

The Trinidad and Tobago Promoters Association wishes to thank the people of Trinidad and Tobago for their determination and discipline over the past year. This unfortunate state of affairs will continue for some time, we know you will continue to contort yourselves into the many shapes you need to, in order to survive. We call on you who have lost your jobs, your homes, are struggling with depression and anxiety, deteriorating mental health, abuse, those who are finding it impossible to feed their families and those who see no light at the end of the tunnel, we must go on. The people of Trinidad and Tobago are the heroes in this fight!

We are proud of you our Cultural Ambassadors, you who continue to create art, knowing you will likely reap nothing this year. You understand that your offerings are not just a job but an expression of the heart of our people. To those of you who cannot create this year, our mas makers, our pan players, our television crews, too many to mention, we salute and know how painful it is for you to sit on the sidelines, this too shall pass, we hope sooner rather than later. Thank you all for what you have done and for what we know you will do, when the explosion of life, that is us, happens again.

We have to especially thank the Commissioner of Police Mr Gary Griffith and his team for initiating collaboration with the TTPA, we have engaged in fruitful and beneficial talks with him and believe that we have agreed, that the best approach is to work together. From now on we will be working closely with the TTPS on any and all the endeavours of our members, with a clear understanding that we can only succeed in partnership. We thank you sincerely Commissioner Griffith your frank insightfulness was useful.

The TTPA has observed over the last year in particular, a very disturbing trend in the narrative that is continuously fuelled about events, about our carnival, about the people who choose to spend their life energy making fun happen, about how we live, how vibe and how we party.

Make no mistake, we are clear that the story that is being told by those who do not live by this bread is destructive, for all. Events are not a joke, the business of tourism (which we are successfully engaged in) is not a joke, carnival is not a joke, it is not a nuisance, it is not a space where people **end up**, ours is not a Vi-ki-Vi business.

It is in fact where some of the brightest, most innovative entrepreneurs in our country have chosen to direct their energies because, they love Trinidad and Tobago, they love who we are, and what we stand for and believe, they know that flying our cultural flag high is worth the effort. Our spirit, our energy, our vibe, is valuable, and this is important to say because it is those characteristics that event producers, creatives, technicians and musicians harness, and tap into to make their genius manifest. For those in the TTPA their work is revered and applauded all over the world as the very best, bar none, Yes us the carnival people, the partiers, the wine and jammers, the mas players, the noise makers. In this case it is true the whole world watches us.

Our countries largest and most successful tourism product is carnival and those who draw the crowds and forex to our shores every year reside inside of the TTPA. Our event landscape is no longer what it was 20 years ago. It is events, parties, fetes and mas that our visitors flock to Trinidad and Tobago to experience. **We are clear** that world has changed and we have changed with it and have tailored our products to suit. We at the TTPA cannot afford to sit by and pretend that we are in the year 2000. Hence, we create that which is in heavy demand and is replicated in countries from here to the African continent.

Despite that, despite the fact that Carnival in particular, is the single most unique expression of our people, despite the fact that esteemed columnist Martin Daly described our cultural articulation correctly as "The Other Oil," or that many of us need it like we need air, our industry is viewed by many as 'slight."

In the environment that pervades today, to even suggest having a discussion about events, a conversation about how we go forward to reposition and re-start our activities is deemed unpatriotic and irresponsible. We are accused of being simply mercenary by the arm chair critics who used social media to throw words, without discipline, around the world. We ask them, for whom is money not important, what do you use to feed your family? If your income was annihilated would you not want to get it back?

We know there is a pandemic, it's impossible to ignore. We know we have to be smart and do what is asked of us, we stopped the train. We are aware of the law, we respect why it is there and we know what is required and will continue to do our best, like everyone in this society. But we are confused, as to why the approach to our sector in particular is so unnecessarily heavy handed. The playing field is not levelled, because for us any breach means we are flogged in the square of public opinion, our industry further trivialised with scoldings and threats, while others are given a free pass to create environments of risk.

In the Express Newspaper, yesterday the Minister of Culture is reported as saying that persons who attend events now must not dance and must stay seated, "The article is titled Stay Seated to Stay Safe." We have to ask are we seeing the beginnings of a ban on winning in our country? Is it now illegal to dance in public in Trinidad and Tobago? The absurdity of such a notion is self evident, it is not lost on us, and it is a real concern. Where does this end? We make our first ask today, kindly offer clarity to the nation on this point?

