

Trinidad and Tobago Transparency Institute

Sixth Annual General Meeting DFL Conference Room, Cipriani Blvd., POS

April 28, 2005

Chairman's report – by Emile A. L. Valere

“Never for the sake of peace and quiet deny your own experience or convictions.”

Nobel Peace Prize Winner Dag Hammarskjold

Media Reports:

It has been reported that at least three government ministers have been identified as corrupt or in receipt of bribes .

Distribution of Caroni Lands and properties have been allegedly stolen and given away.

BWIA is still flying high mainly due to its continued dependence on government bailouts despite the fact that it is privately owned and its shares are publicly traded.

After spending millions, our government has now realized that the FTAA may not be a reality...something which has been advocated by myself and many other persons for more than a year. Where was the information that the FTAA was a reality?

New state corporations such as UDECOTT and PIDCOTT have been given larger responsibilities and are spending more tax-payers money on construction and other investments. However, their tendering procedures are allegedly done in-house and by-pass our Central Tenders Board. Where is the accountability to the tax payers?

Surveys and public opinion polls indicate that the public has lost much faith in the competence of the police service, which is still perceived as marred with corruption. Everyone claims to know who the corrupt police officers are, however no police officer gets charged or removed from duty. Meanwhile, in this small society our police continue to be unsuccessful in solving or stopping kidnappings .Where is the accountability when our security forces offer poor performance?

Many judges and magistrates do not want to declare their assets under the Integrity Commission because they say they declare it under the Judicial and Legal Service Commission, which is under the ambit of the Judiciary. Why this sudden change?

The government has borrowed money from the IDB and raised funding by issuing bonds – where was that money invested and where is the balance sheet explaining what has been disbursed and how it has been spent? Where is the full report ?

The Occupational Safety and Health Act still awaits the President's approval. Why is it being held back? The law is there to protect the people who spill their blood and give their lives during the construction of corporate buildings, apartment complexes and homes.

How much more must be said before we all admit that Trinidad and Tobago is not a truly transparent country? There are too many question marks over the operations of this country and there is very much work for Transparency International in this little nation.

TTTI was founded in May 1998 and is the national chapter of the Berlin-based Transparency International. We are part of the global coalition against corruption. However I believe we in Trinidad and Tobago are still part of the problem, not part of the solution.

How many people do each of us know who are involved in some form of illicit or borderline legal activity? How many of us will “pull a string” when needed? Just knowing or condoning someone who will do something like this is part of the corruption process.

We at the Trinidad and Tobago Transparency Institute (TTTI) have made our best efforts to awaken the good and upright character in the public by raising flags of idealism. However we were burdened by tremendous challenges over the past 14 months. Other than our administrative and financial stumbling blocks, the board has been struggling to deal with internal issues.

Members of the board had vicious fights for power and their own personal differences proved to be problematic , resulting in resignations from the board. Other directors did not stick to our mandate and refused to oblige basic protocol.

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My apology to the Minister of Housing, Dr. Keith Rowley was just a tip of the proverbial ice berg. Other than the fact that our director made comments which were perceived by Mr. Rowley and others to be politically biased and agenda motivated, she changed our agreed press conference “media only” format and invited Wade Mark and other politicians to it. This contravened all TI regulations. A politician cannot even join TTTI as a member. Thankfully this issue stopped at my apology to Mr. Rowley, who did send a copy of his complaint letter to TI’s head office in Berlin. However, TI’s head office could very well shut down TTTI due to her invitation to the opposition members to attend our press conference. This is regardless of the point that other politicians and government representatives were invited to the press conference. During my tenure, I was a witness to broken promises, self promotion and failure of the directors to follow basic protocol.

So how can TTTI continue to raise flags and call for good governance when we are struggling to get it among ourselves?

We held firm to core values. We achieved results while dealing with our differences. We had to because we all held onto the prevailing belief that Trinidad and Tobago needs us to voice concerns and raise flags...not only locally but internationally.

We all believed that we had to continue to raise the consciousness of our people because where good men stay quiet, evil will prevail.

But then there’s the question - does this society really want transparency? Does this society want an accountable government? Are we prepared to deal with auditable processes and good governance?

I believe we are ready for solutions – not all too soon because that could be traumatic, but our people want a better society. According to our integrity act for example, all government ministers, directors of state boards as well as their wives and children must declare their assets. The deadline for this is in the next two months and this information should be public based on the Freedom of Information Act. This will be an amazing step toward transparency in our country.

We endorse the role of the Integrity Commission and will continue to work closely with them as they move ahead to succeed in carrying out their mandate.

TTTI’s future must be not just to point out the issues I raised earlier, but to suggest solutions. In our mandate, we want to work with government and the private sector to develop policies and communication plans to raise concerns and educate the public before perceptions could be mis-construed.

We applaud the government on their initiative to adopt the principles and practice of the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative. We also applaud the opposition for raising concerns and scrutinizing government programmes. In some countries, you have silent opposition government MPs.

TI's vision is a world in which government, politics, business, civil society and the daily lives of people are free of corruption

Challenges

1. In March 2004 it was identified that TTTI’s finances needed to be better managed.
2. May 2004 – Office Administrator Steve Mulrain resigned leaving many questions unanswered.
3. July 2004 – Finance Chairman Emile Valere notified the board of his temporary absence for three months on ‘paternity leave’.
4. September 2004 – TTTI Chairman Boyd Reid resigned citing ill health.
5. October 2004 – Director Father Henry Charles resigned.
6. October 2004 – Planned SGM had to be postponed.
7. October 2004 – Finance Chair Emile Valere was elected by the board to take the post as Interim Chairman.
8. October 2004 - Johanna Koorn was elected as treasurer and chair of the Finance Committee.
9. Issues of corruption are raised on a daily basis in the local media and our resources to monitor these issues are limited.
10. The lack of an administrative officer hamstrung the effect of the office. For example, in December 2004, TTTI was invited by the JCC to speak at their workshop on Public Procurement. However, due to the lack of administration in the office, the invitation was not seen on time and thus we did not attend.

