

**THE NATIONAL GAS COMPANY OF TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO LIMITED**

**UWI RESEARCH EXPO 2013**

**MEDIA LAUNCH**

Thursday 5th September, 2013 at 10:00am

Main Salon, Office of the Campus Principal, UWI St. Augustine Campus

Vice President's Remarks

Mr. Indar Maharaj

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**SALUTATIONS:**

- Pro Vice Chancellor of Research at The University of the West Indies, Professor Wayne Hunte
  
- Pro Vice Chancellor and Campus Principal, Professor Clement Sankat
  
- Chief Executive Officer of the Trinidad and Tobago Chamber of Industry and Commerce, Ms. Catherine Kumar
  
- Senior Programme Manager in the Office of the Campus Principal, Mrs. Stacy Richards-Kennedy
  
- Other Members of the UWI St. Augustine Campus Management
  
- Specially Invited Guests
  
- Members of the Media

Good morning.

Since inception, NGC has been fulfilling a series of expanded governmental mandates that exceed the boundaries of buying, compressing, transporting, and selling natural gas to the domestic gas based sector. One of the most significant of these mandates is to be the primary entity charged with developing the natural gas sector within Trinidad and Tobago. Accepting this challenge has defined NGC's operations as much as its core business has.

The NGC Group, especially the parent company and its subsidiary, National Energy, has been instrumental in encouraging local and foreign direct investment within the energy sector by exploring the feasibility of gas-based industries, seeking out the right investors, and providing infrastructure to make investment as attractive as possible.

I'm proud to say that NGC has played a large part in securing the commitment of many of the larger companies at the Point Lisas Industrial Estate, as well as deepening gas utilization to the light manufacturing and industrial sector.

And apart from increasing our capacity to suit the needs of an ever-expanding network of industrial estates, the NGC Group also owns and operates the La Brea and Union Industrial Estates.

But we have also been acutely aware of the fact that industrial development goes beyond the wooing of consumers, the establishment of new plants, and the development of industrial estates.

In order to function, these operations must be staffed by a trained workforce that is grounded in appropriate education and qualification, yet flexible enough to respond swiftly to change. In other words, the physical infrastructure is of little value unless we have a population that is ready, willing and able to manage and support it.

For this reason, NGC has always placed great emphasis on skills development and training. Over the years, we have partnered with tertiary institutions to sponsor a range of skills development programmes that feed the ever-growing needs of the industrial and energy sectors and increase the employability of citizens.

One such partnership is our relationship with the University of The West Indies, which, over the years, has seen the successful deployment of many initiatives. One of our most recent is the Memorandum of Understanding recently signed between NGC and UWI. Through this MOU, NGC will fund a major initiative in research, innovation and entrepreneurship over a period of five years, that is to say, 2012 — 2016.

The components of the initiative include a professorial chair in innovation and entrepreneurship, a research forum, the UWI Research Awards, and the UWI Research Expo that we are launching today.

Through this sponsorship we hope to support the kind of creative and innovative thinking that has distinguished UWI as one of the most prestigious learning institutions in the region.

I also want to note that, though I may have given the impression that our attentions have been focused on development and training within the energy and industrial sectors, this isn't entirely true.

We believe that national development is a far-reaching and holistic thing, encompassing not just industry and infrastructure, but also science, medicine, art, literature and culture. This country will not flourish if we restrict our support to engineers and technicians.

We need innovative thought from our teachers, our students, our entrepreneurs, civil servants, musicians, designers and artisans. We need fresh thinking in the tourist sector, the Carnival sector, and the food and fashion industries, and many more.

We can't deny that Trinidad and Tobago is a small country, and yet we have challenged giants for a share in world markets. In some instances we have won; in others we have lost...but our response to these losses must always be to recover, rethink, and look at the issue from another angle.

We must always try to think differently, and ask ourselves, What if? What now? What next? We continue to try again and again.

Indeed, you will have to forgive me if I use the energy industry as a reference, but that is the background I am most familiar with. Think of the mental leap it must have taken for the early visionaries, way back at the turn of the century, to take an island that had been previously only known for its excellent coffee, sugar, cocoa and coconuts, and turn it into a producer of oil?

Or what about the 1970s, when the idea first began floating around to construct an Industrial Estate in the middle of a cane field? And what about the idea to compress and monetize natural gas that was being wastefully flared off the south-east coast - the Teak and Poui marine fields?

It is through this sense of adventure, this opening of the mind and harnessing of Trinidadian and Tobagonian ingenuity, that this relatively tiny country has become one of the largest exporters of ammonia and methanol in the world. Our courage and imagination have won us the respect of players many times our size.

It is therefore an open question what will come of projects like UWI's innovation and research initiatives. It's exciting to think that many of the young minds that will benefit from this project will move on to create, innovate, and maybe even change the face of the country in ways we can't yet imagine, using technology that hasn't yet been invented.

We can choose to play it safe, and follow roads that have already been well beaten, but these paths rarely lead anywhere interesting. Instead, we must choose to think faster, think differently, collaborate, innovate and create. This is where positive change comes from. This is how a nation grows.

And I am sure I speak on behalf of everyone at NGC when I say that we are more than happy to be a part of it.

Thank you.

**END**