

# EOC role in upholding the principles of Constitution

WHAT DOES it mean to be a republic? A quick search of a definition would tell us that a country is declared a republic when it establishes a constitution and supreme power is held by the people and their elected representatives rather than a monarch.

It is a privilege and blessing to have the ability to elect our own head of state, independent of an external body, draw up our own laws and unlink ourselves from the identity of former colonisers and claim self-determination.

This is just a definition of what it means to become a republic, but what does it mean to BE a republic? This may seem like a play on words, but it is an important differentiation to make. The former tells us when and how a nation becomes a republic, but the latter indicates that it takes continuous work to realise the vision of the republican constitution.

The Constitution of the Republic of TT outlines the fundamental rights and freedoms of the citizens and a government system built on democracy. In the commencement of the Constitution, it outlines the vision and hopes for the people of this young nation. The opening section states:

“Whereas the People of Trinidad and Tobago – have affirmed that the Nation of Trinidad and Tobago is founded upon principles that acknowledge



the supremacy of God, faith in fundamental human rights and freedoms, the position of the family in a society of free men and free institutions, the dignity of the human person and the equal and inalienable rights with which all members of the human family are endowed by their Creator...”

This opening paragraph in many ways reflects the tenets of the Equal Opportunity Act and emphasises the importance of the mandate of the Equal Opportunity Commission (EOC) and our role in upholding the principles of the Constitution.

The mandate of the EOC, in accordance with section 27 of the act, is to, among other things, “work towards the elimination of discrimination; and to promote equality of opportunity and good relations between persons of different status generally.”

Moreover, the vision of the EOC is “a society, which is free from discrimination and prejudice, where human

rights and diversity are respected, and where there is equality of opportunity for all.”

The act is also seen as a critical piece of legislation that fills gaps relating to redress for those who have been discriminated that the Constitution does not cover.

For instance, prior to the act, a person could not lodge a complaint against a person or private organisation if they had experienced discrimination. They could only bring a constitutional motion against a public authority or the State in relation to the Constitution.

The act seeks to protect citizens against discrimination as it relates to employment, education, the provision of goods and services and the provision of accommodation. Under the act, citizens are entitled to equality and fair treatment for all, despite different racial, ethnic, religious, marital and gender backgrounds. Further, all people are entitled to equal treatment despite geographical origin or physical disabilities.

On the 46th anniversary of being declared a republic, let us celebrate the rights and freedoms guaranteed to us by the Constitution, but also take time to reflect on how we can continue to actively and proactively move to shape our identity as a republic based on the promising vision of the Constitution