

MINISTRY OF EDUCATION

Communications Unit

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NEWS RELEASE

PALO SECO GOVERNMENT PRIMARY SCHOOL Teaching and learning resumes on September 12, 2007

Earlier this year the Petroleum Company of Trinidad & Tobago Limited (PETROTRIN) conducted a ‘condition and defects survey’ that revealed that its Beach Camp facility that temporarily housed the students of the Palo Seco Government Primary School was no longer safe and presented risks to its occupants. Following this survey, the Ministry of Education held discussions with PETROTRIN and the Palo Seco Agricultural Enterprises Limited, PSAEL, and it was agreed that a lease arrangement be entered into with PSAEL for the transformation of an administration building and two adjacent warehouses at Beach Camp, Palo Seco, into temporary accommodation for the school’s 260 students and 19 teachers. In August 2007, Cabinet agreed to the award of a contract amounting to over \$2.4 million for the refurbishment of these buildings.

On September 3, a six-member delegation of parents and community activists met with representatives of the Ministry of Education and indicated that they held separate discussions with PETROTRIN and by consensus had agreed to arrangements other than those agreed to by the Ministry.

This morning, a team of Ministry of Education officials that included Permanent Secretary Mrs. Angella Jack, Deputy Permanent Secretary Mrs. Marlene Juman-Redhead and Chief Education Officer Mr. Peter O’Neil, visited the Palo Seco area where they met with about 150 persons from the community including parents, teachers, students and community activists. Representatives of PETROTRIN including its Vice President for Exploration and Production, Mr. Victor Mitchell, and Community Relations Officer, Mr. Arthur Sanderson, also attended the meeting. Initially the discussions focussed on the two venues proposed for the temporary location of the school.

Mr. Walton Samuel of the Parent-Teacher Association said the closure of the Petrotrin Beach Camp facility was made known to the parents a few days prior to the re-opening of school and some members of the community were not in favour of the PSAEL facilities. The Permanent Secretary emphasised that the priority remains the education of all children and called upon the parents and community activists to join with the Ministry “to make something happen quickly.”

As a result of these discussions the parents and Ministry officials agreed to the following arrangements:

Phase One:

The students of the Palo Seco Government Primary School will, as an interim measure, attend classes in temporary accommodation on the grounds of the condemned School from Wednesday, September 12. Contractors will begin work immediately to restore two classroom blocks, the school's toilet and other facilities and to erect temporary shelter. The Ministry of Education will facilitate arrangements for the students to be provided with 'bus transport (from Erin and Penal), meals, textbooks and psycho-social support

Phase Two:

The Ministry will facilitate arrangements with Petroleum Company of Trinidad and Tobago Limited for the upgrade of buildings owned by PETROTRIN at Beach Camp that were identified by the parents and community activists as the better location for the further temporary accommodation of school children and teachers. This upgrade work is expected to be completed within five weeks following which the 260 students and 19 teachers will move to that Beach Camp location.

Phase Three:

The Ministry of Education will continue to hold discussions next week with parents, community activists and teachers with a view to fast-tracking the demolition of the existing Palo Seco Government Primary School and the construction of an ultra-modern school in the community. The Ministry's team advised that architectural design for the new school is completed and tender documents are being prepared. The new school, to be sited on the original location of the Palo Seco Government Primary School, is expected to be completed in 2009.

Representatives of the Ministry, PETROTRIN, the Parent-Teacher Association and community activists will continue discussions next week on the areas of agreement