

COMMENTARY

Race, unity and the responsibility we share

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TRINIDAD and Tobago is a place of love, peace and unity, but at times on social media it can be seen that, unfortunately, race and political tensions get extreme. Comments sections become battlegrounds, old wounds are reopened, and narratives of “us versus them” take centre stage. While these moments may be loud online, they do not reflect who we are at our core, nor who we aspire to be as a nation.

TT has long prided itself on being a multicultural, multi-ethnic society. Our diversity is visible in our festivals, food, language, places of worship, and everyday interactions. For the most part we live, work, and celebrate side by side. Yet, when tensions arise they often expose underlying fears, misconceptions, and unresolved historical issues around race and identity.

This is where conversations about race must move beyond blame and into responsibility.

Understanding race and equality

Race and ethnicity are among the protected grounds under the Equal Opportunity Act. The law exists to ensure that no one is treated unfairly in employment, education, accommodation, or access to goods and services because of who they are or where they come from.

The Equal Opportunity Commission (EOC) was established to uphold these protections. Our role is not to police opinions or silence disagreement, but to address discrimination and victimisation when they cross the line into unequal treatment. We also have a responsibility to promote understanding, education, and respect across all communities.

Racism does not always appear as open hostility. It can be subtle, embedded in assumptions, stereotypes, or decisions that quietly exclude or disadvantage others. When left unchallenged, these behaviours erode trust and weaken social cohesion.

The impact of divisive narratives

Social media has given everyone a voice, but it has also amplified division. In moments of political tension, racial narratives are often weaponised. Communities are painted with broad strokes, individuals are reduced to stereotypes, and historical grievances are reignited.

These narratives do real harm. They influence how people are treated at work, how students feel in classrooms, and how safe individuals feel accessing services. They also distract us from the shared challenges we face as a country, challenges that cut across race, class, and background.

Unity does not mean pretending differences don't exist. It means recognising those differences while refusing to allow them to divide us.

Role of the EOC

The EOC continues to receive complaints related to race and ethnicity. These range from discriminatory hiring practices to unequal treatment in education or access to services. Each complaint is assessed carefully, investigated, and where appropriate addressed through conciliation.

Conciliation is a key part of our work. It allows parties to engage in structured, confidential dialogue aimed at resolving disputes fairly and respectfully. In many cases, this process leads to greater understanding, policy changes, and improved practices that benefit not just the individuals involved, but entire organisations.

Beyond complaints, the EOC remains committed to public education. Through sensitisation sessions, outreach programmes, and public commentary, we work to remind citizens that equality is not just a legal requirement, it is a shared value.

What unity really requires

Unity is not passive. It requires effort, reflection, and accountability. It asks us to challenge our own biases, to listen even when conversations are uncomfortable, and to resist the urge to generalise or assign blame.

It also requires leadership, not just from institutions, but from individuals. The way we speak to each other, the language we use online, and the assumptions we make all shape the national climate.

If we are serious about unity, we must also be serious about fairness.

Moving forward together

As a nation, we have come too far to allow division to define us. Our laws, including the Equal Opportunity Act, reflect a commitment to dignity, respect, and equal treatment for all. But laws alone cannot create unity. That work happens in our homes, workplaces, schools, and communities.

The EOC will continue to do its part by addressing discrimination, promoting education, and advocating for inclusion. We encourage members of the public to do theirs by choosing dialogue over division, understanding over assumption, and unity over fear.

Race relations in TT will always be complex, shaped by history and lived experience. But complexity should never be an excuse for intolerance. Our diversity is not a weakness, it is our strength.

If we remember that, especially in moments of tension, we can move forward together with greater empathy and purpose.

For more information about your rights under the Equal Opportunity Act, to request a sensitisation session, or to make a complaint, contact the Equal Opportunity Commission at www.equalopportunity.gov.tt, e-mail communications@eoc.gov.tt, or call 672-0926