Accomplishments

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1. Ongoing activities for the year included work with the Inter-American Convention Against Corruption (IACAC), the Public Procurement Reform and the Implementation of the Integrity Act.
2. April 2004 - The Finance Committee recommended that TTTI use a calendar year as opposed to a financial year in the preparations of its Financial Statements. The board agreed with this decision and it was adopted. TTTI had to now await the end of the year to prepare financial statements for 18 months.
3. October 2004- Corruption Perception Index launch – TTTI held a press conference on the CPI in October 2004 and focused on the fact that the perception of corruption in Trinidad and Tobago has risen. We were given very good media coverage and also spoke on television morning programmes.
4. November 2004 - Public Procurement Reform Programme – TTTI held a press conference in November 2004 to raise the awareness of the Green Paper on Public Procurement. We used this opportunity to ask the government for an extension for public comment. TTTI received much media attention at that forum and the extension was granted.
5. November 2004 – TTTI sent off 7,179 email letters to executives in Trinidad and Tobago inviting them to join. We have received many new members including applications from large corporations such as Associated Brands, Merck Sharpe Dhorne, Oscar Francois and Ansa McAl. We have also received donations such as from Dr. Ronald Ramkissoon of Republic Bank. This effort also raised our profile.
6. In December 2004, TTTI held a launch on the United Nations Anti-Corruption Day with local UN Officials, the Auditor General, Ministry of Education Officials and schools. We invited school children from various schools to participate. Again, we received considerable support from the media.
7. In December 2004, TTTI launched a column in Newsday Business Section and have used articles from members, but edited by two directors. This has assisted in raising our profile.
8. In December 2004, TTTI employed a temporary assistant to assist with the office administration. We employed the services of another assistant to help us prepare for this AGM.
9. In January 2005 – TTTI worked with its auditors to finalise its 18 month Financial Statements – June 2003 – December 2004. This was critical to ensure continued transparency and accountability in our operations.
10. January 2005 - TTTI was invited by Minister Christine Sahadeo to deliver a presentation on Engaging Civil Society in Transparency for Extractive Industries at a workshop of the UK based Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative. The workshop was held at the Trinidad Hilton. Their guests included government ministers, diplomats and executives from the petroleum industry.
11. January 2005 – TTTI was invited by the Auditor General to deliver two presentations at a day long workshop for their entire staff. One presentation was on the role of TTTI and the other was on the Integrity Act.
12. March 2005 – TTTI held a press conference on the Global Corruption Report 2005, which focussed on Constructoin.
13. March 2005 – TTTI represented at conference in England on Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative
14. March 2005 – TTTI represented on the committee preparing the White Paper on Public Procurement
15. March 2005 – TTTI represented at OAS workshop on Anti-Corruption in Washington.
16. March and April 2005 – TTTI represented at Trinidad and Tobago EITI Committee

Ongoing activities for the past 14 months

1. It should be noted that TTTI, through our former chairman Boyd Reid sat on the government committee to assist in the preparation of the Green Paper on Public Procurement from 2002 – 2004.

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2. Integrity Pact Implementation - Formerly planned as part of Public Procurement Reform Phase II, this will negotiate and monitor the implementation of an Integrity Pact in a major publicly funded project.
3. International Conventions Programme - TI chapters in the Americas have been actively and collaboratively monitoring the implementation by signatory states of the *Inter-American Convention Against Corruption (IACAC)* and the work of the OAS in this regard. TTTI has conducted an **IACAC Monitoring Project** which made a critical assessment of Trinidad and Tobago's implementation of the Convention. The assessment will be presented to the OAS before the monitoring committee in Washington DC, USA possibly in 2005. There is funding available for this from TI - USA. We estimate the funding requirement to be US\$32,000.
4. TTTI has contributed to the vision and mission of the Integrity Commission via meeting with its consultant David Nitkin of EthicsCan, Canada.

Conclusion

According to our Corruption Perception Index, Trinidad and Tobago is perceived as a corrupt society with trends indicating that it is becoming increasingly more corrupt. The history of this Index is telling, with compliance for best practice being at an all time low.

Civil society therefore needs to be continuously informed and empowered. Transparency International informs the public and in the long run empowers them. We will continue to serve this role – we do not investigate – but I advise the new board to keep informed, keep partnering with Government once good initiatives are involved and keep communicating with the public via our TI column as well as press releases and press conferences.

The outgoing board of TTTI remains committed to practicing what we preach and being accountable to our members and the society as a whole. We recognize that there is no society without corruption but together we aspire for greater transparency.

I would like to thank the members of our respective committees, including Anson Humphrey, Chris Sadler, John Jardim and Audley Walker for their time and expertise.

I also thank the many members, including the incoming chairman Reginald Dumas and incoming Secretary Boyd Reid, both of whom asked me to occupy the chair position for another year. I do apologise for not obliging to your request of running as chairman for the next year but due to personal commitments, I simply would not be able to give it my best time and effort. I believe at this juncture in TTTI's continuing evolution, it needs a chairman who has time to give. I do however assure the incoming team that you will have my support once I am available.

The target is set and the solutions are at hand. I do hope you appreciate my transparent remarks.

God bless you all.
Emile A. L. Valere