



Feature Address by:

THE HON. CAROLYN SEEPERSAD-BACHAN
Minister of Public Administration
Member of Parliament for San Fernando West

Trinidad and Tobago Diamond Standard Certification Programme

Inaugural Awards Ceremony

Queen's Hall, St. Ann's, Port of Spain.
Wednesday 21 January, 2015 | 5 to 9 p.m.

SALUTATIONS [ALL PROTOCOLS OBSERVED]

The Honourable Kamla Persad-Bissessar SC — Prime Minister of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago

The Honourable the Chief Justice — Mr. Justice Ivor Archie

Senator, the Honorable Vasant Bharath — Minister of Trade, Investments & Communications

Mr. Reynold Cooper — Permanent Secretary to the Prime Minister and Head of the Public Service

Ms. Gillian MacIntyre — Permanent Secretary Ministry of Public Administration

Permanent Secretaries and Heads of Departments

The Chairman and Members of the Trinidad and Tobago Diamond Standard Independent Advisory Panel

Other Senior Government officials

Mr. Amer Haidar — Honorary Consul to Lebanon

Team Members of TTDS Participating Agencies

Members of the Media

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen...

*“There is a tide in the affairs of men.
Which, taken at the flood, leads on to fortune;
Omitted, all the voyage of their life
Is bound in shallows and in miseries.
On such a full sea are we now afloat,
And we must take the current when it serves,
Or lose our ventures...”*

These words from Shakespeare’s *JULIUS CAESAR* speak about the importance of timing — whether in management or politics — and how vital it is for us to recognize and read the situations in which we find ourselves, and to take advantage of the opportunities fleetingly presented.

In 2012, such an opportunity arose for transforming the public service into a twenty-first century citizen-centric organization, one which delivers the highest quality goods and services in the shortest possible time and at the lowest possible cost...

This came about because of the convergence of five key forces that previously were not all present at the same time.

The first of these is the rising tide of citizen demand for value for money, and their desire to actively participate in the process of excellence in service delivery.

The second is that all public servants are citizens who want opportunities to rise, to lead and to be the best they can be. They are not afraid, because of their conviction that with transformation come greater benefits, opportunities and advantages; and already, they are reaching out to that brave new world which will be theirs to own and operate, enjoy and share. They know that with greater autonomy comes greater accountability, but they are not daunted.

The third force is the growing availability of ICTs that are turning night into day for us. It is now well established that e-government spurs the innovation of new services and the transformation of existing ones, through re-engineering of business processes. People can deal with people and the machines can deal with processes. Red tapes will give way to green lights and our response or turn-around time will be much shorter.

The fourth is the political will that is clearly evident in the leadership of our Government. Our Prime Minister set the tone by insisting that our primary focus should be on serving the people... Hence our commitment to the 24/7 never-ending task of working on your behalf...

The fifth imperative is leadership, not just at the Governmental or Ministerial levels, but at all levels of management in the public service itself, particularly the Ministry of Public Administration. We are charged with facilitating and steering the process during and along the **Journey from Gold to Diamond**, which was launched in 2012 – our Golden Anniversary – and will deliver before 2022 – our Diamond Jubilee.

Today’s world is volatile and uncertain; our societies and economies are hyper connected. 20th century tools and solutions are no longer equal to the task. Increasingly, the business of Trinidad and Tobago is growing our business houses, and the Public Service has a crucial role in improving our national competitiveness and the ease of doing business. Whether their economic endeavour is in Energy,

Services or Manufacturing, failure by the Public Service to get these fundamentals right would cause all the voyages of our lives to be bound “in shallows and in miseries...”

The Gold to Diamond Journey was born out of recognition of this reality, and is based on three major thrusts.

Firstly... The move towards modern organisational structures and systems, including the **Diamond Shaped Human Resource Management Architecture**, embedded with re-engineered processes for **Open Government** initiatives and **Results Based Management**, thus allowing the modern public officer to be empowered and innovative.

Secondly... Rising above the silos under which we currently operate, **Shared Backend Support Services** will facilitate work across multiple boundaries and involve many participants in addressing complex issues — including the private sector, NGOs and citizens themselves as co-creators and co-producers, to achieve better results at lower costs.

Thirdly... **The No Wrong Door Approach**, allowing access to public services anytime and anywhere, via our smart devices, computers, or even public spaces not too far from one’s doorstep.

This trinity of forces is at the heart of the **Trinidad and Tobago Diamond Standard Certification Programme**. This is the accelerant, the impetus, the flagship of the transformation that we are celebrating here this evening.

It was launched in June 2013, with thirty four government agencies registering as participants. There are three main phases on the road to the Diamond Standard. The first involves the formulation of a **Customer Service Charter** and a **Service Implementation Plan**, while the second phase concentrates on implementing this Plan. In the final phase, an independent assessment is conducted in accordance with the following eight criteria, as we heard from the Chairman of the Independent Advisory Panel. These eight criteria are: **Customer Involvement and Understanding; Communications; Promoting a Customer Service Culture; Responsiveness and Service Standards; The Service Environment; Innovation and Creativity; Technology; and Partnerships.**

These criteria and their sub-criteria were formulated in response to weaknesses identified in our own online research surveys, and successive editions of the World Economic Forum’s *Global Competitiveness Report* and World Bank’s *Ease of Doing Business Report*, all towards improving our ranking in these indices.

Each step of the way, the Ministry of Public Administration worked with each Service Improvement Team, guiding and assisting them on the road to success.

