

COMMENTARY

Public Service Day: Celebrating everyday heroes, work of EOC

NEWSDAY

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CHOY FELIX

LAST MONTH we took a moment to recognise a group that often goes unnoticed: public servants. Each year, June 23 is observed as United Nations Public Service Day, a date established by the UN General Assembly in 2002 to highlight the value and importance of public service in communities around the world.

From frontline workers during emergencies to the administrators behind long-term policy, public servants are the backbone of society. They teach, care, enforce, and serve, often without recognition or applause, and during the covid19 pandemic they literally risked their lives to keep us safe and the country operational.

In TT, public service is more than just a job; it's a calling. It's teachers in classrooms, officers in community centres, nurses in hospitals, and diligent staff in the EOC office, all working behind the scenes to ensure fairness, equity, and dignity for every citizen.

When we celebrate Public Service Day, we celebrate values that define us as a nation: integrity, responsiveness, accountability, and inclusion.

The UN vision and our local connection

The UN designates June 23 to highlight the “value and virtue of service to the community,” honour public workers, and encourage young people to embark on public service careers. It also promotes innovation and excellence through the UN Public Service Awards, which celebrate creative solutions that make governments more effective and responsive.

Here in TT, the Equal Opportunity Commission (EOC) stands at the intersection of public service, law, and social justice. Our work embodies the principles of this global observance. We protect rights, champion fairness, and foster inclusive communities. As public servants, we strive daily to strengthen systems so that no one is left behind.

Serving through the mandate

At the heart of our mission is the Equal Opportunity Act, which safeguards people in four key areas: employment, education, the provision of goods and services, and accommodation. It also covers seven grounds of protection: ethnicity, marital status, origin, race, religion, sex, and disability.

When a student with a disability faces repeated exclusion, or when an employee is denied promotion because of their race or religion, it's not only unfair; it's unlawful. The EOC acts to correct these injustices. We receive and investigate complaints, facilitate conciliation, and, when necessary, refer cases to the Equal Opportunity Tribunal. Whether it's outdated school policies, biased hiring practices, or workplace rules that ignore the needs of pregnant or breastfeeding employees, our work ensures public systems work for everyone.

Education as empowerment

Public servants don't just enforce laws – they educate. Through our outreach programmes and corporate workshops, we use the power of public service to build understanding. We teach young people about respect, inclusion, and dignity. We guide employers in creating equitable workplaces, and we remind service providers that equity isn't optional; it's essential.



This proactive approach aligns directly with UN public service priorities: capacity-building, innovation, and improved governance. By equipping our educators and stakeholders with the tools to

challenge bias and systemic exclusion, we drive meaningful change from the ground up.

A national duty, a personal mission

At its core, public service is about people. Legislation and procedures can sometimes feel remote, but behind every complaint the EOC investigates and every policy we advise on are real individuals seeking dignity and fair treatment.

Public Service Day reminds us that dedication doesn't need pomp. It lives in patiently listening to a student who was ostracised, in guiding a small business owner to better understand workplace equity, and in offering clarity to someone fearful of lodging a discrimination complaint. These acts, whether small or large, add up to a stronger, fairer nation.

The road ahead

As the UN has pointed out, we're now just five years away from the 2030 deadline to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals. This year, the UN Public Service Forum held in Samarkand, a historic city in Central Asia, focused on the urgent need to improve how public services are delivered, so they can better support sustainable, fair, and inclusive development around the world.

The EOC's role in that future is clear: by tackling discrimination head-on and empowering citizens and institutions alike, we help build governance systems rooted in equity and ensure no one is left behind.

Engaging every citizen on UN Public Service Day last month, we were reminded that public service is a shared responsibility. I encourage everyone in TT to carry that message forward: attend a free outreach workshop, talk to a teacher, an officer, a nurse, or a civil servant about how equity matters. Expect fairness in your daily life and work with us to make it a reality for everyone.

The EOC remains dedicated to serving our communities. We invite you to book a free sensitization workshop, file a complaint if you

face discrimination, or simply connect with us to learn more. Together, we can reinforce the principle that public service is, and must remain, a force for equality, dignity, and inclusion for all.

And to my fellow public servants, comrades in service – stay the course. Even when the work feels slow or invisible, what you do matters. Keep showing up with integrity, compassion, and purpose. You are helping to shape a better, fairer future. TT needs you.

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Visit www.equalopportunity.gov.tt, e-mail us at communications@eoc.gov.tt, or call 1-868-672-0928 to book a free workshop for your organization, report discrimination or victimisation, or get support. You can also follow us on social media