

LETTERS

TRINIDAD and Tobago joined the global community to honour Human Rights Day, which was celebrated on December 10. This significant day acknowledges one of the world's most influential commitments to dignity and equality – the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR).

UDHR was proclaimed by the United Nations General Assembly in Paris on December 10, 1948, which established for the first time a collective understanding that all human beings are entitled to fundamental rights and freedoms, regardless of race, ethnicity, gender, disability, belief, or social background.

This year, the UN theme, "Human Rights: Our Everyday Essentials," is a reminder that human rights are not merely reserved for international conventions or legal textbooks, but rather are a part of our daily lives and experiences.

Human Rights in its simplest form determine the adequacy of foods we eat, the air we breathe, how we are treated at school or in the world of work, the opportunities we have to succeed, and our right to protected dignity. Human rights establish shared human values which create the basis for fair treatment, safety, justice and equality.

Human rights are positive, essential and attainable

According to the UN, human rights uplift and not merely protect. They create a sense of happiness, security and belonging which people ought to experience in their everyday lives. For example, these rights guarantee that children can learn without prejudice, prospective employees receive fair assessments based on their qualifications instead of stereotypes, and people with disabilities can access public services independently and with dignity.

Human rights operate as fundamental necessities, that is, the right to be safe, to express our selves without fear, to participate in decisions affecting our lives, and to access various opportunities free from bias, stigma and discrimination. During uncertain times, these universal rights remain a reliable foundation.

Notably, human rights are attainable. They start with individual actions which include treating others fairly, fighting stigma and discrimination, listening to others, and respecting differences between people of different



NO AMNESTY FOR JAIR! A protester carries a sign, right, that reads "Without Amnesty" in Portuguese during a protest against a bill that looks to reduce former president Jair Bolsonaro's prison time, in Brasilia, Brazil, on Sunday. **AP PHOTO**

"Systems that work, spaces that feel alive again, and people who feel seen. Because service is not about power: It's about responsibility."

— Karyn "Baby" Forbes, PNM candidate for Plymouth/Black Rock in the January 12 THA election.



Human Rights Day 2025

Everyday essentials, rights: A call to equality



backgrounds. Human rights depend on collective action, which requires nations to work together to protect equality and fight against injustices.

Human rights and mandate of the EOC

In TT, the Equal Opportunity Commission (EOC) operates as a guardian of these everyday essentials. Created by the Equal Opportunity Act (EOA), the EOC has a mandate to prohibit discrimination, promote equality of opportunity and inclusive practices across the public and private sectors.

It is also responsible for receiving, investigating, and, as far as possible, conciliating allegations of discrimination lodged with it. The EOC's mandate aligns closely with the principles of the UDHR, that is, equal treatment under the law, protection from discrimination, respect for dignity, participation in society, and access to justice.

The EOC continues its work to make human rights a practical reality and not merely a theoretical concept in various settings, including homes, workplaces, schools, religious institutions, and public services.

Promoting non-discrimination and equality in everyday life

Discrimination based on race, ethnicity, religion, sex, disability, marital status or origin diminishes the very essence of human rights. It hinders access to employment, limits educational opportunities, and excludes individuals from participating equally in society.

The EOC addresses discrimination by providing free investigative and conciliatory services for members of the public who believe they have been subjected to discrimination; educating and sensitising the public on their rights and obligations under the EOA; collaborating with employers, schools, and service providers to build inclusive and respectful environments; and advocating for policies and practices that promote equal access, consequently removing systemic barriers.

Human rights as everyday essentials in TT

Human rights manifest itself in ordinary expectations such as being treated fairly in the recruitment process when applying for a job; accessing education without discrimination; receiving goods and services free from bias or prejudice; ensuring public spaces are accessible to people with disabilities; and being protected from hate, harassment, or unequal treatment because of one's background or beliefs.

These "everyday essentials" are not extraordinary demands but basic requirements for people to thrive in society.

Building society of respect and dignity

While legal protections such as the EOA are key deterrents to discrimination, human rights ultimately depend on having a culture of fairness which can only be created through daily individual actions. Every person has a part to play in developing such an environment. This can be done by speaking up when witnessing unfair treatment or discriminatory practices, respecting differences, and fostering inclusive environments.

The EOC continues to champion this cultural shift through nationwide outreach, training, advocacy, and sensitisation programmes. Human Rights Day gives us an opportunity to recognise that equality requires continuous work and efforts, and that progress is not only achieved through legislative reforms and policies, but through shifts in mindsets.

As we reflect on Human Rights Day 2025, this year's theme urges us to recognise that human rights touch every aspect of our lives and that protecting them is a shared responsibility.

While organisations such as the EOC exist to uphold these rights, true equality is only achieved when institutions, citizens and communities work together to firmly reject discrimination and embrace inclusion.

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