

Human Rights Day 2021:

# Equality – Reducing inequalities, advancing human rights

THE WORLD is battling with a pandemic. The only way to navigate this period and build a better society is to do it together. It is critical that we treat each other with dignity and respect and, above all, kindness. No group or sector has gone unscathed and it is a sobering reminder that this is a defining moment in history that will put our humanity to the test. Based on our experiences so far, in terms of how we have reacted and treated our fellow citizens, what grade do you think we would receive? Are we passing or are we failing?

On the occasion of Human Rights Day, which was commemorated on Friday, let us all reflect on where we are now and decide whether or not this is the trajectory on which we want to continue. We reference specifically the vaccinated vs unvaccinated division that has appeared in our nation.

It is a source of stigmatisation and discrimination and a worrying trend that seems to rip not just the nation in half, but communities, families, friends and even schoolmates.

The Equal Opportunity

**‘Since the establishment of the EOC in 2008, the commission has been committed to working toward the elimination of discrimination and the promotion of equality through advocacy, public education, research and the conciliation of complaints’**



Commission (EOC) is making a clarion call to break down this partition and, more than that, speak up against discrimination. Despite our differing views on whether or not to be vaccinated, we must not allow this decision to permanently damage our nation to the point where it is irreparable. Some wounds are so deep that they cannot

be healed. Since the establishment of the EOC in 2008, the commission has been committed to working toward the elimination of discrimination and the promotion of equality of opportunity through advocacy, public education, research and the conciliation of complaints.

However, the Equal Opportunity Act, like many other pieces of legislation, certainly did not foresee this pandemic and it does not cover covid19-related discrimination.

It is up to individuals, groups, institutions and the nation at large to look within and be our neighbour's keeper until the law books catch up

This year marks the 60th celebration of Human Rights Day and its theme is dedicated to "Equality – Reducing inequalities, advancing human rights."

## About the Equal Opportunity Act

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 people of different statuses.

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.