



Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago
Ministry of Foreign and CARICOM Affairs

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8th December, 2021

Mrs. Jacqui Sampson-Meiguel
Clerk of the House
Parliamentary Complex
Cabildo Building
St. Vincent Street
Port of Spain

Dear Clerk of the House,

The First Report of the Joint Select Committee on Foreign Affairs on an Inquiry
To Examine the Foreign Policy of Trinidad and Tobago

I refer to your letter of 15th July, 2021 on the subject at caption and the request therein to present a written response to the recommendations/comments contained in the Report.

In this regard, I forward the enclosed response of the Ministry of Foreign and CAROICOM Affairs to the recommendations/comments of the Committee, as contained in the Report. The delay in transmitting the response is deeply regretted.

Yours faithfully,

Reita G. Toussaint
Permanent Secretary (Ag.)

**First Report on an Inquiry to Examine the
Foreign Policy of Trinidad and Tobago**

**Response of the Minister of Foreign and CARICOM Affairs to the
Recommendations of the Joint Select Committee on Foreign Affairs**

Recommendations

4.12 The Committee therefore recommends that the Ministry:

- i. Review and update its foreign policy taking into account the changes in the internal and external environment; technological improvements; and, where relevant, the recommendations made by the Committee appointed to undertake a review of Trinidad and Tobago's foreign policy in 2006; and*
- ii. Institute a periodical review system to ensure that its policies and strategies remain current and relevant.*

The Ministry of Foreign and CARICOM Affairs acknowledges that considerable time has elapsed since the last exercise undertaken to review the Foreign Policy of Trinidad and Tobago. Events during the last two years also confirm that there are elements of the Foreign Policy of Trinidad and Tobago and, more so, its implementation strategies, that would benefit from review.

Appropriate action will be taken to initiate a review, schedule periodic review and undertake intermittent review as required based on the need to make adjustments based on the operating environment, to ensure that the policies and strategies are current and relevant.

4.52 The Committee recommends that the Ministry:

- i. Develop measurable indices to assess the effectiveness of the Ministry's activities and the effectiveness of Foreign Policy measures;*
- ii. Develop and implement a Monitoring and Evaluation Plan to systematically collect, analyse and use data to assess the Ministry's performance and monitor the Ministry's progress in achieving its objectives;*
- iii. Establish a timeframe for the completion of the Ministry's restructuring and report same to the Parliament;*

- iv. Implement a schedule for the regular maintenance of the Ministry's properties both at Headquarters and abroad;*
- v. Ensure that a property rationalization system is in place at the Ministry to assist decision making regarding the acquisition, lease and sale of properties belonging to the Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago overseas;*
- vi. Fill the position of Inspector of Missions and report to the Committee the name of the person who occupies the role;*
- vii. Complete the Work Programme of the Facilities Manager and submit same to the Committee;*
- viii. Develop and implement a policy for the communication of sensitive information;*
- ix. Develop a communications strategy which:*
 - a. promotes Trinidad and Tobago on all media platforms,*
 - b. addresses negative comments made on social media about Trinidad and Tobago, and*
 - c. educates the citizenry on the work of the Ministry, including the benefits of multilateralism;*
- x. Complete and implement its policy on the Diaspora and report same to Parliament;*
- xi. Expand the registration system for nationals abroad to capture information on talent and/or skills of the diaspora;*
- xii. Deepen its engagement with the diaspora and expand the services available to members of the diaspora;*
- xiii. Liaise with the Ministry of the Attorney General and Legal Affairs to ensure that Trinidad and Tobago meets its international obligations, as well as support the removal of Trinidad and Tobago from the EU blacklist;*
- xiv. Promote the importance of economic diplomacy to Heads of Mission to assist them in leveraging Trinidad and Tobago's overseas missions to attract investment, tourism and other economic opportunities;*
- xv. Intensify its work in advancing the CARICOM Single Market and Economy (CSME) to improve the movement of services, persons, capital and technology within the region; and*
- xvi. Liaise with other government agencies to ensure and monitor the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in Trinidad and Tobago, in line with the global development agenda*

The Committee's recommendations are duly noted. The need to develop measurable indices is understood, acknowledged and recognised by the Ministry as an essential element to the monitoring, implementation and measurement of success and progress.

