



Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago

Ministry of Trade, Investment and Tourism

MEDIA RELEASE

Together we can combat Illicit Trade: MTTI's AITTF leads High-Level Seminar on Illicit Trade as an HSSE (Economy) concern

OCTOBER 28, 2026: The Ministry of Trade, Investment and Tourism is advancing its national anti-illicit trade agenda to confront illegal trading activity that directly threatens consumer safety, undermines compliant businesses and deprives Trinidad and Tobago of public revenue. As part of this effort, the Ministry, through its Anti-Illicit Trade Task Force (AITTF), hosted a high-level seminar and panel discussion titled "Illicit Trade: An HSSE(E) Concern" during AMCHAM T&T's 30th Annual HSSE Conference on October 27, 2026, at the Hyatt Regency Port of Spain. The session provided participants with insights on illicit trade and its detrimental impacts on Health, Safety, Security, Environment and the Economy.

EXPERT CONTRIBUTIONS & ACTIONABLE STRATEGIES

International, regional and domestic industry leaders delivered practical solutions to secure supply chains, safeguard public health and protect commercial operators:

- **Global & Regional Threat Mitigation:** Mr. Jeff Hardy (Director-General, TRACIT) addressed transnational crime links and public health risks. He commended Trinidad and Tobago as one of only 30 countries globally with a dedicated task force like the AITTF, noting the nation's rank of 62nd out of 158 countries in TRACIT's 2025 Global Illicit Trade Index.
- **Regional Intelligence & Environmental Crime:** Ms. Ariel De Freitas and Ms. Melanie Garib (CARICOM IMPACS) presented regional threat intelligence and outlined environmental enforcement strategies. They emphasized environmental crime as a critical facet of illicit trade, encompassing the trafficking of protected species, illegal/unreported/unregulated (IUU) fishing, illegal mining, waste and gas offenses, illegal logging and scrap metal trafficking.
- **Commercial & Border Defense:** Addressing illicit tobacco trade, Ms. Josiane Khan (WITCO) revealed that 1 in every 15 cigarettes locally is counterfeit or illicit. She highlighted Trinidad and Tobago's transition from Free Trade Zones to Special Economic Zones as a major structural milestone, calling for enhanced regional port collaboration, stricter penalty enforcement and custodial sentences to deter illicit operators. Ms. Margaret Turchinski (US Customs and Border Protection) further shared international border enforcement models and institutional capacity frameworks.

COMMUNICATIONS UNIT

- **Supply-Chain Integrity & Food Security:** Mr. Barry Tangwell (Bryden Pi Limited) underscored the Caribbean's extreme vulnerability to fake healthcare products, noting that with 70% of the region's pharmaceuticals imported, rigorous supply chain due diligence is vital to combat a US\$200B–US\$430B global illicit market tied to one million annual deaths. Complementing this, Mr. Farz Khan (CARIRI) addressed rampant food fraud, revealing how supply chain gaps jeopardize everyday consumer items including honey, fish, dairy, oils and meats.

PROTECTING CONSUMERS & ENTERPRISE

Panelists emphasized that safeguarding citizens and the business community requires tighter supplier screening, early detection of suspicious shipments, robust inter-agency intelligence sharing and stricter border enforcement. Highlighting concerns that one in ten medicines globally may fail to meet quality and safety standards, experts stressed the critical role of consumer awareness, urging shoppers to purchase goods exclusively from reputable, authorized sources to minimize exposure to dangerous counterfeit goods.

A CONTINUED COMMITMENT TO LAWFUL TRADE

The Ministry, through the AITTF, remains committed to building a secure, fair and transparent trading environment. By deepening partnerships across law enforcement, border control and private sector leadership, the Ministry continues to champion safer purchases for families, a level playing field for local enterprise and lasting economic resilience for Trinidad and Tobago.

ABOUT THE ANTI-ILLICIT TRADE TASK FORCE (AITTF)

The Anti-Illicit Trade Task Force (AITTF) operates under the Ministry of Trade, Investment and Tourism to coordinate inter-agency efforts against illegal trade, protect national revenue and safeguard public health, safety and economic security.

The AITTF secretariat is located at the Ministry of Trade, Investment and Tourism's headquarters in Port of Spain and can be contacted at (868)623-2931-4 exts. 2403, 2413 and 2411.

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