

# Towards hope and growth in 2023

IT IS the time of year when we decide on our new year resolutions and engage our best efforts to keep them. Some of these resolutions include kicking an old and damaging habit, working towards a better career, or small and simple changes that will have a significant impact. We want to add a resolution for all of TT to consider.

In this new year, let us work towards tolerance and, further, respect and dignity for all. Perhaps it is an ideal that some think is unattainable but as a nation we are further along than we give ourselves credit for and, therefore, we are closer to this ideal than further away from it.

We have active and concerning examples around the world to draw reference: the Russia/Ukraine War; the death of Mahsa Amini while in the custody of the morality police in Tehran, Iran and resulting protests; the mosque blast that killed 18 in Afghanistan; and the series of mass shooting in the US.

It is a sober reminder that while we have a long journey ahead of us, as a young nation we have so much to be thankful for. This is the reason that one of our recurring themes in 2022 was gratitude and hope for our nation that was built on unity.

We are not unaware that 2022 was a difficult one as we edged past the pandemic and are still dealing with all the resulting impacts of it. The covid19 pandemic was an equaliser, having no regard for any particular race, religion, sex; but also a magnifier of inequality. A paradoxical pandemic.

In 2022, as a response to the increased inequalities due to the pandemic, we amped up our public education efforts hoping to reach all corners of our society and share with them their right to equality and how the Equal Opportunity Commission (EOC) can bring redress for those



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who have been discriminated against.

Some of our major projects included this column publication series that was run for the entirety of 2022. It was published every Monday in the Newsday, educating the public on various ways the Equal Opportunity Act protects members of the public and how the EOC can bring redress.

We have also produced, in partnership with TTT, two television series aimed at raising awareness on targeted subjects. The first programme was Sex and Prejudice and focused on the issues and solutions surrounding sex and gender discrimination. It extended the conversation past International Women’s Day and activists and experts in the field shared scholarly and practical advice.

The second programme was The Hard Conversation: Let’s Talk Equality and it focused on powerful testimonies by those affected by discrimination and their hopes for the future. We provided this platform for young people in stereotypical “hot-spot” areas and people with disabilities. In this new year, we will shine a light on con-

versations about religion.

The EOC also fully utilised the mass media to make appearances on various radio and television programmes. The inaugural Real Unity Independence Competition was also launched on Instagram last year and targeted the youth.

The nationwide caravan was launched as an outreach project to visit areas in TT. The Tobago leg has been completed and the caravan will continue this year.

The EOC also continued its inclusivity training with organisations, informing both employer and employees on their rights and responsibilities in the workplace and the protection that the act offers. These sessions are free of charge.

As the leading state advocate on discrimination, EOC representatives shared their expertise on various panels, webinars, workshops and training sessions.

As we begin the new year, we can surely all agree on one thing: we must take this opportunity to reflect on the lessons coming out of the pandemic and learn from them. Who our most vulnerable are, how they were affected and continue to be affected and our response to those in need of support. How we, as a society, emerged from the pandemic.

Our message for 2023 is one of hope and growth. Seeking to find common grounds, respecting differences and treating each other as we would ourselves liked to be treated as a human being should be our priority. If a tragedy such as the covid19 pandemic were ever to arrive at our doorsteps, it is this approach that will carry us through.

To Trinidad and Tobago, we wish you all the best for the new year.

**The EOC column will appear every other Monday from today**