

Leading the way to a corruption free Trinidad and Tobago

Corruption continues to be a hot topic in the everyday life of the people of Trinidad and Tobago. In our news media, the business community, among politicians and among those who write letters to newspaper editor's, issues of corruption, transparency within the Public Service, arbitrary, unfair treatment and the absence of Integrity remain prominent.

In one newspaper a writer says 'corruption is rife in the nation.' Over the past few weeks we have read the following headlines in the local newspapers:

- "Our deeper corruption"
- "A call to serve country – not self"
- "An eye for an eye"
- "Culture of compliance needed"

The Trinidad and Tobago Chamber devoted its most recent business magazine, "Contact" to issues of "Crime & Governance" while in one of the popular Internet blogs a local writer spent much time writing on "Corruption in Trinidad and Tobago – Setting New Standards."

While no definitive statement with respect to the economic costs of corruption in Trinidad and Tobago could be found this writer is unaware of any study to determine the extent of corruption in terms of the cost to the country's economy.

However, the Integrity Commission of Trinidad and Tobago, established by our Republican Constitution, seeks to ensure that Persons in Public Life and Persons Exercising a Public Function comply with the laws governing Integrity in the fulfilment of their duties and responsibilities to the people they serve. The Commission has as its Vision to be "*the leading organization to promote Integrity and make Trinidad and Tobago corruption free.*"

Based on the historical incidence of corruption, its magnitude in public debates, the findings of a recent Commission of Enquiry and the volume of complaints of corruption and wrong doing investigated by the Integrity Commission, corruption continues in Trinidad and Tobago.*

The Commission, in its investigations, has also enquired into complaints and allegations where Ministerial and Board decisions negatively impact the operations and viability of Ministries, agencies and private entities in contravention of guarantees enshrined in our Constitution. Where this is threatened, particularly by those who hold political office, it is important that it is brought to light and properly addressed in accordance with transparency and the law. Indeed, the Auditor General has reported instances of unauthorised processes being conducted side by side with established, legal procedures in the Public Service.

The following are examples of misconduct in public office.

- Conduct which involves a fraudulent or dishonest motive;
- The refusal to perform a function which the official is obliged to do as a duty of office;
- The wilful misuse of official power, for example displaying favouritism in the award of contracts, licenses, to an individual or a group – where the person has personal, family, economic or political affiliation with that individual or group;
- Wilful abuse of position where the official, having no actual authority in a matter, nonetheless uses his or her position so as to subvert the interests of the public or to harm a member of the public.

In its Mission the Integrity Commission sees itself as “a performance driven institution that promotes the highest ethical standards by –

- Ensuring compliance with the Integrity in Public Life Act;
- Detecting corrupt practices and dishonest conduct;
- Providing excellent customer service and public education for the benefit of the nation.”

**The secrecy provisions in Sections 20 and 35 of the Integrity in Public Life Act forbid discussion on any investigation carried out by the Integrity Commission.*

Send your comments and letters to:

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