

HIPCAR Project to bring cybercrime solutions to Barbados

BB'S, texts, e-mails, VoIP, Facebook, Twitter – these are the tools of modern communication, and living without them has now become almost unimaginable.

However, how many of us truly understand how they work and the risks associated with using the infinite space called the world wide web? With great technology comes an ever greater responsibility to protect the instruments which facilitate our research, communication and business.

As such, Barbados, along with 14 other CARICOM countries, has heeded the call to safeguard Information Communication Technologies (ICTs), and its users, throughout the region.

The answer has come in the form of the HIPCAR Project – Enhancing Competitiveness in the Caribbean through the Harmonisation of ICT Policies, Legislation and Regulatory Procedures (HIPCAR). It was designed to support Caribbean countries in improving their competitiveness by harmonising approaches to ICT development. It was created to bring together Caribbean governments, regulators, service providers, civil society, the private sector and regional and international organisations involved in ICT.

The project, which will provide guidelines for harmonised policies, legislation, technical matters and regulatory procedures and processes, was conceived by the International Telecommunications Union (ITU), the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) Secretariat and the Caribbean Telecommunications Union (CTU).

Its formulation was in response to requests from CARICOM states and other ICT stakeholders who saw the need for a more united approach to the subject; and professionals from the Ministry of Commerce and Trade, Telecommunications Unit and the local business community gathered to hear more about the undertaking.

ITU Project Co-ordinator, Kerstin Ludwig, explained that the endeavour was part of a larger project which covered all African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) countries. The key work areas

included ICT policy and a legislative framework relating to information society issues, including electronic transactions; privacy and data protection; cybercrime; and ICT policy & legislative framework relating to telecommunications, which encompassed universal access; interconnection and access; and service and licensing.

This EU funded project saw the design of regional models of ICT policy guidelines and draft model legislation texts in the first phase, which was completed earlier this year. The activities, which were described as “by Caribbean people for Caribbean people”, saw the full engagement from Ministry representatives region wide, collaborating with ITU personnel, who aided the identification of gaps within ICT-related legislation.

With proactive and decisive action taken by various Caribbean islands, project participants from the Pacific Islands have chosen to adopt some of the guidelines established here in the region in the drafting of their own legislation.

The second stage of HIPCAR will focus on country implementation, which will require amendments made during the consultation process to be accepted and applied into national law. The two year project was originally slated to end this year, however, it has now been extended until 2012, allowing countries ample time to pass relevant legislation.

Also present at the meeting was ITU Consultant, Dr. Marco Gercke. He offered a comprehensive presentation on the sheer vastness of cybercrime, and how treating the problem could only be facilitated through training and the creation of the requisite laws.

“In the last couple of weeks, we’ve looked at your legislation (The Electronic Transactions Act, The Computer Misuse Act and the Telecommunications Act) and compared them to the HIPCAR standards, and highlighted where the differences were. During the stakeholders Workshops, we explored what could be done to bring them fully in line with HIPCAR standards and thereby with international standards but customised for the

region.”

“Now, what needs to be done is to have them implemented and this is the crucial point. You can have the best laws but if they are not enforced, you can’t apply them,” Dr. Gercke stressed.

In addition, he emphasised that the small size of Caribbean countries ensured that not only could implementation be swift, but training could be conducted efficiently and quickly.

The ITU Consultant also noted that

all of us – individuals and corporations – are exposed to cybercrime at some point, from computer viruses and spam e-mails to becoming a victim of illegal data acquisition or even data espionage, all facilitated by the very open and vulnerable world wide web.

He gave a tourism-related example to illustrate the opportunities and threats associated with an online presence, stating that while a website facilitates e-mail bookings for an online

business, it also presented challenges.

“They have an online booking system, what happens if I send a fake e-mail (reservation and) I never show up? Can they go to court? Can they sue me? Or is there no legislation in place that will allow them to do this? (There’s) data espionage, people breaking into your computer system, taking your databases full of customer records,” he said, also noting that electronic evidence needed to be supported by legislation, espe-

cially considering that cybercrime was committed not only by nationals of a country, but by those visiting or in transit.

This, he said, and the fact that country-wide available wi-fi was planned for the near future, made it crucial for legislation to be enacted and training to be facilitated, so authorities could act quickly.

Additional information can be found at http://www.itu.int/ITU-D/projects/ITU_EU_ACP/hipcar/. (NH)

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