

# Emancipation greetings from the EOC

**DID YOU** know that Trinidad and Tobago was the first independent country in the world to officially declare Emancipation Day as a public holiday to celebrate the abolition of slavery? On August 1, 1985, Emancipation Day replaced Columbus Discovery Day, which commemorated the arrival of Columbus to Moruga. It made the shift from celebrating the moment our country was colonised to instead honouring and celebrating our African ancestors who brought a rich culture to our shores and the contributions of their descendants to our country's development.

Emancipation Day reminds us of the struggle of our ancestors and the story of their resilience. The liberation of enslaved Africans was the end of an atrocious period in our history. Slavery was designed to break the spirit of the Africans, erase their culture and religions and destroy any glimmer of hope for a better life.

Emancipation Day was not just freedom from harrowing work on the plantations, but freedom to endeavour to be treated with dignity, respect and equality. It is in the DNA of our nation to fight against the odds to define who we are and what our future looks like.

Because of this, we as a nation must take immense pride in this day by recognising and celebrating this historical moment that today allows us to live in a society of freedom, a society not bound

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by the shackles of ignorance, intolerance, discrimination and inequality, but rather unified by our differences, celebrating each other and appreciating the ethnic diversity that is TT.

We should also take this as an opportunity to reflect and address our own unresolved issues and not be complacent when it comes to matters that compromise our convictions and sabotage the values of our beloved country. Emancipation is therefore not just a day of celebration, emancipation is a call to action,

a pursuit towards the elimination of racial inequality or acrimony because of one's ethnicity.

Race and ethnicity are two of the seven protected status grounds covered under section 4 of the Equal Opportunity Act and it is unlawful to discriminate against someone based on their race under the broad categories of employment, education, provision of goods and services and provision of accommodation.

Discrimination based on race or ethnicity occurs when a person is treated less favourably, or not given the same opportunities, as others in a similar situation, because of their race or ethnicity. The commission continues to receive complaints of discrimination based on ethnicity, but more so race. While today is a day of celebrating how far we have come as a nation, the fact that such complaints are still received should also be a reminder to us how much further we have to go.

Emancipation can therefore only truly be achieved when we individually and collectively strive towards a society free from inequality and discrimination, as real achievement can only come from living in a just society that strives to eliminate discrimination and prohibit inequality to allow each individual to reach their full potential; by truly living as free human beings unhindered by prejudice, intolerance and attitudes that diminish the morals of our society.

Happy Emancipation Day!