

55-57 Manic Street, Chaguanas 500621, Trinidad and Tobago, W.I.
Phone: (868) 672-0928 • Fax: (868) 671-8826 • Email: complaints@eoc.gov.tt • Website: www.equalopportunity.gov.tt

MEDIA RELEASE

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For Immediate Release.

EOC: Continue advocacy after IWD.

The Equal Opportunity Commission is calling on the nation to continue the conversations and advocacy efforts against sexual harassment, even after International Women's Day.

Chief Executive Officer Devanty Maraj-Ramdeen said, “Do not allow the dust to settle on one of the largest movements our country has seen on International Women’s Day (IWD). Let us use this opportunity to continue tackling a pressing issue that is predominantly experienced by women: sexual harassment.”

The Commission has been advocating for and has submitted, among other amendments to the Equal Opportunity Act (EOA), that amendments be made to clarify that sexual harassment is a form of sex discrimination and within the remit of the EOA. It is well recognised in court judgments from other countries and in international conventions that sexual harassment is a form of sex discrimination. The Commission has been receiving complaints of sexual harassment on this basis. However, the Commission has asked that the Act be amended to expressly say this, to remove any ambiguity that any member of the public may have. This will empower persons to lodge complaints when they experience unwelcomed and inappropriate sexual advances under all the categories covered by the Act.

The CEO welcomed the Attorney General's announcement that amendments to the Equal Opportunity Act, with regard to sexual harassment, will soon be made. She said, “it is important for women and men to advocate for gender equality but until there is a culture that promotes respect for women, legislation is needed to protect and empower our women.”

“Women in leadership: Achieving an equal future in a COVID-19 world” is the 2021 theme for International Women's Day. The Commission advocates for zero discrimination based on sex and for more women in leadership positions. Women who are on a path to leadership must also be protected from the pressures of sexual harassment as they reach for their goals. The Commission’s mandate includes promoting equality of opportunity between persons of different status.

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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 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.

Contact:

Shelly Dolabaille

Manager, Corporate Communications

Equal Opportunity Commission

Central Courtyard

55-57 Manic Street

Chaguanas

Tel: (868) 672-0928 ext 231

Mobile: (868) 330-4791

Fax: (868) 671-8826

E-mail: shelly.dolabaille@eoc.gov.tt