



FISHERMEN AND FRIENDS OF THE SEA

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Press Statement

Was Social and Environmental Accountability Omitted?

Date: November 20th, 2019

Dear Editor/Newsroom,

We respect the positions of each entity but wish to share a community-based opinion. Corporate budgets can drown out community voices and this is an imbalance that we wish to address.

FFOS congratulate entrepreneurship but this should not be at the expense of the environment, vulnerable or down-trodden communities.

Although we salute Mr. Sieunarine Coosal on his induction to the Trinidad and Tobago Chamber of Industry and Commerce, Business Hall of Fame, for 'his contribution as a pioneer, an astute strategist, philanthropist and role model for emerging business professionals' we also have serious concerns that the Chamber may have selected a role model with a far from commendable track record.

In our respectful view, Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) must also be measured by holistic standards. In the modern world the CSR definition includes consideration of social accountability, and ethically driven environmental stewardship and sustainability. In Mr. Coosal's case, there should have been a consideration of the environmental and social impact on the communities within which his successful quarries have caused degradation, misfortune and ongoing impoverishment.

The Coosal Group have owned and operated several quarries which have been the cause of critical environmental degradation throughout Trinidad. One such example is our nation's largest privately-owned limestone Quarry situated in the Maracas Valley in the Northern Range, owned and operated by Coosal's for over 60 years.

Residents of Maracas Valley have complained for decades of irreparable quarry damage done to the once deep and beautiful Acono river, which has been studied

and reported to have impacted on the death of more than thirteen (13) species of freshwater fish, leaving in its wake, a raised river bed of sand and gravel and an aquifer starved of water.

Residents are disheartened that this corporate magnet is being rewarded over and above their decades of complaints of the degraded river, the dust generated and the daily risks they are forced to take while traversing the narrow roads alongside multiple heavy trucks speeding loudly in and out of the valley. Is this Chamber award holistically considered? Did the Chamber consult or consider the community in their determination?

Did the selection committee of the Chamber of Commerce not investigate the extensive media coverage including video footage of quarry waste being washed down the Acono River, to which Mr. Coosal has never given a public response, or apology, nor has he made any effort to clean up or rehabilitate the once beautiful Acono River? If corporate entities are rewarded for unsustainable practice, are we not promoting mediocrity?

Residents of this community have suffered in silence while pleading with Mr. Coosal (both publicly and privately) for sustainable quarry practices; for rehabilitation of the mined hillside; for rehabilitation of the Acono River and for restoration of the roads. Had he heeded these calls in a humane or "philanthropic" manner, FFOS would wholly applaud the Chambers selection and commend Mr Coosal on his Corporate Social Responsibility.

Until and unless our businesses and Chambers raise the bar on its accreditation, our nation will continue to promote and reward conduct that is far from meritorious.

Sincerely,
Gary Aboud
Corporate Secretary