we drink. In this regard, sustainable development encompassing the protection and conservation of the environment continues to be a major plank of the Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago's long-term strategic plan of attaining developed country status by the year 2020.

To this end, the Ministry has sought to put in place an appropriate institutional and legal framework for the protection of the environment. The enactment of the Environmental Management Act which established the Environmental Management Authority (EMA) in 1995 and the Environmental Commission which became operational in 2000 are just two examples of the many initiatives in the areas of policy development, legislation and institution building.

The enactment of the Environmental Management Act provided the basis for the introduction of an orderly regime for the administration of over one hundred pieces of legislation relating to the environment. The Environmental Management Authority has responsibility to coordinate, facilitate and oversee execution of an effective environmental regulatory programme, to promote public awareness and develop an effective environmental regulatory programme.

Ladies and Gentlemen, as a result of the regulatory function bestowed upon the Environmental Management Authority, there arose a need for a specialized judicial body to which the decisions and actions of the Environmental Management Authority may be challenged. To this end, the Environmental Commission was established on October 30, 2000 with appellate jurisdiction with respect to decisions of the Environmental Management Authority. The Environmental Commission is therefore a Superior Court of Record and is the first specialized environmental court in the history of Trinidad and Tobago and indeed the Caribbean region.

The Environmental Commission has been in existence for just over four years, however very little is known publicly about its functions and operations. It is in this context that I wish to congratulate and express my appreciation and support to the efforts of the Environmental Commission to develop a package of information materials including brochures, booklets and a video designed to inform the public about the Commission, its functions, powers and jurisdiction.

This information package is an important step in empowering the public to access the services of the Environmental Commission. In this regard, I am especially pleased with today's launch as an initiative which is intended to improve the

provision of service to the public of Trinidad and Tobago in respect of the environment. This focus on quality services is the goal of my own Ministry and is integral to our own strategic direction and I am pleased to be here today to endorse similar initiatives of the Environmental Commission which is a key partner of the Ministry in the protection of the environment.

In fact, I would like to take this opportunity to briefly share with you the legislative agenda of the Ministry as it relates to the environment which impacts on the jurisdiction of the Commission which may provide some additional insight into the services of the Commission.

The Commission exercises appellate jurisdiction as conferred upon it by the Environmental Management Act including subsidiary legislation under the Act. The subsidiary legislation that has been enacted to date under the Act are:

- The Certificate of Environmental Clearance Rules, 2001
- The Certificate of Environmental Clearance (Fees and Charges) Regulations, 2001
- The Certificate of Environmental Clearance (Designated Activities) Order, 2001
- The Noise Pollution Control Rules, 2001
- The Noise Pollution Control (Fees) Regulations, 2001
- The Environmental Sensitive Areas Rules, 2001, and
- The Environmental Sensitive Species Rules, 2001

Ladies and Gentlemen, although the subsidiary legislation under the Environmental Management Act that has been enacted provides for the protection of certain aspects of the environment in a fairly comprehensive manner, there are still some critical gaps. Some of the priority areas for the Ministry relate to water and air pollution and non-hazardous and hazardous waste management.

These pieces of legislation which include the Water Pollution Rules, Air Pollution Rules and the Beverage Container Deposit Bill will be brought before the

Parliament once the National Environment Policy which is currently being revised, is itself laid in Parliament. The process of revising the policy is well advanced and it is expected that it would be laid in Parliament this year.

The dynamism in the development of the legislative framework related to the environment makes the launch of the Environmental Commission's information package all the more important and timely and also emphasizes the need for more and continuously upgraded information to be made available to the public of Trinidad and Tobago with respect to laws pertaining to the environment.

In closing, I therefore again extend my congratulations to the Environmental Commission and thank them for their commitment to play a role in public education and awareness on environmental matters.

I wish you every success in this public information initiative.

Thank you.