



## **OPENING REMARKS BY**

**Ms. Sylvia Lalla  
President (AG.)**

**AT THE LAUNCH OF THE FIRST LEGO LEAGUE**

**November 23, 2016**

**QUEENS PARK OVAL  
(SHELL HOSPITALITY SUITE)**

**The Honourable Minister of Education,  
Mr. Anthony Garcia**

**The Minister of State in the Ministry of Education,  
Dr. The Honourable Lovell Francis**

**Ag. Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Education,  
Ms. Angela Sinaswee-Gervais**

**Country Chairman, Shell Venezuela, Trinidad and  
Tobago and the English and Dutch Caribbean,  
Luis Prado;**

**Head, Microsoft T&T, Ms. Frances Corriea**

**Members of the Media**

**Specially Invited Guests**

**Good morning and welcome!**

On behalf of the Executive Management and staff of NIHERST, it is indeed a **wonderful** privilege to welcome you to this auspicious event - the Launch of the “**FIRST LEGO League**” pilot programme in Trinidad and Tobago.

NIHERST is best positioned to execute this programme as the Institute occupies a unique space within the public sector. It is the only state entity formally created by an Act of Parliament, the **NIHERST Act of 1984** with a clear mandate to **raise awareness of the importance of Science, Technology and Innovation (STI) among the citizenry, as well as to create opportunities for access and growth of STI for the social and economic welfare of Trinidad and Tobago.**

Under my (Acting) Presidency, and with the appointment of a Board of Governors in the not too distant future, my highly competent,

dedicated and committed staff, for whom I have deep respect, will continue to introduce and engage in innovative programmes and projects that narrow the knowledge gap, and expand Trinidad and Tobago's international reach, advancing our small nation-state as a formidable player in the information age.

In its 32 years of existence, NIHERST has demonstrated a strong commitment towards programmes and projects that narrow the STI knowledge gap. Examples of these programmes and projects include:

- **the Caribbean Youth Science Forum (CYSF)**, a regional program catering to sixth-form science students embarking on tertiary education in STI disciplines;
- **the Visitor's Programme at the National Science Centre (NSC)**, a foundational programme geared towards teaching and inspiring students in subject matter related to science and technology.

Initiatives that target other segments of the population include:

- ***Foresighting*** exercises that determine inter-alia the economic priority areas for revenue and employment generation;
- **The National Aeronautics and Space Agency (NASA) Internship Programme**, a Cooperation Agreement between NASA and NIHERST that annually offers internship opportunities to two (2) students pursuing studies in STEM disciplines at the undergraduate and postgraduate levels.
- ***The Prime Minister's Awards for Scientific Ingenuity***, a bi-annual competition that encourages and rewards local inventors for their creative solutions and prototypes.
- ***The Community-Centered Design and Innovation (COMDESI)*** programme targets underserved communities in Trinidad and Tobago, and harnesses the capabilities of secondary and tertiary education students in problem-solving, design and innovation, to meet the needs of those communities; and

- **The Sectoral Innovation Mapping (SIM)** studies, ground breaking research, conducted on the Animation, Energy Services, Software and Web Development Industries. NIHERST is proud to be the forerunner in this type of research, which offers meaningful insights on how innovation is currently conducted within those specific industries, highlighting the drivers that support and the factors that impede innovation. The SIM also identifies the actors, their roles, and the tacit framework conditions that ought to exist, for the industries to perform at their best mark. Documented findings of the SIMs, in addition to increasing the national research resource pool and informing and supporting evidence-based decision-making, have also been well-received by stakeholders who have identified the benefits to be derived by the public sector, academia and industry.

I understand that FIRST LEGO League is carried in 80 countries worldwide. This year's FIRST LEGO League challenge is titled "Animal Allies" and targets the youth 16 years and under. This "fun and sporty" programme is designed to challenge young minds to think scientifically and creatively. For the 2016/2017 season, NIHERST has enrolled 23 teams totalling 180 students into this pilot. The programme is structured into three parts namely: **Core Values, the Robot Game and the Project**, all of which solidify the principles of Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM). Teams of no more than ten (10) children led by an adult coach will program an autonomous robot using **LEGO MINDSTORMS** to solve a series of missions set on a table top. For their project, teams will also solve a real world problem. Throughout this experience, participants will be encouraged to operate under the FIRST LEGO League's signature set of core values that place emphasis on friendly competition, independent learning and community involvement.

I have read that historically this programme has positively impacted young students, strengthening their hard and soft skills in: - problem-solving, critical thinking, working in teams, communication, ethics, and many more.

At the international level, there is a clarion call for improving and increasing STEM skills. At the national level, Trinidad and Tobago needs to build critical mass by inspiring young people to pursue careers in STEM. The government's policy documents articulate the transition to a knowledge-based economy. Government, academia and the private sector must therefore strengthen their efforts to assist students and citizens in circumnavigating and accessing STEM opportunities in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Improving access to STEM programmes and careers is also very necessary in the under-represented communities. An example of one such STEM initiative is the **Afterschool Alliance Programme** which has been successfully adopted in several states in the United States of



America. This programme has helped to close the opportunity gap by engaging such communities in STEM education.

After much planning, NIHERST has partnered with a local firm, Sacoda Serv Ltd., to implement the **FIRST LEGO League** in Trinidad and Tobago. At this point in time, this pilot project is funded by Shell Trinidad Limited, the official 2016 Cycle Social Investment Partner.

I wish to thank Shell Trinidad Limited and Sacoda Serv Limited for working with NIHERST to make this pilot a reality. Let me assure you as the host and operational partner, NIHERST will do its part in making this pilot programme for the 2016/2017 Season an enjoyable, inspiring and learning experience. **Filled with enthusiasm and great expectation**, I am eager to see the outcome and the future impact this FIRST LEGO League promises to have on the student population in Trinidad and Tobago.

I thank you.