



FEATURE ADDRESS BY

SENATOR THE HONOURABLE DONNA COX
**MINISTER OF SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT AND FAMILY
SERVICES**

**75TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE INCORPORATION
OF THE
TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO BLIND WELFARE
ASSOCIATION**

**MONDAY JUNE 13, 2022
SCHOOL FOR THE BLIND, SANTA CRUZ**

11:30 A.M.

It gives me great pleasure to be here with you this morning for the 75th Anniversary celebration of the Blind Welfare Association of Trinidad and Tobago. I am happy to know that, for 75 years you have consistently assisted the blind and visually impaired in coping with the problems that result from limited vision, failing vision and total blindness, to ensure they live independently.

Guided by the mandate of this Government's National Development Strategy, also known as Vision 2030, the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services continues to work assiduously to ensure that no one is left behind, and that ALL citizens are afforded an EQUAL opportunity to access social services. Thus, ensuring that all our citizens, including the most vulnerable, are cared for and treated with dignity and respect.

A critical element of this mandate includes the full inclusion and participation of persons with disabilities in society.

In this regard, the Ministry, through its Disability Affairs Unit, continues to work towards the implementation of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, with a strong focus on sensitization and awareness, as well as achieving the objectives of the Action Plan of the Policy.

The Ministry continues to maintain the provision of both the Disability Assistance Grant for adults, as well as the Disability Grant for Minors. In recent times, the Ministry also sought to promote and facilitate wider access to the Ministry and its services for Persons with Disabilities, particularly those with visual impairments. Hence, the Ministry has introduced several initiatives, utilizing digital technology, to help, empower and transform the lives of persons with disabilities. These included, the recommissioning of our website and the addition of a disability microsite.

Further to this, in 2021, the Ministry in collaboration with the Telecommunications Authority of Trinidad and Tobago, introduced the Assistive Mobile Devices Initiative.

This initiative focused on providing the opportunity for persons with disabilities to increase access to information through ICT devices.

Recognizing the valuable and critical role of civil society in our national development, the Ministry continues to provide financial, technical and advisory support to NGOs through the services of the NGO Unit. The NGO Unit also provides subventions and one-off grant funding, as well as targeted capacity building initiatives, to enhance good organizational governance and sustainability, in serving the community of persons with disabilities.

The Ministry applauds the services offered by the Blind Welfare Association such as:

- mobility and orientation training;
- daily living skills and welfare checks as part of adjustment to blindness;
- advocacy services;
- braille tutoring; and
- training.

Soon, we can look forward to braille training for staff of the Ministry, facilitated by the Association, as we work towards deeper collaboration for the purpose of sensitization, accessibility and inclusion for the blind and visually impaired.

It is hoped that, not only will all persons with disabilities be further empowered to realise their full potential and live more independently, but our society would be equipped to provide adequate support to this community. Thereby, contributing to the realisation of the United Nations' 2030 Global Sustainable Development Goals.

Moving forward, the Ministry continues to chart a course for the development of initiatives that will result in an expansion of the Ministry's portfolio into one which encourages resilience, enabling clients and beneficiaries to graduate from social support and transition into a more sustainable quality of life.

Part of the Ministry's responsive, multifaceted approach involves employing the latest business and artificial intelligence tools to coordinate social services through a 'one door' approach.

Through the use of a digital platform, known as the Integrated Social Enterprise Management Systems (ISEMS), the Ministry aims to transform our social services delivery system by focusing on creating a central database that will have clients' information readily accessible to facilitate the decentralization of social services.

ISEMS will also aid in the connectivity between the Ministry and external entities including ministries, agencies, NGOs, and other private sector organizations. It will also facilitate the 'single door approach' in accessing social services. The major programmes administered by the Ministry's delivery units are being merged as part of the Social Support and Empowerment Model, which will be operated by the proposed Social Support Empowerment Unit (SSEU). The SSEU utilizes an overall case management method to take clients from dependency to a state of self-sufficiency. These initiatives would utilise assistive technology, which would facilitate the participation of persons with disabilities.

The Ministry is committed to strengthening its collaboration with the Association, which receives a substantial subvention from the Government each year. This subvention accounts for over ninety percent (90%) of the Association's revenue. The Accounting Officer, Ministry of Social Development and Family Services has fiduciary responsibility for the operations of the Association and is responsible to Parliament for the Vote under the Ministry.

The Ministry will continue to working with the Blind Welfare Association and all stakeholders in support of the blind and visually impaired, and encourages the development of collaborative relationships and meaningful interventions for the benefit of this community of persons.

I again applaud the Blind Welfare Association for its commitment to enhancing the lives of the blind and visually impaired person in this country.

Today, I applaud you and wish you continued success as you grow from strength to strength.

May God Bless you.

I thank you!