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AT THE
MINISTRY OF TOURISM'S
OPENING OF THE LA BREA PITCH LAKE MUSEUM
IN COMMEMORATION OF
2016 UN WORLD TOURISM DAY
Accessible Tourism for All: Promoting Universal Accessibility.
LA BREA VISITOR INTERPRETATIVE CENTRE
HREE HANDS JUNCTION
LA BREA VILLAGE
TUESDAY 27TH SEPTEMBER 2016



Good morning.

I have the distinct pleasure of bringing brief remarks on behalf of Dr. Beverly Beckles, the Chief Executive Officer of National Centre for Persons with Disabilities. She sends her sincere apologies, as she was unable to attend today's event due to another engagement.

On behalf of National Centre for Persons with Disabilities, or NCPD, and on my own behalf, I would like to thank both the Ministry of Tourism and the Tourism Development Company (TDC) for the invitation to today's event. We are very happy to be here at this opening and we take the opportunity to complement you on this initiative of remodelling and redesigning the La Brea Pitch Lake Museum to be accessible. It is most fitting that you are opening this Accessible Museum on World Tourism Day where the theme is *Accessible Tourism for All: Promoting Universal Accessibility*.

NCPD notes that this is not the first initiative of the TDC toward inclusive tourism. In September 2013, TDC launched its Amphibious Wheelchair Service as a pilot programme on the Maracas and Las Cuevas beaches. NCPD was pleased to partner with TDC to provide training to thirty one (31) lifeguards in preparation for this launch. We believe that it augers well for our country that the Agency is working toward inclusiveness.

This initiative is also very timely, since, as you may be aware, Trinidad and Tobago ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in June 2015. This Convention speaks to a number of rights including the right to *Accessibility* contained in Article 9, and in *Article 30, Participation in cultural life, recreation, leisure and sport*, paragraph 5(c) speaks directly to the responsibility of the State Party *to ensure that persons with disabilities have access to sporting, recreational and tourism venues*.

This is why, we as an agency with over fifty (50) years of strong advocacy for the advancement and inclusion of persons with disabilities, were extremely pleased to learn that the theme for the 2016 UN World Tourism Day is *Accessible Tourism for All: Promoting Universal Accessibility* and that the Ministry of Tourism and the TDC are working towards this goal. I give the commitment today that we at NCPD are prepared to partner and provide guidance and assistance to the Ministry and TDC as you seek to ensure that you cater to all.

We are mindful, that as a country we want to be able to demonstrate that both our local and foreign visitors can access this Centre and learn about the history of the pitch lake which is considered to be a wonder of the world.

However, while we congratulate the Ministry and the TDC on these initiatives, we recognise that there is still much more work to be done. In this regard, we would like to make three suggestions to the TDC today that we think may help domestic and international tourists looking for accessible tourism opportunities.

Firstly, we've noted that the www.gotrinidadandtobago.com website gives information on hotels and meeting venues. We would like to suggest that you include an indicator to show which venues are accessible.

Secondly, include a tab on the website for **accessible attractions** and give information on the existing initiatives, such as the amphibious wheelchairs at Maracas and Las Cuevas and accessible attractions such as this La Brea Pitch Lake Museum and Visitor Centre that you are opening here today.

Finally, we recognise that the Amphibious Wheelchair Service was a pilot project and we suggest expanding the programme to other TDC controlled beaches.

As I close, I once again congratulate the Ministry of Tourism and the TDC on this initiative and on what we perceive as your commitment to inclusive tourism. I also pledge NCPD's continued support wherever possible

I thank you.