After Phases One and Two in this First Cohort, twenty of the 34 pilots applied for assessment and underwent rigorous evaluation, critique, and adjustments of their service delivery operations and mechanisms, measuring their progress against the previously agreed to high-water marks of excellence. We heard the Chairman of the Independent Advisory Panel speak to this.

This evening, we are awarding the Diamond Standard Certificate to the eleven Service Agencies who were successful in their bid, during this First Cohort. **I am pleased to announce that 45 agencies have registered for the Second Cohort of the Diamond Standard Certification Programme.**

I am indeed proud that there was great buy-in from all levels of staff striving for the Diamond Standard in their operations, as well as from the members of the public accessing those services. As the Chairman of the Independent Advisory Panel observed, it was this buy-in, from the lower ranks to the middle management to the top leadership, which made the Diamond Standard achievable. Organisation leaders learnt what it meant to be in the frontline; frontline officers teamed up with middle management and top leadership to re-engineer the way they delivered their respective Government services. Citizens were engaged in the process and provided invaluable feedback to help with the re-design of work-flows and processes, and in some cases, these citizens assisted with their implementation.

Soon, the eleven successful Service Agencies will take their rightful place on stage this evening, to claim their awards and enjoy their moment of glory and well-earned accolades, which hopefully will characterise the work of their organisations now and forever more.

Remember, this is not a competition. This is a standard which these organisations have worked hard towards, and met, and in some cases, even exceeded. Their Certificates will be valid for three years, after which, they will be required to re-apply for re-certification. Awardees are encouraged to continue seeking new heights in service excellence; even re-engineer their processes to ensure they remain dynamic and responsive. Should a Service Agency fail to maintain the required standards of service delivery, certification can be withdrawn at any time and we are fully prepared to do so, in the interests of our citizens and the reputation of our Diamond Standard brand. Given that diamonds are forever, this Standard is here to stay. **We are determined that all Government Service Agencies achieve the Diamond Standard.**

The Chairman of the Independent Advisory Panel spoke to the issue of “Micro” vs “Macro” and the Bottom Up Approach. The design of this certification programme and the G2D Journey is based on the Bottom Up and Micro Approaches, in order to ensure they are doable, implementable and achievable by public officers, in collaboration with stakeholders and members of the public. Indeed, I am very optimistic that through this flagship Diamond Standard Certification Programme, and our G2D Journey, we are laying a solid foundation in the Public Service with our new breed of officers, with the capability to execute transformation themselves, and with the steady hands necessary for guiding our economy through the challenges of the 21st century...

Ladies and Gentlemen, there are many people whose commitment, support, cooperation and hard work are responsible for where we are today. We cannot identify and thank them all, but I think it is only fitting that I recognise the following groups...

Firstly, to the **Service Improvement Teams** of the participating 34 Service Agencies in this First Cohort... There were some extremely interesting findings from this experience which convince me that the future of the Public Service is in capable hands, and that the transformation already is taking place. There was a level of creativity displayed that was astonishing. Staff looked at non-monetary mechanisms to enhance their service, and demonstrated commitment by working after hours and on Saturdays and Sundays. This is an extremely mature and propitious stance.

On behalf of myself, the Permanent Secretary and the Ministry of Public Administration, we sincerely thank you. You not only encouraged us, but inspired us. Your sharing, especially in our Call Back Sessions, will assist us to further improve the Diamond Certification Programme for the benefit of future cohorts. You are our Pioneers! The importance of your contribution will go down in history, and for this, you deserve a round of applause...

We would like to thank the staff of the Ministry of Public Administration's **Public Service Transformation Division**, who held the hands of the Service Improvement Teams throughout the process. Tremendous strides were made in the development of mechanisms for the management and facilitation of Customer Focus Groups and User Panels. For the newly established **Diamond Standard Certification Unit**, we recognise that there was a steep learning curve, especially with respect to the training and development of independent assessors. For achieving this mandate during the set timeframe, we salute you with a round of applause...

However, there is still much work to be done towards improving and perfecting this Programme. I know there were times when I seemed a hard task-master as we sought to bring the First Cohort to fruition. I make no apologies. This is a work in progress and continuous improvement must be our mantra, as we try to respond to emerging best practices in this dynamic, volatile and uncertain world.

Finally, the **Independent Advisory Panel**, comprising members of the private sector and chaired by captain of industry, Gary Voss. We are thankful to all of you for your yeoman public service and your commitment to taking this project to higher heights. We salute you. Please, take a bow. A round of applause for them...

To the eleven agencies receiving awards this evening, you are the standard bearers of the new 21st century, citizen-centric Public Service. Remember, excellence is a continuum, not a destination. Keep pushing the envelope. In addition, I don't know if anyone told you, but you now have an added responsibility and duty to assist and guide agencies in our Second Cohort. Therefore, you are all now part of the online community — **Community of Practice Forum, INTERACT** — designed to facilitate, encourage and engender sharing and transferring of knowledge across related industries. That said, I commend your achievement and your tenacity... You deserve a round of applause...

To all of us in attendance here this evening – public officers, stakeholders, citizens – this Gold to Diamond Journey of Public Service modernisation and transformation is moving apace. We must not slip. We must not lose momentum. *"We must take the current when it serves or lose our ventures..."*

As Shakespeare observed: *"This is a consummation devoutly to be wished..."* It is what we are working diligently towards and what, together, we will achieve.

May God continue to bless our Public Service with the strength, the courage and the wisdom to face the challenges that are ahead of us...

May God continue to bless our beloved nation, Trinidad and Tobago...

Ladies and Gentlemen, I THANK YOU... ♦