



## **ADDRESS**

by

**THE MINISTER OF NATIONAL SECURITY  
SENATOR THE HONOURABLE BRIGADIER JOHN SANDY**

**At the  
LAUNCH OF THE EMERGENCY SHORT MESSAGE  
SYSTEM**

***PLACE: First Floor, Temple Court, MNS***

***DATE: Tuesday 17<sup>th</sup> August 2010***

***TIME: 9:00 a.m.***

- Senator the Honourable Subhas Panday, Minister in the Ministry of National Security
- Desdra Bascombe, Deputy Permanent Secretary, Ministry of National Security
- Colonel (Ret'd) George Robinson, Chief Executive Officer, Office of Disaster Preparedness and Management
- Lisa Agard, Executive Vice President, Mobile Services and Vice President, Legal - TSTT
- Other Heads of Divisions and Representatives of TSTT
- Representatives of the ODPM
- Members of the Information Task Group and Government Communicators
- Members of the Media

Ladies and gentlemen,

I am indeed pleased to be here with you this morning to launch this most significant initiative, the Emergency Short Message Service (ESMS) which will redound to the benefit of the safety and security of citizens of Trinidad and Tobago in times of disaster.

As many of you may know, international disaster mitigation offices around the world define a disaster as a sudden, calamitous event bringing great damage, loss, destruction and devastation to life and property. Sometimes the damage caused by disasters is immeasurable and varies with the geographical location and climate.

Typically, disasters influence the mental, socio-economic, political and cultural posture of the affected area and generally carries with it the following effects:

1. It completely disrupts normal day to day life.
2. It negatively influences the emergency systems.
3. Basic needs and processes like food, shelter, provision of health care, etc. are affected and deteriorate depending on the intensity and severity of the disaster.

Ladies and Gentlemen, we should be aware that our region resides in a very active seismic zone and is susceptible to disasters such as earthquakes and tsunamis.

It was only last Saturday morning that the Seismic Unit at the University of the West Indies recorded a 5.1 earthquake, which shook several parts of North and East Trinidad, and certain parts of Tobago. We were indeed fortunate and thankful to Almighty God that there was no damage to property or injuries to person.

Additionally, the recent floods of the last three weeks that occurred in several areas in Central and South Trinidad caused immense damage to properties and agriculture in affected areas. The torrential showers also gave rise to landslips and landslides along the North Coast Roads, the Western Main Road and parts of Santa Cruz, where unfortunately one of our citizens lost his life and scores of other people were temporarily displaced.

The Meteorological Office continues to warn that as the rainy season proceeds in Trinidad and Tobago we must continue

to brace ourselves for more rains and the heavy flooding that may result.

It is obvious therefore is that we need to persist at instituting the appropriate and preventative disaster reduction strategies and programmes, coupled with a practical Public Awareness and Education component, which will systematically minimize the disaster factor.

It is in recognition of these realities, that we launch today's project. The Government of the People's Partnership remains cognizant of these realities and continues to respond to the challenges associated with securing the safety and security of citizens of Trinidad and Tobago.

As such, an action plan has been implemented and an Inter Ministerial Committee established to properly oversee co-ordinated efforts to bring some measure of early relief to our citizens who were hardest hit by recent flooding. Your Government recognises that even while it responds through its health services, social development programmes, through the efforts of the Ministries of Works and Transport, National Security and other associated agencies, the key to a well co-ordinated response is – getting accurate information to members of the public in real time.

Accordingly, **today's event is aimed at treating with this challenge.** The Ministry of National Security believes that by disseminating information in a timely manner, we can minimise disaster risk and assist in improving relief efforts in the aftermath of, or during a disaster.

This is why the launch of this ESMS is so vital at this time, with the aim being to provide timely advisory warnings via mobile telephone to the population of Trinidad and Tobago. I am advised that TSTT's mobile network which will be utilized in this initiative, comprises over 800,000 users.

While the ESMS will assist greatly in getting critical information to first responders, disaster victims and the population as a whole more quickly, it will not replace the traditional media, but add to the other forms of communication currently in use.

At present, the Office of Disaster Preparedness and Management (ODPM) uses the print and electronic media to disseminate information. Moreover, with the increase popularity of social media, the ODPM has been using Facebook, Twitter, its website and the various forms of mass media to get information out to the public.

Ladies and Gentlemen, the Ministry of National Security believes that the ESMS can play an important role in disaster risk management in Trinidad and Tobago, just as it has done in other countries. It is also a medium by which the ODPM can assist in preventing the potential loss of lives by providing early warning information to those who are likely to be affected by approaching systems or weather patterns.

Emergency messaging will also assist in keeping citizens informed about what preparatory measures to take so that they may safeguard the lives of their families, and elements in their communities.

The Ministry of National Security through the ODPM has engaged the Telecommunications Services of Trinidad and Tobago (TSTT) as the leading telecommunication provider for Trinidad and Tobago to support this initiative.

Following several discussions between both parties, TSTT agreed to provide this service to Trinidad and Tobago for an on behalf of the ODPM. The agreement was established through a Memorandum of Understanding which was signed by the Ministry of National Security and officials of TSTT.

An ESMS platform was established, separate and apart from that which is used for the normal everyday TSTT subscriber use. The system has already been successfully tested with a selected group of persons, and the ODPM intends to conduct another test with the general public once the launch is finalized.

I am advised that this is how it is intended to work. Once the ODPM releases an advisory, it will go first to members of government and the first response agencies. It is intended that the ESMS will cover effectively both islands of our Republic.

If there is an emergency or disaster specific to either of the two islands, then the broadcast will facilitate only that specific territory.

As I indicated before the ESMS will not be the only medium used to inform first responders and the public about a crisis or emergency.

All other traditional methods such as mass mailing, the use of the mass media and the use of the social networks will still be used to get information across, including the ODPM's **sustained education and preparedness programme.**



Before I close let me embrace this opportunity to thank TSTT for coming on board with this project and for helping the ODPM put such a system in place for times of disaster. We are quite pleased to partner with you in this initiative.

Let me also at this time express sincerest thanks to all the agencies under the Ministry of National Security, the Ministry of Works and Transport, the Ministry of Local Government, the Ministry of the People and Social Development, the Ministry of Housing and all the other relevant agencies and organisations, both private and public, for their on going efforts to bring some relief to our citizens who were disrupted during the floods of the last two weeks.

In recognition of the atmospheric conditions and the weather patterns now being experienced, I encourage all citizens to take the necessary steps to safeguard life and property, as we invite God's blessings for continuation of a rainy season that is gentle on the lands, structures and waterways of Trinidad and Tobago.

Finally, Ladies and Gentlemen, it is my honour and distinct pleasure to launch today's Emergency Short Message System.

I Thank You.