

**The Twentieth Report of the Public Accounts Committee on the Examination of
the Report of the Auditor General on the Public Accounts of the
Republic of Trinidad and Tobago for the year 2017 -
Response of the Minister of Foreign and CARICOM Affairs**

Refurbishment of the Residence in Geneva

Recommendation:

The MFCA should submit the policy which stipulates the standard requirements for an Official Overseas Residence to the ADG in time for the next audit of the Public Accounts

The Ministry of Foreign and CARICOM Affairs takes due note of the recommendation and is reviewing the entitlements of such office holders with a view to developing policy pertaining to the standard requirements for an Official Overseas Residence. The Ministry notes that the Ninety-eighth Report of the Salaries Review Commission stipulates that the Government of Trinidad and Tobago is responsible for the provision of “an official residence, fully furnished and maintained by the State” for Ambassadors/High Commissioners, but it does not stipulate the size, quality, number of rooms or appliances and furniture to be provided.

The Ministry of Foreign and CARICOM Affairs (MFCA), however, is cognizant of the rank of the official and notes that there are basic standards of accommodation and provision of appliances and amenities that should be applied. Whereas there is no policy set out which itemizes what is to be provided for Ambassadors/High Commissioners, there are guidelines for what is to be applied to officers as follows in accordance with Regulation 35 of the Civil Service (External Affairs) Regulations 1977:

(i) Living Room

1 Settee
3 Chairs
Coffee Table

(ii) Dining Room

Table
Chairs – not less than 6, not more than 10
Buffet/China Cabinet/Trolley

(iii) Bedrooms

Beds: Choice of twin or double
Dressing table
Chest of Drawers
1 Chair/Bedside Tables

(iv) Study

Book case
Desk
Chairs

(v) Kitchen

Refrigerator

Cooker

Tables and Chairs

(vi) Laundry

Washing Machine

Dryer

In providing for Ambassador/ High Commissioners, the Ministry is guided and influenced by the basic provision for officers as set out above as well as the following factors:

- (i) Office: the Head of Mission is the principal representative of the Head of State in the foreign jurisdiction. The standard of accommodation, therefore, must reflect this high office as well as project the appropriate image of Trinidad and Tobago.
- (ii) Role and Function: the accommodation must also facilitate the effective carrying out of the role and functions of the office holder. The Official Residence is not only the home of the Head of Mission, but also serves as a venue for official representational undertakings and must support the diplomatic work carried out beyond the confines of the Chancery or the premises of organisations, as in the case of the responsibilities of an Ambassador who is also Permanent Representative to multilateral organisations (the case of the Trinidad and Tobago's Ambassador and Permanent Representative to the United Nations in Geneva).
- (iii) Architectural style and design existing in the jurisdiction
- (iv) The need to upgrade and modernize furnishings and amenities
- (v) Items available in the jurisdiction

The policy developed will take into consideration the points listed at (i) to (iv) as well as pay due attention to issues related to cost and maintenance of properties.

Duplication Schedules for Diplomatic Bags

Recommendation:

The MFCA should investigate the use and control mechanisms for the use of diplomatic bags at all the overseas missions and determine whether more stringent control mechanisms are required

Control mechanisms for use of diplomatic bags are in place at all overseas missions as follows:

Policy for the Use of the Diplomatic Bag

- (i) Only official mail will be sent through the diplomatic bag and must bear the signature of a Senior Officer.
- (ii) By “Senior Officer” is meant a Head of Chancery or the next Senior Officer in the Mission in the absence of the Head of Chancery. In the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, a Senior Officer” means a Permanent Secretary, a Director or an Acting Director of a Division.
- (iii) Official packages emanating from overseas missions which are to be forwarded to other Ministries or Government Departments must be accompanied by a letter from the Head of Mission to the Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Foreign Affairs detailing the contents of the package and the name of the recipient at its destination.
- (iv) If a Mission is expecting to receive a package or documentation from another entity in Trinidad and Tobago, the Mission must inform the Ministry in writing and provide all relevant details.
- (v) Sealed packages containing official documents from another Ministry/Agency in Trinidad and Tobago must be accompanied by a letter from the Head of the sending Ministry/Agency indicating the contents of the package and its recipient and must be consigned to the Head of Chancery of the destination Mission.
- (vi) If another Ministry or Government Department wishes to send an item through the diplomatic bag, it must request such a courtesy in writing after which the Ministry will advise the Mission accordingly.

- (vii) All Missions must implement an official electronic log of incoming and outgoing correspondence, including packages. Details such as the date received/sent, the contents of package and the name of the recipient/sender must be recorded.
- (viii) The seal of the Ministry/Mission must be appended to each envelope or package.
- (ix) Personal packages must be sent through the normal postal services and not in the diplomatic bag.
- (x) Any item of mail which is not appropriately signed before dispatch may be retained for investigation by the Security Forces.
- (xi) The foregoing directives can only be varied at the discretion of the Permanent Secretary.

In addition to the foregoing, there is a precise procedure for preparation and sealing of the diplomatic bag, such that any tampering with the bag after it has been sealed damages the material used irreparably.

The Ministry began a review of all elements of the use of the diplomatic bag at Overseas Missions and at Headquarters to ascertain whether and, if so, at which stage of the process, more stringent control mechanisms should be employed. An examination of the current mechanisms and controls revealed that strict adherence to the policy and steps for preparation, sealing and dispatch of the diplomatic bag will ensure security of contents and avoidance of the dispatch of unauthorised packages.

Nevertheless, the Ministry will conduct periodic checks and reviews of the system to ensure that it remains a secure means of transmitting official documents between Headquarters and the Overseas Missions.