

January 6th, 2020

Dr. The Honourable Keith Rowley
Prime Minister | Minister of Planning and Development
Ministry of Planning and Development
Level 14, Eric Williams Financial Complex
Independence Square, Port of Spain

Honourable Prime Minister:

Re: The establishment of the National Council for Sustainable Development (NCSD)

Civil society in Trinidad and Tobago writes to draw your attention to the fact that the date of actualisation of the National Council for Sustainable Development, as mandated in the National Environmental Policy (NEP) for establishment within a year of the NEP being laid in Parliament on November 2nd, 2018, has passed. Civil society strongly urges the Ministry of Planning and Development to establish the NCSD at the earliest of opportunities, while ensuring that civil society's voice is represented in its design and implementation.

In the Ministry of Planning and Development's foreword to the National Development Strategy (NDS) 2016-2030, Vision 2030, it was stated clearly that "achieving sustainable economic growth through greater diversification of the economy, as well as improving the social conditions and quality of life of citizens in an inclusive and environmentally sensitive manner" must include all of us acting in concert. Of course, this echoes the underpinning sentiments of the Sustainable Development Goals that we must all work together towards development that leaves no one behind.

We were further encouraged, as public interest organizations, to see emphasis placed on the inclusion of Transparency, Public Participation and Access to Information as key tenets within the latest National Environmental Policy (NEP). The commitment to these principles is evident in the time-bound pledge to establish a National Council for Sustainable Development (NCSD) within one year of the NEP coming into effect. It is also laudable that the concept of the NCSD has itself gone through an evolution from the 1995 and 2006 NEP wherein the NCSD is charged with "ongoing oversight with advisory functions" to the 2018 NEP wherein the NCSD is specifically strengthened with "ongoing oversight with advisory functions to the Action Plan." The creation of a mandated 'place at the table' for representors of public interests through civil society organizations, is one that augurs well for the truly inclusionary actioning of the NEP for a more environmentally sustainable future.

Civil society is ready to represent the public interest. Over the last few years, there has been a marked upswing in public action, led in many instances through civil society collaboration, for advocacy around governance issues. The Cropper Foundation, along with its partners (Environment Tobago, Fishermen and Friends of the Sea, the Oilfield Workers' Trade Union and the Network of Rural Women Producers of Trinidad and Tobago) is leading one such movement: a three-year, European Union-funded Action to build the ability of civil society to be more effective in representing public interest. The Action 'Enhancing Civil Society Capacity for Governance of Environmental Transparency and Accountability in Trinidad and Tobago's Extractive Industries' (CSOs

for Good Environmental Governance) involves over twenty civil society organisations, from well-known NGOs, to rural community groups and youth-led organisations working together to build their capacities to understand and effect change within the environmental/development legislative system in Trinidad and Tobago. In addition, you will be aware that civil society has very recently mobilised to lead the call for Trinidad and Tobago's adoption of the Escazú Agreement (Regional Agreement on Access to Information, Public Participation and Justice in Environmental Matters in Latin America and the Caribbean) for which we would take this opportunity again to prompt the State to sign and ratify. It is clear, therefore, that civil society is eager to fully assume its role as collaborators and partners towards more sustainable development.

Civil society organisations under the Action "CSOs for Good Environmental Governance" and other likeminded organisations, recognising that the deadline for creation of the NCSD as stated in the NEP 2018 has passed, strongly urge the Ministry of Planning and Development to establish the National Council for Sustainable Development at the earliest opportunity. In addition, we remain committed to working with your Ministry to ensure that that civil society participation is included in the development of the mandate for the NCSD, the criteria for members' selection and the subsequent composition of the NCSD before its establishment. We must ensure that this critical mechanism is truly representative and realised for the benefit of all the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago.

Please accept, Honourable Prime Minister, the assurances of our highest consideration.

Yours faithfully,

Acono Village Dynamic Action Committee	Innovation and Creativity through the Arts
Caribbean Natural Resources Institute	Institute for Small Islands
Caribbean Youth Environment Network – T&T	Lloyd Best Institute for the Caribbean
Caura Eco-Protectors	Lopinot Tourism Association Ltd
Caura Valley Village Council	Maracas Valley Action Committee
Central Pathfinders Environmental Foundation	Matura Women's Group
Council of Presidents of the Environment	Network of Rural Women Producers of T&T
Environment Tobago	Pro-C-Vane
Environmental and Social Consultative Association	Sustain T&T
Fishermen and Friends of the Sea	The Cropper Foundation
Fishing Pond Farmers Association	The Oilfield Workers' Trade Union
IAMovement	Toco Foundation
Ideas I Foundation	Trinidad and Tobago Bridge Initiative

*CC: Mrs. Nadra Nathai-Gyan, Chair of the Board, Environmental Management Authority
Mr. Hayden Romano, Managing Director, Environmental Management Authority
The Office of the Prime Minister*