



**REMARKS BY**

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**MINISTER OF SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT AND FAMILY  
SERVICES**

**LAUNCH OF THE  
HEAL, EMPOWER, RISE  
COUNTER TRAFFICKING IN PERSONS  
(HER CTIP) PROJECT**

**THE BRIX HOTEL  
ST. MADELEINE ROOM**

**WEDNESDAY SEPTEMBER 07, 2022**

**10:00 A.M.**

It gives me great pleasure to bring remarks on behalf of the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services at this launch of the Heal, Empower, Rise Counter Trafficking (HER CTP) Project. This is a Project that is intended to strengthen and reinforce Trinidad and Tobago's response to Victims of Trafficking (VoTs).

Today, I commend the three International Organizations that are working collaboratively on this initiative:

1. The United States Agency for International Development, Mission for Eastern and South Caribbean (USAID/ESC), (the donor agency providing funding and technical support);
2. The International Organization for Migration (IOM), (the implementing partner – providing technical expertise, experience and resources), and
3. The United Nations Development Programme (providing support for counter trafficking efforts).

We must all acknowledge that human trafficking is both a serious crime and a public health issue. Victims are exploited, enslaved and their rights are taken away; they are robbed of their freedom, dignity and the opportunity to develop their human potential.

Victims are abused, their passports and other identification documents are confiscated, and they are forced into domestic servitude to work under horrible conditions. They are forced to work as sex slaves, forced into criminal activities such as pickpocketing, drug cultivation, drug trafficking and in some countries they are unlawfully used as child soldiers. No wonder the US Department of State described human trafficking as modern day slavery (2022).

We, at the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services recognize the complexity of this crime and the reality that more and more people; women, girls, boys, persons with disabilities, refugees, migrants, asylum seekers and even men are lured away by unscrupulous individuals. In this age of technology, the risk of being victims of human trafficking is greater through social media. Adults and children become easy targets for those human trafficking criminals who troll these virtual spaces and enter chat rooms with one motive – to capture their next victim. Additionally, our location in the Caribbean creates multiple vulnerabilities that we must build defences against.

The recognition of the seriousness of human trafficking resulted in the Ministry establishing a draft Manual on Victims Care for Social Service Providers. The Manual provides comprehensive information on some of the following:

- The importance of adopting a victim-centred approach;
- The victims' need for care and protection and the relevant agencies to contact;
- Other basic needs such as food, clothing and shelter;
- The need for legal representation;
- The repatriation and reintegration of the victim;
- The role and importance of collaborating and cooperating with law enforcement, other Government Agencies and NGO service providers;
- Referral to international bodies for victim.

Once this Manual is approved by the Cabinet, it will be circulated to the respective stakeholders who provide services to victims of human trafficking.

In 2020, the Ministry established the Working Committee for the Delivery of Care for Victims of Trafficking, in line with its strategic goals for the period 2018-2022 and Section 37(1) of the Trafficking in Persons (TIP) Act, 12:10. This Committee reports directly to the Ministry's Permanent Secretary and to the National Task Force Against Trafficking in Persons. Government also established a special facility for girls who are victims of trafficking.

This facility was developed with the understanding that 72% of the globally detected human trafficking victims are girls under the age of 18 (Global Report on Trafficking in Persons 2020).

Furthermore, our National Family Services Division continues to provide psychological assessment and counselling for victims of human trafficking. This is done on behalf of the Counter Trafficking Unit. Victims of human trafficking, once eligible, can also access the food support, rental assistance and clothing grants offered through the Social Welfare Division of the Ministry.

If the victim is a minor, an adult can submit an application for public assistance, education and uniform grants for the child. The Ministry also provides assistance to trafficked victims who are deportees. Funding is also provided to several Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) that provide support to migrant populations, which may include victims of trafficking.

This Ministry is also swiftly moving towards a service delivery model that treats with empowering and helping its clients to achieve sustainable living and independence. The model is called the Social Transformation Empowerment Programme, which we commonly refer to as STEP-UP.

The STEP-UP Programme aims to move our clients and families out of vulnerability to an independent, sustainable living. This Heal, Empower, Rise Counter Trafficking Project therefore resonates well with the Ministry's STEP-UP service delivery model and our mandate to provide a robust social protection system for the vulnerable.

We recognize that through partnerships we can effectively address the scourge of human trafficking.

The Ministry remains committed to working collaboratively with the United States Agency for International Development Mission for Eastern and Southern Caribbean, the International Organization for Migration, and the United Nations Development Programme. Through these engagements we will develop survivor informed strategies and training to improve our responses to victims. This will also help us to develop the capacity of survivors to become their own advocates and leaders, in the fight against counter trafficking in Trinidad and Tobago. I am confident that the Project will shape policy, and create sustainable positions for survivors.

Within recent times, staff of the Ministry participated in the International Organization for Migration's in-depth Research Project on key countries in the Caribbean, focusing on migration policies.

Further to this, they also participated in the Planning Workshop for the 2023/2024 Refugee and Migrant Response Plan (RMRP).

Today, we formally express our gratitude for the opportunity to participate in the capacity building component of the the Heal, Empower, Rise Counter Trafficking (HER CTP) Project.

I am advised that staff will receive training in trauma-informed care, psychological first aid, protection mainstreaming and human rights. They will also receive technical assistance in awareness raising, victim care and the review of technical documents. This capacity building training will aid the Ministry as it seeks to fulfil its responsibility, to provide social services and support to victims of trafficking.

I must emphasize that the care of victims of trafficking is urgent and constantly increasing, and hence, the Government of Trinidad and Tobago continues to advance the fight against human trafficking. We will continue to implement and strengthen our systems, policies and procedures to support and assist in meeting the needs of these victims.

As we work together to ensure the lives of vulnerable persons are empowered and transformed, I pledge the Ministry's continued support and look forward to the success of the Heal, Empower, Rise - Counter Trafficking in Persons Project.

In closing, I agree with the words of Pope Francis, "*Human trafficking is a crime against humanity. We must unite our efforts to free victims and stop this crime that has become ever more aggressive, that threatens not just individuals, but the foundational values of society.*" I encourage everyone here, and the people of Trinidad and Tobago, to follow the mantra of the New York Metropolitan Transportation Authority, "*If you see something, say something*". Let me say that again, "*If you see something, say something*". This is one way we can all help law enforcement to apprehend perpetrators. It is only when perpetrators are captured, brought before the Court and convicted, would we see a significant decrease in human trafficking.

Remember, we are all in this fight, together. It is a fight we must win.

Thank you for the courtesy of your attention. May God bless you and may God bless this collaboration.