

It is an honour to welcome each of you here today to witness the signing of this agreement between the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services and the National Information and Communication Technology Company Limited (**iGovTT**), for the verification of life of our senior citizen pensioners via the Life and Residential Declaration (LRD) form, formerly called the Life Certificate. This verification process can now also be done through TTConnect's Service Centres.

The verification of life of senior citizen pensioners via TTConnect is an extension of an existing Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between this Ministry and iGovTT. A previous MOU which was signed in 2019, allows members of the public to access information on specified grants and services offered by the Ministry, as well as submit applications for identified grants through the seven (7) TTConnect Service Centres located in Trinidad, as well as in Tobago.

Senior Citizen Pension recipients, their relatives or nominees can now call TTConnect's toll-free number 800-TTCN to set up an appointment for the verification of life through the Life and Residential Declaration (LRD) form. This verification process will also be done at the TTConnect Service Centres located in Arima, Curepe, Chaguanas, Princess Town, Sangre Grande, St. James and Bon Accord, Tobago.

The Life Certificate, that is now called the Life and Residential Declaration form, provides the opportunity for our pensioners to be seen by a staff member at the Local Board or by a staff member at the TTConnect Service Centre. The staff member will certify that he or she is alive and was seen. This is an important procedure that has to be done annually in order for our elderly clients to continue to receive their pension.

The Ministry is always looking for ways to help clients experience an easier way to access services at hours that are convenient to them. It was for this reason that we successfully transitioned to the Automated Senior Citizens Pension and the Direct Deposit Initiative.

Now, this collaboration with iGovTT and TTConnect will bring much relief to senior citizens who will no longer be required to join long lines outside the Ministry's Social Welfare Offices or visit multiple times. Ladies and gentlemen, this arrangement would also result in less bottlenecks in the system.

They can set an appointment that is convenient to them. It must be noted however, that they will not have to wait for hours for the verification process to be completed, since the wait time will also be reduced. This is a reflection of the Ministry's desire to help our senior citizens and to increasingly find ways to better serve them.

All the available data suggests that the population of older persons is on the increase, a fact that encourages the Ministry to continue to explore opportunities which would result in an overall enhanced quality of life for older persons. At the forefront of this, is the opportunity to have TTConnect through its various platforms and Service Centres, assist in facilitating our clients in completing the Life and Residential Declaration Forms.

Additionally, through the shared database platform, the Ministry now has access to all our clients' data in a space where it can be easily shared amongst its many divisions whenever the information is required.

On this note, I take this opportunity to remind and encourage our elderly clients to apply for the Senior Citizens Pension through the Online/Automated facility, as well as sign up for their funds to be deposited in their bank account through the convenient, reliable and safe - Direct Deposit.

Ladies and Gentlemen, the care of the elderly remains an area of high priority for the Ministry. Hence, the Ministry has and continues to collaborate with relevant Ministries, State Agencies, Faith Based Organizations, Community Based Organizations and the Private Stakeholders in an effort to ensure that enhanced quality care and support is provided to them.

The Ministry of Social Development and Family Services remains committed to the continuous review of our social service delivery system to ensure our clients have the opportunity to access the grants and services offered without any hassle. It is for this reason we are digitalising our processes with a view to becoming more responsive to your needs. The Ministry's digitalization project will ensure that our grants and services that are provided to our clients are done in a timely and efficient manner. It is envisaged that replacing the current paper-based processes to a digitalised one will result in significant benefits to the Ministry and a better service experience for all our clients.

We also continue to deliver our senior citizen's pension every month, on time, in the right amount, to One Hundred and Eight Thousand, Six Hundred and Thirteen (108,613) elderly citizens aged 65 and over. Our senior citizens are our priority.

I close by commending our colleagues from iGovTT and TTConnect for their continuous innovation and for partnering with us on this initiative.

In this regard, the Ministry looks forward to continued opportunities where we can establish and maintain mutually beneficial relationships. On behalf of our elderly who will benefit tremendously from this initiative, I offer my sincerest thanks and appreciation.

I thank all of you who took the time to be present today.

May the abundance of God's favour rest on you and may God bless our Nation.