So where do we go from here in this atmosphere? Trinidad and Tobago's event producers have not once been consulted by the state, during this whole period, we have not been engaged, we the largest tourism stakeholder. That, in an atmosphere where there continues to be no support, no dialogue and not a word on how we move forward.

Yesterdays editorial in the Express put it to bed, Open Quote "Instead of exploring how Carnival 2021 could be re-conceptualised the Government went straight to 'no Carnival' shutting out and shutting down the single largest creative community and constituency of entrepreneurs in the country. The possibility that the challenge could have been handed to them to design a Covid-Proof "new and more resilient, carnival , to quote the PM, was not even on the cards." End Quote.

The event producers of Trinidad and Tobago, our soca artistes, our band owners earn their keep in our country and are not the beneficiaries of any government subventions. We thank the Head of DOMA for his genuine attempt to articulate how carnival could happen. We cautiously posit that the Head of DOMA sought to make sense of the loss of income, being felt by thousands of businesses, because of the absence of Carnival. He knows that that loss is felt the bellies of children, it is not imaginary. He knows that in the second Quarter of 2021 when the foreign exchange that is brought into our country by those who come for carnival is not in the system, the true impact of not having the 'wine and jam' will be manifest. What do we do then? The Covid 19 Pandemic is over the hill as a vaccine has been found and we hope it will soon neutralize that threat, however in the meantime the accompanying economic pandemic rages on , with no vaccine in sight!

We want to give everyone the sincere assurance that we will comply with all regulations laid down by law makers, we will always seek to do what is best for our country, the country that we prove our love to consistently, not with lip service but with our blood, sweat and tears. We will continue to be Covid compliant and are clear that the loss is global. We are heavily invested as an industry, in the well being of our people.

We are here today to articulate the above sentiments and to ask for the following things:

1. We need a seat at the table of decision making, a real seat, we have earned it.
2. We ask that the negative and dismissive messaging surrounding what we do is changed?
3. We ask that discussions, about carnival 2022 and about that a path to re-opening our sector intelligently and safely are held immediately?
4. We ask that our cultural fruits be respected and not disregarded as irrelevant because of short sightedness.
5. We ask that the opportunity to engage is visionary, meaningful, forward thinking collaboration about how we use our cultural sector as a tool to earn foreign exchange and vault our tourism product to the front of the line, be created?
6. We ask that Carnival be viewed and treated as our tourism pearl, as the other oil, as though it is our most unique offering to a world that favours high quality event tourism.
7. We ask that we begin to plan now, to welcome the world back to our country, We must present ourselves as the best place in the world to visit, when it is time for people to seek leisure again. This is a strategic decision that must be made now, and executed to perfection.
8. We ask that the travel exemption system be revisited, especially for those with business needs, our brands are global and travel for us is not a luxury it is part of our work. Many countries have found ways to adapt and are reopening their entertainment sectors. They have had spikes and have had to ebb and flow restrictions, but they understand that the beat goes on.
9. We ask that the people of Trinidad and Tobago give us their support, as we seek to do our part to create pride amongst ourselves and help develop our nation in a progressive and relevant manner.

Carnival, our event culture, is a life jacket, we have to get about the business of using it.

We want to be a part of the journey, we want to collaborate and co-operate, we are offer ourselves for service to help chart a way forward, so we can have a future. We are ready, willing and able to be a part of what comes next. We do this, we do events, we do carnival, we have solutions, we know our market and our craft. Are we not best poised to help create a sustainable future for our culture?

To close, Trinidad and Tobago, our family around the world, the fete lovers, the partiers, the carnival junkies, the people all who believe, " Soca is Life" we want you to know that

Covid 19 is not bigger than us, it will not win against our spirit of love and light and joy, for that is what our carnival is. We are down but not out. Carnival is not dead because we will not let it die. We are here to stay, we have earned a seat at the table, professionally, economically, socially, credibly, legitimately.

In the current environment of negativity that is being fuelled by some, we are clear that if we do not stand up and fight for our space, nothing will change and we cannot let that happen and no we did not misunderstand the message.

Our cultural product is one of the most viable means of earning foreign exchange that we have today, we have control over it, it is ours, it is indigenous and we have to protect it. The TTPA is awake to the fact, that the glorious, irresistible offerings that the event professionals, artists, creatives, artisans and technicians churn out across the world each year, in a seemingly effortless manner, represent a truly enlightened engagement of our people. Business as usual, being left on empty will only lead to us being left behind and we cannot afford to be left behind!

We thank you for your support , we thank you for your energy. We are your champions, and Carnival will not die once we are here!

Now we ask the media to field their questions.