

MEDIA RELEASE

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EOC: Use our Services, Report Racism!

In 2020, only 30 complaints were lodged at the Equal Opportunity Commission based on race and ethnicity combined.

The EOC revealed the figure on International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination.

There has been a proliferation of racial intolerance on social media and there are stories reported in the media where persons allege that they have been discriminated against based on their race or ethnicity but they do not lodge a complaint at the EOC.

The EOC is calling on the public to lodge a complaint at the EOC if they have been discriminated against based on their race or ethnicity. This includes discrimination or offensive behaviour that occurs on social media.

Chairman of the EOC, Ian Roach said, “lodging a complaint and having the matter conciliated can ultimately address and influence the bedrock of racism in our society; it can be a major deterrent for those who discriminate against someone based on their race. It requires deliberate and consistent steps by all of society to rid us of this disease. The EOC is a critical part of the process and we are mindful of its duty to provide redress in appropriate cases of racial discrimination for victims accordingly.”

The Equal Opportunity Act also covers offensive behaviour. This applies to all acts done in public inclusive of social media that is intended to offend, insult, humiliate or intimidate another person or a group of persons because of their gender, race, ethnicity, origin or religion.

Speaking on the noticeable increase in offensive behaviour and racist remarks on social media, the Chairman said, “as a nation, we need to speak positively about one another and avoid racist comments when sharing opinions. It is easy to write offensive posts on social media but remember, there is a person on the other end of that message, even if you cannot see him/her.”

The Chairman also called on young people to adopt and promote a culture of unity and inclusivity. He said, “unity helps bring the stability and peace necessary for achieving greater economic and social progress and development. Young people must raise their voices to advocate for a world free of all forms of racial inequality, be it institutional, social, or otherwise. They play a critical role in dismantling systemic racism.”

The theme for International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination is ***Youth Standing Up Against Racism***.

The International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination is observed on 21 March every year by United Nations members. It engages the public through #FightRacism, which aims to foster a global culture of tolerance, equality and anti-discrimination and calls on each one of us to stand up against racial prejudice and intolerant attitudes.

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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