



**Senator, the Honourable, Donna Cox**  
**MINISTER OF SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT AND FAMILY SERVICES**

**WRAP TT-Elimination of Violence (EOV) Project 2023**

Ladies and gentlemen, it is a privilege to share some thoughts with you, as we commemorate another International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women. Today, as we shine the spotlight on women and girls, we do so against the growing phenomenon of domestic abuse and intimate partner violence. Thousands of our sisters, daughters, aunts and nieces, have been either brutally murdered, maimed, or otherwise scarred by their experience of violence.

There is a growing global acceptance that violence against women and girls is a human rights violation, public health pandemic and serious obstacle to sustainable development.

Violence against women and girls imposes large-scale costs on families, communities and economies. When women cannot work as a result of violence, their employment is often put at risk, jeopardizing much-needed income, autonomy, and their ability to leave abusive relationships. Violence against women also results in loss of productivity for businesses, and drains resources from social services, the justice system and health-care agencies.

Domestic and intimate partner violence remain widespread. The net result is enormous suffering, as well as the exclusion of women and girls from playing their full and rightful roles in society. The universal empowerment and protection of women and children against violence is therefore an absolute imperative.

Such acts against women and girls have tremendous socio-economic costs for households, communities and nations. Gender based violence weakens efforts to ensure peace and security and, threatens the eradication of poverty. It is also a hindrance to the fulfilment of the *2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*; and therefore challenges the promise of this Government *to leave no one behind*.

Globally, the data and reports - both empirical and anecdotal - have shown that all types of violence against women and girls intensified during the COVID-19 pandemic, so much so that this was identified as the shadow pandemic. Trinidad and Tobago was neither immune to, nor exempt from this phenomenon.

Data collected by the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service indicated a marked increase in the number of females affected by

sexual violence between the years 2020 and 2021. These increases ranged from as low as 9 percent in the 15-19 age group, to as high as 106 percent in the 30-34 age bracket. What was alarming, is that there was a 62 percent increase in the number of female victims of sexual violence who were under the age of 15. Moreover, up until September 2023, females accounted for 75 percent of the reports of domestic violence made to the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service, with the remaining 25 percent made by men.

The reports gleaned from the Domestic Violence Unit of the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service are no less flattering, as they tell the continuing story of women often being treated as objects, and as less than equal to their male counterparts. For the period, January to September 2023, there were 972 calls made to the Domestic Violence Hotline, with 95 percent being made by women. Similarly, the majority of the reports (66%) centred around emotional, physical and verbal abuse.

As glaring and heart wrenching as these figures are, they do not tell the true story of the pain and suffering endured by the

hundreds of women who were strong enough to call the Hotline. None of these statistics could ever accurately describe the horrors endured by the nearly one thousand, five hundred (1,500) women who, this year alone, have been affected by some form of violence, or of the over seven thousand five hundred (7,500) women who reported domestic abuse between 2018 and 2022.

Our experience over the years, tells us that there may be hundreds or thousands more of these cases which, for varying reasons, have not been documented, possibly because they were not reported. These numbers have not gone unnoticed either by the Government or, more specifically, by the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services.

Currently, several multi-pronged approaches, initiatives and activities are being undertaken to bring awareness to and curb the incidence of Domestic Violence in Trinidad and Tobago.

Through its National Family Services Division, the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services treats with domestic violence-related issues immediately, beginning with an

assessment interview of individuals, as well as home visits to ascertain the families' immediate needs. Should the need arise, there is close collaboration with the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service.

The Ministry also provides psychosocial support for survivors of domestic violence, with over sixty survivors receiving assistance during the last fiscal year, ending September 2023. This included shelter assistance, counselling and referrals to divisions within the Ministry, such as the Social Welfare Division or to external partners such as the Office of the Prime Minister - Gender and Child Affairs Division and the Gender Based Violence Unit of the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service.

The Ministry will also continue to provide financial support via subventions to Community-Based Organizations, Faith-based Organizations and Non-Governmental Organizations that provide shelters or safe houses and services to survivors of domestic and gender-based violence. We recognise the need for a collaborative approach with respect to dealing with this pressing issue.

In this regard, we are also quite pleased to be part of “The Spotlight Initiative.” Ladies and gentlemen, despite growing momentum to end all forms of violence against women, with targeted government legislation and a dedicated unit in the police service, levels of violence remain high. As such, the Spotlight Initiative is a partnership of a number of public and private sector organizations that work to prevent and reduce instances of family violence and ensure integrated, quality and accessible services in Trinidad and Tobago.

Trinidad and Tobago continues to forge ahead with the implementation of policies and programmes to enable and encourage an enhanced quality of life for all citizens. On behalf of the Executive and Staff of the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services, I must commend WRAP TT for its efforts to help, empower and transform the lives of women, children and, of course, families.

We recognize the tremendous attention and relief you have brought to female victims of domestic and gender-based violence, as well as your sterling contributions to our country’s progress in

promoting the empowerment of women to achieve their full potential. For this, I extend my sincerest appreciation, and pledge to you today, the support of the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services.

I thank you.

God Bless You.