



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

**LAUNCH OF THE
#ENDPOVERTYTT WEEK**

TUESDAY 18TH OCTOBER, 2022

2:00 P.M.

It is a great honour for us at the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services to join with the international community to commemorate the 35th Anniversary of the United Nation's declaration of October 17 as the International Day for the Eradication of Poverty (IDEP). This is an initiative for Governments and persons around the world to stand with poor and vulnerable persons, to help them overcome poverty.

This year's theme, "***DIGNITY FOR ALL IN PRACTICE: The commitments we make together for social justice, peace, and the planet,***" underscores the value of respect in the fight against poverty and inequality, and challenges us to redouble our efforts to preserve peace. The theme further admonishes us to adopt the moral and legal framework of human rights, placing human dignity at the heart of our practice.

Kofi Anan, the former Secretary General of the United Nations stated that "*extreme poverty anywhere is a threat to human security everywhere.*" Poverty is a threat to human development and livelihood. It is with this in mind, that the United Nations aimed to eradicate poverty by 2030. This goal was shattered when the world was significantly impacted due to COVID-19. This led to a global economic crisis, increased unemployment and increased poverty.

The negative impact of COVID-19 was worst than the 1990 depression or the world economic crisis between 2007 to 2009. The United Nations indicated that in some countries, the poverty levels returned to that experienced thirty years ago and they have estimated that the number of persons living in poverty could increase to 580 million.

Additionally, the World Health Organization's (WHO) reports indicate that two billion people still live without safe drinking water; 3.6 billion without safely managed sanitation, and at least 1.3 billion still live in multi-dimensional poverty. Unfortunately, almost half of them are children and youth.

In the Caribbean, the Caribbean Food Security and Livelihoods Survey (August 2022) revealed that there has been an alarming increase in food insecurity over the past six months.

The World Food Programme estimates that there are now 4.1 million people who moderately or severely lack consistent access to enough food in the English and Dutch-speaking Caribbean. This figure represents a significant shift from the past three rounds of surveys which showed a relatively stable level of food insecurity.

Sadly, from the reports provided, the number of persons experiencing food insecurity in the region have more than doubled since the start of the pandemic. This population increased by 1.4 million, equating to a 46% increase over the past six months alone. This significant increase in food insecurity at the regional level is a great cause for concern.

The call to eradicate poverty is one that the Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago attempts to respond to with a slew of different policies, grants, programmes and services, all designed to lift the poor and vulnerable, one by one, and place them on a path of dignified and sustainable development. This Government will continue to push ahead in implementing measures to mitigate and address poverty.

Ladies and Gentlemen, we remain ever mindful that persons who experience poverty are often vulnerable and face social exclusion. Impoverished households, senior citizens and persons with disabilities are most likely to experience a greater threat of vulnerability and discrimination when faced with socio-economic challenges that impede their ability to participate meaningfully in a number of areas in society.

It is out of respect for the dignity of the most vulnerable, that the Ministry has been working steadfastly on all fronts to minimise and roll back poverty, while undertaking sustainable measures to transform the lives of our less fortunate citizens.

Some of these major measures include:

1. The establishment of a Social Services and Empowerment Unit, which will assist in coordinating the holistic development of social welfare clients to enable them to live more independently;
2. The establishment and implementation of a National Register of Vulnerable Persons, with the aim to significantly improve how the government identifies and targets the poor and vulnerable in society;
3. The continued implementation of the National Social Mitigation Plan to ensure the expansion of food security and the growth of micro and small enterprises within households and communities.

The Government remains cognizant of its role and responsibilities in the elimination of poverty amongst its vulnerable populations. It is for this reason, ladies and gentlemen, that notwithstanding continued challenging economic times, the Government opted not to remove any of the social assistance grants accessible to the population.

Instead, the safety net was widen even further, by increasing the personal tax allowance now available to citiznes from **\$84,000** annually to **\$90,000**. About Three Hundred Thousand personsd benefitted from this.

Similarly, the introduction of a one-off transportation grant was meant to benefit those at the lowest end of the economic scale who will be affected by the reduction, **not removal** of the gas subsidy.

We do not believe that the poor should always be with us. It is for this reason that several apprenticeship programmes have been initiated with the Ministry of Trade and Industry, and the Ministry of Youth Development and National Service. The expansion of GATE to include more technical vocational subject areas is also consistent with this Government's belief that education is one sure way out of poverty. And here at the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services, one of our flagship programmes, the SEED programme, is designed to ensure that we create more and more entrepreneurs, and in so doing, wean persons off the need for state assistance.

Similar to the United Nations, we at the Ministry recognise that building a sustainable future requires an intensification of consistent and well targeted efforts toward eradicating extreme poverty and discrimination, while ensuring that everyone can fully exercise their human rights.

We are firmly of the view that the full participation of persons living in poverty, particularly in the decisions that affect their lives and communities, must be at the centre of policies and strategies to build a sustainable future. To this, the Ministry remains absolutely committed.

In keeping with this year's theme, our Social Investigations Division will be undertaking a week of activities as part of its #EndPovertyTT Week 2022, aimed at promoting awareness of poverty-related issues, encouraging transformative actions and strengthening collaboration in the fight against poverty. The week of activities, commenced on Monday (October 17, 2022) and will end on October 21, 2022 and will consist of a number of activities to engage our internal staff, our SEED beneficiaries and the general public. Interested persons can visit the Ministry's Website and Social Media platforms for further information on these activities.

As the Ministry affirms its commitment to social justice, peace, and the planet, it is essential that everyone within the social protection system demonstrate respect for the inherent dignity and worth of every human being, including the most vulnerable, in the delivery of social goods and services.

I, therefore, encourage everyone to continue to participate and support this week of activities. Be your brothers and sisters keepers and look out for the poor and vulnerable in your families and communities to ensure that they access the grants, programmes and services offered by the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services. Be an advocate for helping, empowering and transforming the lives of the poor and vulnerable persons in this country.

The Bible reminds us in Deuteronomy 15:11, *“For there will never cease to be poor in the land. Therefore I command you, You shall open wide your hand to your brother, to the needy and to the poor, in your land.”*

Join us as we open our hands to the poor and vulnerable in our land.

God Bless you

I thank you.