All necessary and possible action will be taken in the Ministry's engagement to promote Trinidad and Tobago as an attractive location for investment, tourism and other economic activities.

Funds permitting, the Registration System for Nationals Abroad will be expanded to permit the system to capture the additional information to facilitate a more productive relationship with the Diaspora. Initiatives will also be developed to deepen and enhance engagement with the Trinidad and Tobago diaspora.

Current services provided and means of service delivery will be reviewed with a view to upgrading, updating and expanding, where feasible, such service delivery.

With regard to the CARICOM Single Market and Economy (CSME), with the assistance of the Ministry of Digital Transformation, the Ministry of Foreign and CARICOM Affairs has already begun to improve the service through the implementation of a digitization programme designed to capture data and enhance the Ministry's ability to formulate policy. The Ministry has also launched e-Appointment and live chat platforms to facilitate the provision of information on the CSME 7 days a week and to allow members of the public to request in-person or virtual appointments. An automated CSME application system and an online payment portal will also be pursued.

The Ministry will also liaise with the pertinent Government entities to address the other issues raised in the recommendations. Work continues on the Diaspora Policy with the next phase being public consultation, which is anticipated to be completed by the end of January 2021.

4.74 The Committee recommends that the Ministry:

- i. Recruit another cohort of International Relations Officers immediately to address the shortage in staff;*
- ii. Impress upon the Service Commissions Department its staffing shortages and develop a proactive strategy to manage staff levels at the Ministry;*
- iii. Formulate a succession plan which would ensure that vital positions are not vacant for lengthy periods;*
- iv. Ensure that staff posted at missions, including administrative staff, are well suited to perform the required duties;*
- v. Ensure sufficient staffing at missions to accommodate the volume of work required to provide services to the diaspora;*

- vi. Rotate Foreign Service Officers regularly to ensure that they are multilingual, exposed to culturally dissimilar environments and never lose touch with national concerns;*
- vii. Clarify the responsibilities of all levels of staff (professional and administrative) at Missions;*
- viii. Clarify the roles of the Head of Mission and the Head of Chancery with persons appointed to these positions understanding both roles and the need for cooperation and communication between these two offices;*
- ix. Ensure that there is a smooth transition for Heads of Missions and that they are fully supported by staff at the Mission;*
- x. Establish a policy that all Heads of Mission be provided with a letter clearly outlining:*
 - a. the conditions of service,*
 - b. a desk manual indicating the relationship, roles and responsibilities between the various staff at the Missions, and*
 - c. entitlements and emoluments including non-cash emoluments at their time of departure interview; and*
- xi. Pursue the conclusion of agreements between the Government of Trinidad and Tobago and the Governments of the receiving states permitting spouses of Officers to find employment.*

The Ministry of Foreign and CARICOM Affairs continues to liaise with the relevant Government agencies with regard to the filling of vacant positions of Foreign Service Officer I. An exercise to rationalise the overall need for officers at this level, including International Relations Officers, will be undertaken in the context of the ongoing consideration for the restructuring of the Ministry of Foreign and CARICOM Affairs.

There is an appreciation for the need for officers to be rotated regularly to avoid undue service at any one location. Proper succession planning will be instituted, restrictions of the system of promotion and unpredictability of attrition in the Civil Service notwithstanding.

The challenges with ensuring adequate readiness of officers for posting and availability of staff for overseas assignment will be examined holistically with a view to finding workable solutions, including more timely training of officers and exposure to practical experience, as far as possible, to enhance learning.

Periodically, information will be provided to Missions to reinforce previous directives regarding the responsibilities of staff overseas, to avoid misunderstanding and to ensure the smooth operation overseas, particularly as it relates to the relationship

between and separation of roles, responsibilities and authority of the Head of Mission and the Head of Chancery.

The Ministry will continue to provide Heads of Mission with information on their role, responsibilities and entitlements prior to their departure to assume duty at post.

Ministry of Foreign and CARICOM Affairs
December 2021