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MEDIA STATEMENT

Saturday 06th January 2024

For Immediate Release

Statement by the Equal Opportunity Commission on the passing of former Prime Minister Basdeo Panday

The Equal Opportunity Commission (the ‘Commission’) joins with the national community in extending condolences to the family and friends of deceased former Prime Minister Basdeo Panday and in commemorating his legacy of national service.

The Commission was created by the Equal Opportunity Act of 2000 (the ‘Act’) which was a piece of legislation passed during former Prime Minister Panday’s premiership from 1995 to 2001. This Act reflected his belief in social justice, equity, and the removal of barriers for all persons and was designed to prohibit certain types of discrimination and to create a mechanism by which persons who have been discriminated against can access relief quickly and cost-effectively. It was at the time, and even today, is a progressive piece of legislation.

In addition to former Prime Minister Panday’s quick wit, he at times made very profound statements that went to the heart of his vision for a unified and equal society. Most notably, having been sworn in as Prime Minister and asked how he felt about being the first Indian Prime Minister, he replied that the only Indian Prime Minister he knew was the one in India, and as far as he knew, he was the Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago, conveying the message that he was first and foremost a Trinbagonian Prime Minister for all its citizens, and not of a particular race, religion, creed, ethnicity, or geography. Such statements by a leader certainly captures and promotes a spirit of unity and equality among the multi-faceted and diverse group of people that is Trinidad and Tobago.

The Act was born out of former Prime Minister Panday’s belief in the need to transform Trinidad and Tobago into a more just and inclusive society, where persons are treated with

COMMISSIONERS: Mr. H.R. Ian Roach (Chairman)
Ms. Denise Duncan (Vice Chairman) • Mr. Peter Elias
Mr. John Arnold • Dr. Krystal-Jane Verasammy

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based on their individual merits and abilities are not divided based on group identity. The Act and the Constitution both express unequivocally, aspirations for a society that is based on equality and justice, that is, non-races, non-sexes and non-discriminatory. It is a vision that the Commission hopes will continue long after former Prime Minister Panday's passing. May he rest in peace.

END

About the Equal Opportunity Commission (the 'Commission')

The Commission is a statutory body created by the Equal Opportunity Act Chap 22:03 (the 'Act') and its primary mission is to implement that Act. The Act prohibits certain kinds of discrimination and seeks to promote equal opportunity between persons of different status.

- The Act is concerned with discrimination in four broad categories - employment, education, provision of goods and services, and provision of accommodation - where someone has suffered less-favourable treatment:
 - Because of their status, that is, because of one of the following personal characteristics: race, ethnicity, religion, sex, marital status, origin or disability;
 - Or by way of victimisation, that is, in retaliation for doing certain actions that are protected under the Act, for example, lodging a complaint with the Commission or giving evidence in support of someone who has lodged a complaint.

The Act also applies to a third category of conduct known as 'offensive behaviour.'

- A person who believes that they have been subjected to discrimination in any of the above areas may lodge a complaint with the Commission. The Commission is mandated to receive, investigate and as far as possible conciliate complaints.

- If the matter is unresolved, the complaint can be referred to the Equal Opportunity Tribunal (the ‘The Tribunal’). The Tribunal is independent to and separate from the Commission; it is a superior court of record and its mandate is to hear and adjudicate on matters that the Commission has referred to it and to make such orders, declarations and awards of compensation as it determines to be appropriate.

The Commission urges all persons to be mindful of these provisions and to refrain from discriminatory practices which infringe the human rights of others.

For more information, please visit www.equalopportunity.gov.tt.

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