Steelbands told: Don't play on docks

By PETER RAY BLOOD

PAN TRINBAGO has told steelbands to "desist from playing" on the Port of Spain Wharves for arriving cruise ships until negotiations for appropriate appearance fees are negotiated.

The organisation said it was currently involved in such negotiations with the Ministry of Industry, Enterprise and Tourism.

At a news conference last Thursday, Pan Trinbago accused the government of displaying gross disrespect for the organisation and threatened to withdraw its support for government's. "tourism thrust."

Pan Trinbago president Owen Serrette has called on Tourism Minister Senator Ken Gordon to appoint a member of its executive to the Board of the Tourism Development Authority (TDA) so that "when decisions are made we will be able to participate."

Serette said government indicated to the United Nations that the steelband would be the primary vehicle for moving the "tourism thrust" forward but "scant courtesy" was being paid to steelbands by both government and its agency, the TDA.

Serrette accused the TDA of failing to act in good faith by ignoring Pan Trinbago and directly negotiating with member bands for performances on the docks for arriving cruise ships.

"The TDA," he said, "is now going directly to the sponsors of steelbands to perform free of charge, while providing fees for other artistes performing for the tourists. We must discourage this."

Taking TDA cultural advisor Aubrey Adams to task for not seeking the interests of pannists, Serrette accused Adams of negotiating directly with steelbands, as well as attempting to entice school bands at greatly reduced fees.

He suggested that "instead of having steelbands play on the docks, like the old colonial days, the TDA should bring the tourists to the panyards." Serrette said 300 cruise ship passengers recently paid $10 (US) each to be entertained at a newly opened nightclub when they could have been taken to panyards to get "a true feel of the steelband in its indigenous environment."

According to Serette, $1,000 was the minimum fee to employ a band for a one-hour performance, with preference being given to unsponsored bands.

In response to a meeting held on March 22 concerning the arrival of four cruise ships over the Easter weekend, Pan Trinbago's executive received a "note" which indicated that the Tourism Ministry exclusively requested sponsored bands for performances on the docks. "The answer to that is an emphatic 'no', " said Serrette. "We insist that unsponsored bands must have priority."

Yesterday, Serrette confirmed that no steel orchestras performed on the Port of Spain docks when the cruise ships arrived last weekend.