

MEDIA RELEASE

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For Immediate Release.

EOC's Zero Discrimination Day Message: Help us to help you.

“We take all complaints seriously and we investigate every complaint that is lodged.”

The statement was made by the Equal Opportunity Commission's Chief Executive Officer, Devanty Maraj-Ramdeen ahead of Zero Discrimination Day, which is observed on 1 March by all United Nations members.

Maraj-Ramdeen said that the Equal Opportunity Act protects persons who lodge a complaint and it removes barriers that may prevent one from lodging a complaint, “our service is free of charge up to the stage of conciliation and the Act has provisions to protect you if you are victimised because you lodged a complaint or gave evidence for someone who lodged a complaint. We cannot have zero discrimination unless we expose discriminators. Do not let anyone convince you that you have nowhere to turn.”

Vice Chairman of the Commission, Dr. Gabrielle Hosein added, “The Equal Opportunity Act is legislation with teeth, and it has impact. The Commission provides conciliation services but if the matter is not resolved, it goes to the Equal Opportunity Tribunal. There are real consequences for those who are brought before the Tribunal and have committed acts of discrimination.”

The CEO revealed that more than three quarter of the complaints made to the Equal Opportunity Commission in 2020 were made under the category of employment. She said, “this does not mean that employees experience the most discrimination in the country, it means that members of the public are not reporting other instances of discrimination. There are still some people who have been discriminated against and feel that they have nowhere to turn to. This is the reason the Commission was created but you must lodge a complaint with the Commission for us to act on your behalf.”

Maraj-Ramdeen noted that the Commission has made significant strides working toward eliminating discrimination through public education, conciliation services and advocacy but members of the public must do their part by utilising the services of the Commission.

The Equal Opportunity Act (EOA) addresses discrimination in four broad categories: employment, education, provision of goods and services, and provision of accommodation. She encouraged

members of the public to work together with the Commission and lodge a complaint if they have experienced discrimination based on their sex, race, ethnicity, religion, marital status, geographical origin and disability.

Zero Discrimination Day is commemorated annually on March 1st. This year, UNAIDS highlighted the urgent need to take action to end the inequalities surrounding income tax, sex, age, health, occupation, disability, sexual orientation, drug use, gender identity, race, class, ethnicity and religion that continue to persist around the world.

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Photo caption: Amrita Gangadeen, Business Operations Assistant II holds up a sign with her position on Zero Discrimination Day during a staff exercise.

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 would urge 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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