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Other Fellow National Mirror Committee Members

Management and Staff of the Trinidad and Tobago Bureau of Standards

Specially Invited Guests

Members of the Media

Ladies and Gentleman

Good morning

It gives me great pleasure to address you this morning at the official launch of TTS/ISO 26000:2011, Guidance on Social Responsibility, which represents the local adoption of the international standard on social responsibility here in Trinidad and Tobago.

And just to provide some brief information on the local context with regard to ISO 26000; the standard was published internationally on November 1st, 2010 and our local national mirror committee was reconstituted in January 2011 when it held its first meeting.

Our purpose is primarily to facilitate the development of the ISO 26000 in a manner that represents the interests of Trinidad and Tobago stakeholders.

I see this move of the local adoption of ISO 26000 to be a very important as we work towards the advancement and institutionalization of the Social Responsibility Agenda here in Trinidad and Tobago.

This launch also comes fresh on the heels of an event just two weeks ago, where local business associations were able to bring together three Ministers of Government to discuss the role of government in Corporate Social Responsibility.

I am extremely pleased to see the strides that Social Responsibility has made in Trinidad and Tobago within a relatively short time, since the seminal research conducted by the then South Trinidad Chamber of Industry and Commerce (now the Energy Chamber) and the United

Nations Development Programme (UNDP), entitled Mapping CSR in Trinidad and Tobago. This report in 2006 noted that CSR was in its embryonic stages, and just five years on we are here today adopting a local standard in Social Responsibility.

I must also mention that from what I have seen within this five year period, through my involvement in the field, there is not only an increased awareness of the concept social responsibility, but also a growing acceptance by organizations of the need to act responsibly. And, when we talk about responsibility, we refer to responsibility by all organizations, regardless of the sector in which they operate; private, public, labour, NGO, consumer or academia, AND responsibility in all aspects of their operations,

in the workplace; with employees and contractors,

in the marketplace; with suppliers, customers and governments

in the society; with communities, and

in the ecological environment; with our natural resources.

The concept of Social responsibility embraces such issues as transparency, accountability, ethics, stakeholder expectations and sustainable development, issues which are important to all organizations.

As my colleague Wade has already provided you with a very comprehensive history and overview of ISO 26000, and you are now all aware of what the standard involves, I want to focus the time I have on two important issues that I believe need to be discussed as we encourage the adoption of the standard locally.

The first of these is the issue of the standard being a **guidance standard**, rather than a certifiable standard, and there has been much international debate surrounding this.

As Wade explained, unlike other certifiable standards like ISO 14001 and ISO 9001 with which you may be familiar, where the organization can get that 'stamp of approval' for have met standard requirements, ISO 26000 is a guidance standard, not a management standard that is auditable.

And it is worth mentioning that this is not the only NON-certifiable standard issued by the ISO, there are other standards, like, ISO 31000 on Risk Management, which has seen significant global adoption, and is also a guidance standard, not certifiable.

So why is ISO 26000 not certifiable? Well the easy answer is that it just was not written as a certifiable standard.

But on a more serious note, the issues that ISO 26000 seek to address and provide guidance on, are not ones that can easily be considered in terms of in black and white, yes or no or checking boxes, and therefore are not issues that can easily be audited to achieve certification.

Let's return for a moment to the definition of Social responsibility that Wade mentioned, it is, "**... the responsibility of an organization for the impacts of its decisions and activities on society and the environment, through transparent and ethical behaviour that contributes to sustainable development, including health and the welfare of society; takes into account the expectations of stakeholders; is in compliance with applicable law and consistent with international norms of behaviour; and is integrated throughout the organization and practised in its relationships.**"

Let's just take one line in the definition, "**contributes to sustainable development**". So as we probably already know, the term sustainable development refers to 'development that meets the needs of the current generation with compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.'

And while, it is possible, as the standard does, to provide guidance on issues of sustainability, it is such a dynamic concept, how can you certify an organization as being sustainable or contributing to sustainable development, where the very interpretation and application of a concept like sustainability is certainly unique to every industry if not every organization within an industry. How do we in fact audit to certify that an organization is meeting the needs of the current generations without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.....do we even know what the specific needs of future generations are likely to be? Especially when we can barely understand the needs of the current generation.

