

MEDIA RELEASE

Tuesday 28th February

For Immediate Release.

EOC Wants Zero Discrimination Day Celebrated Nationwide.

In a bid to spread the awareness and celebration of Zero Discrimination Day, the Equal Opportunity Commission (EOC/Commission) is advocating for the day to be a staple observation in the country and across the region. The institution is leading the charge and championing the cause, and is calling on the nation as a whole to support that mandate.

The EOC is the leading state advocate on eliminating discrimination and promoting equality of opportunity in Trinidad and Tobago.

The institution plays a critical role in raising awareness through its public education and public relations activities and through its complaints mechanism, which members of the public can access to hold persons accountable for their actions.

The Commission has amped up its public education activities this week and will be disseminating messages via the mass media, social media and its nationwide outreach caravan, which will resume on Friday 3rd March at the Commission's Head Office on Manic Street, Chaguanas.

EOC Chairman Ian Roach affirmed that for all of society to benefit from zero discrimination, we have to all be part of the process and solution to change harmful attitudes, behaviours and norms. He said, "we can build a more inclusive society by respecting the rights, differences, and dignity of others. The adage of treating another as you would like to be treated is a simple but effective one that has stood the test of time for good reason."

Chairman Roach encouraged the citizenry and Caribbean neighbours to join the global movement of solidarity to end all forms of discrimination saying, "by becoming a part of this movement, we can recreate a society where no one is denied their rights because of factors such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, origin and so much more. Research shows that truly equal and fair societies are more likely to be prosperous and harmonious ones. Failure to tackle discrimination and to provide equal opportunities hurt individuals and families, and this negatively affects our society and the economy. Discrimination costs us."

Zero Discrimination Day is observed every year on March 1 by United Nations members to celebrate the right of all human beings to live a full and productive life with dignity, which cannot exist if there is

discrimination. The day highlights how members of society can become more informed about inclusion and promote a movement for change.

Through the Equal Opportunity Act (EOA), the Commission has been doing its part by leading the charge in safeguarding the rights of our citizenry. The Act protects seven status grounds, or what can be deemed protected inherent characteristics. These are sex, race, ethnicity, origin (including geographical origin), religion, marital status, and disability. These are protected under four (4) broad categories of employment, education, provision of goods and services and provision of accommodation.

The EOC has also submitted amendments to the EOA to the Honourable Attorney General. These recommendations include inserting age and sexual orientation as status grounds for discrimination, the expansion of the definition of ‘disability’ and Co-habitation and half-blood relationships in the definitions of ‘family’ and ‘marital status.’

Furthermore, the Commission envisions transitioning into an operationally and financially independent organisation (the National Human Rights Institution for Trinidad and Tobago) so that the Commission can address discrimination on a holistic level, instead of only those categories and status grounds laid out in the Act.

The EOC has in the past, addressed wider issues such as human trafficking, migration, LGBTQI+ and HIV & AIDS. For instance in 2022, The EOC was invited to present at the inaugural DEI conference held on May 17th, which coincided with the International Day Against Homo, Bi and Trans Phobia. The theme was “Diversity as an Asset for Investment”. Further, the Commission renewed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Ministry of Labour. The aim of this partnership is to help prevent the transmission of HIV among workers, to mitigate the impact of the epidemic on workplace productivity and to eliminate stigma and discrimination related to HIV and AIDS.

Zero Discrimination Day first was declared in 2014 by the United Nations General Assembly on March 1. It was inspired by World AIDS Day but has since been expanded to include calls to action for eradicating discrimination in all forms and promoting social inclusion and tolerance

If you have been discriminated against, you can lodge a complaint at the EOC on our website www.equalopportunity.gov.tt or via e-mail: complaints@eoc.gov.tt.

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About the EOC

The primary task of the EOC is to oversee implementation of the Equal Opportunity Act Chapter 22:03, which 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 EOC. The EOC 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 ‘EOT’). The EOT is a superior court of record and its mandate is to hear and adjudicate on matters referred to it by the EOC. The EOT has the power to make orders, declarations and awards of compensation as it determines to be appropriate.

The EOC 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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