

## LETTERS

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EACH YEAR on July 18 the world celebrates Nelson Mandela International Day, a global call to action that honours the life and legacy of one of history's greatest champions of equality. The day is more than a tribute; it is a reminder that the responsibility to create positive change lies with each of us. In the words of Mandela himself: "It is in your hands to create a better world for all who live in it."

Mandela dreamed of a world free from discrimination and inequality, where all humans would have equal opportunities and rights regardless of their background. He believed that freedom and equality were not privileges for the few but rights for all. He once said, "No one is born hating another person because of the colour of his skin... People must learn to hate, and if they can learn to hate, they can be taught to love."

Here in TT, a society rich in racial and ethnic diversity, these words carry special weight. Unity across race and background is not only possible, it is essential. At its core, Mandela Day promotes the values of freedom, dignity, and equality for all, principles that lie at the heart of the mission of the Equal Opportunity Commission (EOC).

While apartheid has ended and laws have changed, the struggles against discrimination, bias, and exclusion continue – not just in South Africa, but around the globe, including right here at home. Whether it's unequal access to education, unfair hiring practices, religious intolerance, or stigma against disability, the fight for equality is far from over.

When we commemorate Nelson Mandela International Day, we are reminded that the work of building a just and inclusive society is ongoing and that every institution and individual has a role to play. According to the chair of the EOC, Ian Roach: "For all of society to benefit from zero discrimination, we have to all be a part of the process and solution and change harmful attitudes, behaviours and norms... We can build a more inclusive society by respecting the rights, differences and dignity of others."

The EOC was established under the Equal Opportunity Act, Chap 22:03 to ensure that no one is treated unfairly because of who they are and it provides a clear

**OLE TIME WEDDING:**

Tobago Heritage Festivals Ole Time wedding procession on the streets of Moriah on July 19. PHOTO COURTESY VISUAL STYLES



## Mandela's legacy: A vision of equality



Cheryl Ann Peters

message that every person matters equally. From investigating complaints of discrimination to educating the public on equal rights, the EOC serves as both a protector and a promoter of unity. Its mandate is clear: to eliminate discrimination, to promote equal opportunity, and to foster good relations among all citizens, regardless of status.

However, the EOC cannot do this work alone. Laws and policies provide structure, but true change depends on each of us

choosing fairness daily. Small acts create ripples, they transform workplaces, schools, and neighbourhoods. The work is hard. It demands honest reflection, humility, and persistent effort. But the alternative is far worse: a nation divided against itself, burdened by the pain of inequality and lost potential.

Mandela Day challenges us to ask ourselves tough questions: How do we treat those who are different from us? Do we speak up when we see unfairness? Are we willing to lend our time, energy, or even just our empathy to someone who needs it? The truth is you don't have to start a revolution to make a difference. You can start by showing up, by listening,

by offering a hand. That's what Mandela Day is all about – reminding us that progress is built not only through grand speeches or sweeping reforms, but through small, meaningful actions repeated by millions.

Mandela believed in the power of ordinary people to do extraordinary things. His story teaches us that change does not come from the top down, but from the inside out, from each person who chooses courage over comfort, and justice over indifference.

In honouring Mandela's life, we must do more than remember, we must live his legacy. We must let our anthem's promise that "Here every creed and race finds an equal place" be our practice.

"Today's deleterious national security threats – transnational crime, digital disinformation and economic strain – remind us that the price of democracy is eternal vigilance,"

PM Kamla Persad-Bissessar's message in commemoration of the 35th anniversary of the 1990 attempted coup.



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We must commit, in ways big or small, to building a nation where everyone, regardless of race, ethnicity, religion, sex, disability, marital status, or origin, has an equal opportunity to belong.

The EOC stands ready to lead this charge and invites all citizens to be part of the movement for change. As Mandela said, "What counts in life is not the mere fact that we have lived. It is what difference we have made to the lives of others that will determine the significance of the life we lead."

Change starts within each of us. Let us be, in our own way, the difference.

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