The issue of certification was put to the Chair of the ISO 26000 UK Committee, Adrian Henriques, in an interview conducted by the British Standards Institute, and he responded:

“What does it mean to say that you are certified to ISO 26000? Is that a badge to say that you are good? I don’t think so.

And I think that this is an important question, especially in our society; do we need to earn a badge to get us to act responsibly? I certainly hope not.

So I believe that that once we have all had opportunity to read the standard and the issues that it covers, we will understand why it is not, and in my view, does not need to be certifiable.

This absence of certification must not be seen as a weakness in the standard. The standard is extremely useful in providing both a conceptual and practical understanding of the subjects associated with social responsibility.

And this brings me to the second important issue I want to discuss, and that is **How do you make the standard relevant within your organization?** ISO 26000 can be applied as a useful tool for any organization interested in operating in a more responsible manner.

But what I think is important to make it useful, is to use the standard not just as a reference document but as a living document within the organization, the guidance is extremely clear and understandable and allows the organization to embrace an holistic approach to social responsibility.

By embracing the standard, organizations can not only understand the fundamental and core subjects of social responsibility but also learn about related actions and expectations within each of these subjects.

The standard further explains how to integrate social responsibility within an organization and covers topics from 'making the relationships between an organization's characteristics and social responsibly' to "communication on social responsibly"...everything is covered in the standard.

Another important feature that adds to the usefulness of the standard is its comprehensive references to "voluntary initiatives and tools for social responsibility". These include sectoral and cross-sectoral initiatives, intergovernmental initiatives, multi-stakeholder and single stakeholder initiatives.

Each of these initiatives is then cross referenced to both the core subjects and practices for integrating social responsibility. This allows the user to identify a particular tool that is relevant to their sector, and link the tool back to the standard.

So, for example an organization operating within the extractive sector can refer to an initiative such as the Oil and Gas Industry Guidance on Voluntary Sustainability Reporting, developed by the International Petroleum Industry Environmental Conservation Association (IPIECA), which I know many organizations already use, and then see how the application of this tool within their organization relates to the core subjects covered in the standard, in this case it relates to Human Rights,

Labour Practices, Environment, Fair Operating Practices and Community Involvement and Development.

The standard therefore offers a consolidation of all the countless tools and initiatives across a number of sectors and references them within a practical and understandable framework.

And the standard covers initiatives in every imaginable sector including agriculture, apparel, construction, chemicals, finance and investments, electronics, transport, fisheries, travel and tourism and the list goes on.

So to return to the question on making ISO 26000 relevant to your organization, it is possible to utilize the standard in any organization, but again, I suggest, you need to make the standard a living document.

So coming out of today's launch, and as our Mirror Committee continues its work to promote the awareness and adoption of ISO 26000 I have three wishes:

1. That organizations across all sectors, throughout Trinidad and Tobago, as many have already started to do, will continue to explore and embrace the application of responsible behaviour within their organizations;
2. That they will do this out of a genuine appreciation of the benefits of responsibility, for all, both current and future generations; and

3. That they will not be dissuaded from engaging in responsible behaviour, and utilizing the guidance of ISO 26000, because it does not give them a stamp or badge or feather in their cap to say that they are a 'good' organization.

In closing, I want to take this opportunity to offer a special vote of thanks to our hard working Mirror Committee who has brought us to this stage and I know that with their continued efforts we will make significant strides to bring the concept of Social Responsibility and ISO 26000 to every sector and organization in Trinidad and Tobago.

Our next important task after this launch, which we have made some headway on already, is the development of a Communication Plan, which we hope to roll out very early in the New Year to promote awareness and education around the standard, so look out for more activities on ISO 26000.

I encourage you all to contact the Trinidad and Tobago Bureau of Standards to purchase (yes purchase) your copy of ISO 26000.

Thank you