



Senator the Honourable Donna Cox
Minister of Social Development and Family Services

Shelter Management Training
(with a focus on Survivors of Trafficking)

January 23rd 2024
Hilton Trinidad and Conference Centre
8:45 am

SALUTATIONS

- The Honourable Fitzgerald Hinds - Minister of National Security;
- Her Excellency Candace Bond - United States Ambassador to Trinidad and Tobago;
- Lenor Baptiste-Simmons – Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Social Development and Family Services other Permanent Secretaries
- Mr Mervyn Farroe - United States Agency for International Development (USAID) Regional Representative;
- Ms. Jewel Ali - Country Representative International Organization for Migration (IOM);
- Heads of Department, and Senior Government Officials;
- Mr. Zeke Beharry - HER CTIP Project Manager, IOM-TT;
- Management and staff at Trafficking in Person Residential Facilities;
- Other specially invited and distinguished Guests;
- Members of the media;
- Ladies and gentlemen

It is indeed a pleasure to be here today for this very important intervention. For the most part, I am sure, every one of us here, woke up with a roof over our head today, in surroundings with which we have grown accustomed, and amongst persons with whom we are familiar. Our fingers are, more than likely, insufficient to count the number of persons for whom our lives and presence in their lives are meaningful and are a blessing.

Unfortunately, we live in a world where, for many, especially women and children, this is not the case. Victims of human trafficking face immense challenges even after being rescued, and it is quite easy for improper housing to exacerbate their vulnerability and lead to re-victimization. It is precisely for this reason that this Shelter Management training, with its focus on survivors of human trafficking, is of such profound significance.

Your presence here is greatly appreciated because the horrendous experience of human trafficking has stripped so many individuals of their basic human rights and dignity, leaving them in desperate need of protection, rehabilitation and a secure place to rebuild their lives. Sadly, even in their desperation, they are also exploited, and, ladies and gentlemen, we must intervene.

The men, women and children who find themselves in our shelters are confronted with a plethora of challenges, each requiring tremendous support and attention. Quite apart from the psychological trauma they would have experienced, survivors often lack financial resources, due to the exploitation they have endured, and without stable housing they remain susceptible to further exploitation by traffickers or other criminal elements.

Similarly, isolated or inadequate living conditions can prevent survivors from connecting with others who understand their experiences. Loneliness and lack of emotional support can also make them vulnerable to manipulation or coercion.

Adequate housing accommodation that is properly managed therefore is not just a basic need; it is a critical component of a survivor's journey toward healing and resilience. By properly managing the shelters in which we are able to place these survivors, we can reduce the risk of re-victimization and empower survivors to reclaim their lives. The work you are signing up to do, cannot be done by ordinary people looking for a dollar. This is work that answers the call of God to look after the powerless and forgotten, and I truly want to express my appreciation and admiration to all of you for answering this call.

As the Minister of Social Development and Family Services, with the remit to assist in the provision of this crucial component of our survivors' recovery, I therefore consider it both a privilege and an obligation to stand before you in support of initiatives aimed at providing shelter, protection, and rehabilitation to those who have fallen victim to this atrocity.

While we understand that human trafficking, in all its forms, continues to be a global challenge, we must establish systems that provide a proactive response to victims of trafficking, we must collaborate, and we must commit to protecting and preserving their human rights.

Ladies and gentlemen, this Shelter Management Training is anticipated to equip you with the skills necessary to understand and address the peculiar needs for the shelter of survivors.

I am advised that the Ministry was afforded the opportunity to provide significant inputs into this course of training through our contribution during the training needs assessment exercise. This partnership with the IOM is consistent with our mandate to empower the powerless, and our Government's commitment to ensuring that no one is left behind.

Ladies and gentlemen, this training programme is no “talk shop” but represents a demonstration of our collective resolve to create a safer, more compassionate world.

The shelters we aim to construct and develop, as well as the skills this training is intended to impart, are essential components in the process of healing and empowering survivors of Human Trafficking. Our goal therefore, is beyond offering refuge.

Our goal is to ensure not only the physical safety of survivors, but also ensure that there is adequate nutrition and access to proper health services to address the physical health and other issues resulting from the trafficking experience. Additionally, our shelters will offer the trauma-informed care as well as facilitate the rest and recovery so important for survivors to heal from the trauma.

As a key stakeholder, the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services believes that in providing shelter for survivors of trafficking, we are not merely displaying an act of empathy, but in fact, we are shaping a blueprint for a complete recovery process for victims. A safe and secure environment for survivors is the foundation upon which they can rebuild their lives, receive the necessary support and be empowered with the skills necessary to assimilate into society.

Ladies and Gentlemen, all of this is grounded in the affirmative policy direction of the Government of Trinidad and Tobago as we continue to collaborate with organizations like the IOM to advance efforts to reduce and eventually, eliminate trafficking, in all its forms.

In this regard, the National Task Force Against Trafficking in Persons, spearheaded by the Ministry of National Security was established to coordinate these national efforts.

The work of this Committee has since led to the development of a National Plan of Action Against Trafficking in Persons (NPAATIP) (2021-2025) in consultation with NGOs, other international organizations, foreign embassies, religious bodies, academia, and survivors. This Action Plan places the concern of the management of shelters for adult and child survivors as part of the remit of the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services.

Recognizing the crucial role that Shelters or Transitional Homes play in supporting survivors of human trafficking as they navigate the process of recovery and reintegration into society, the Government of Trinidad and Tobago has articulated very comprehensive plans to establish various shelters which are expected to provide, inter alia, a safe haven and temporary housing for victims of trafficking (VoTs).

Furthermore, I am also pleased to inform you that the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services is establishing a transitional facility to accommodate women who are victims of trafficking.

This transitional facility forms part of the intervention strategies in support of a National Emergency/Transitional and Social Housing Programme. Under this Programme several transitional homes will be operationalized in 2024, for vulnerable men, women and families.

I encourage all participants of this training to engage actively, share your experiences, and embrace the diverse perspectives that are brought to the table. The fight against human trafficking requires a multidimensional approach, and the success of our endeavours lies in our ability to listen, discern and collaborate effectively.

Even as I commend you for your response to this call, I must also congratulate the International Organization for Migration (IOM) for its consistent dedication to addressing human trafficking internationally and developing counter trafficking strategies that will ultimately result in the prevention human trafficking, the protection of victims and prosecution of offenders. I also commend the Ministry of National Security and Her Excellency

Candace E. Bond for their commitment to supporting interventions that will help victims of trafficking. On behalf of the Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, and indeed on behalf of all survivors, I wish to assure you of my personal support and that of the entire Ministry which I am privileged to lead.

As I close, let us remember that our commitment to providing shelter for survivors is not just a legal or moral obligation. Well-managed shelters provide a foundation for survivors to heal, regain autonomy, and reintegrate into society.

In so doing, we will be adding our time, talent and treasure to building a nation where every individual is treated with dignity, respect and kindness, where we leave no one behind.

I thank you.

God bless you.