

LETTERS

Foreign guns, local betrayal

THE EDITOR: The silence of the sea has shattered. The truth about missile strikes near our coastline is leaking, and it is horrifying. Reading the Washington Post report on the US military's attack on a boat near our waters left me hollow – men burned alive, bodies sinking into black water without names, all under the cold command: "Kill them all."

These are not storms, not old regional quarrels; they are deliberate threats, born from policies and alliances our government has chosen.

We have long cherished the Caribbean as a zone of peace – a shield keeping us from becoming pawns in foreign wars. Yet TT has stepped outside that line, "reserving its position" while Caricom condemned the strikes. The uneasy gasps from our neighbours, the harsh words against Ralph Gonsalves, the baffling flip-flops of our own Prime Minister: they show a government that has lost its moral compass. The recent admission of US marines in Tobago and allegedly areas like Mayaro, after denials, reads like a deception...slow, scripted.

What chills me is the realisation that our leaders cheer on these lethal operations, calling this grim militarisation the "new normal." When a small nation applauds extrajudicial killings and welcomes foreign troops without transparency, it heralds danger for our sovereignty. The line between comradeship and complicity blurs fast. Soon, leaders are participants in wartime atrocities: not with guns, but with smiles, silence, and quiet nods.

This is betrayal. Betrayal of the ideal that our seas are not battlegrounds. Betrayal of the unity that sustained us in our weakest hours. Betrayal of leadership's sacred duty to protect its people. The dread we feel is not political; it is human. It is fear of losing the world we call home.

We deserve honesty about foreign military presence. We deserve leaders who respect regional unity and understand the cost of militarising our waters. If the UNC cannot see that, it not only unfit – it is a danger to our nation and the wider Caribbean.

MICHAEL E DHANNY
via e-mail



TOYING AROUND: Visitors dress up and pose with toy guns during the Taiwan Military/Outdoor/Airsoft exhibition Sunday at the World Trade Center in Taipei, Taiwan. AP PHOTO

Having a radar here and (US military) people here makes us a target now... Tourists are not going to flow as they started to book, and we're now having cancellations.

Reginald MacLean,
president, Tobago
Hotel and Tourism
Association



Inclusion: Path to social progress

TRINIDAD and Tobago will join the global community in celebrating International Day of Persons with Disabilities (IDPD) on December 3. This year's UN theme, "Fostering disability-inclusive societies for advancing social progress," calls nations to address existing social inequalities by creating accessible spaces which enable all people to participate with dignity.

The theme emerged from the Second World Summit for Social Development, which took place in Doha in November, as leaders recognised disability inclusion as essential to poverty eradication, social integration, and employment opportunities.

The summit demonstrated that social development becomes unattainable as disability discrimination continues to disproportionately affect people with disabilities through poverty and employment barriers, insufficient social support, inaccessible environments and restricted personal freedoms.

Globally, there are 1.3 billion people with significant disabilities, representing one-sixth of the world's population. According to a 2011 report from the Central Statistical Office, approximately 52,244 people in TT lived with a disability. Who is a person with a disability? These are people who experience long-term, continuous physical, mental, neurological, intellectual or sensory impairments.

Research demonstrates that people with disabilities face poorer health experiences, shorter life spans, limited educational and work opportunities, and other barriers when accessing public health services. The existing social inequalities result from ableist systems and discriminatory practices, stigma, exclusion and limited access to essential services.

The United Nations maintains that disability inclusion is an essential requirement for achieving its Sustainable Development Goals. The UN Disability Inclusion Strategy highlights specific measures to achieve healthcare equity, access to social protection, employment opportunities, and participation



in public life for all people.

The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) requires that all member states ensure that people with disabilities have equal access to all services that others receive. TT signed onto the CRPD in September 2007 before formal ratification in June 2015.

In advancing inclusion in TT, the Equal Opportunity Commission (EOC) has a pivotal role in promoting equality for people with disabilities. The commission has a mandate to prohibit discrimination, promote equality of opportunity and inclusive practices across the public and private sectors. The Equal Opportunity Act (EOA) prohibits discrimination on the grounds of disability in key areas, including employment, education, the provision of goods and services, and the provision of accommodation.

The EOC provides people with disabilities access to justice through its investigative and conciliatory functions, and by engaging the public in awareness programmes so that people can access redress when faced with discriminatory occurrences. The commission actively collaborates with employers, schools, public authorities, and civil society organisations to raise awareness of their responsibilities and ensure compliance with the EOA.

These EOC initiatives echo global recommendations that underscore the need for sensitisation standards and awareness programmes, accessibility standards, and inclusive employment practices.

The goal is to ensure a society in which every person feels a sense of justice and belonging.

The observance of IDPD demonstrates that inclusion is not solely the responsibility of those with disabilities but requires a collective effort from all governmental organisations, employers, service providers, civil society organisations and the wider public.

To ensure a disability-inclusive TT, reform must include establishing accessible physical spaces, digital platforms, and communication channels, and implementing fair employment procedures and reasonable workplace accommodations.

Further, inclusive educational programmes, robust social protection systems, equal access to healthcare and public services, and disability representation in national policymaking and legislation should be of paramount importance. Ultimately, TT will only achieve these reforms if society at large adopts a mindset and cultural shift that outrightly rejects stigma and embraces diversity.

These are not abstract ideals. The practical measures will establish communities that demonstrate improved social unity, strength, and resilience. Consequently, the development of inclusive communities leads to higher national productivity and social equality, which drive national development forward.

As we observe IDPD 2025, the EOC reaffirms its commitment to ensuring the protection, equality, and full inclusion of all people in TT. This day not only honours people with disabilities but also renews the call to action to eliminate barriers that impede access, enhance systems, and establish environments that enable every individual to succeed.

This article is intended solely for educational and informational purposes and does not constitute legal advice. Readers seeking further information or assistance on matters relating to discrimination complaints can contact the Equal Opportunity Commission at 1-868-672-0928, e-mail us at communications@eoc.gov.tt or visit our website at www.equalopportunity.gov.tt