



REMARKS BY

SENATOR THE HONOURABLE DONNA COX

**MINISTER OF SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT AND
FAMILY SERVICES**

SOD-TURNING CEREMONY

**MINISTRY OF SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT
AND FAMILY SERVICES' NEW
BUILDING**

**CORNER VICTORIA AND
TRAGARETE ROAD, PORT OF SPAIN**

**MONDAY MARCH 11, 2024
10:00 AM**

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Today marks a significant milestone as we gather to turn the sod for the commencement of construction for the corporate headquarters of the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services. As we embark on this journey, the phrase “*Mama may have, Papa may have, but God bless the child that's got his own*” resonates in my mind because what a blessing it is for the Ministry to finally have its own home as we no longer will have the yoke of many rental and lease arrangements for properties utilized in the delivery of services to the citizens of this country.

Our commitment to serve the poor, vulnerable, marginalized, elderly, and disabled is unwavering.

The construction of this purpose-built, state-of-the-art building which is earmarked for delivery by UDECOTT in twenty-four (24) months, signifies our continued dedication to fulfilling our moral and legal obligations to those in need.

This site, situated in a historic section of our capital city, is surrounded by landmarks that echo the rich tapestry of our nation's past such as the Lapeyrouse cemetery, which received its

first guest Jean Creteau in 1745. The first Methodist Church in Trinidad known as the Galvanized Iron Church, which is also now known as the Tranquillity Methodist Church, which opened its doors for the first time in 1886, The Primary School of Trinidad and Tobago's first Prime Minister, Dr. Eric Eustace Williams, the Tranquillity Primary School located adjacent is now more than 150 years old. The grounds on which we stand, previously housed the Government Printery for 133 years. d, and most recently the temporary house of Desperadoes Steel Orchestra, Ladies and gentlemen, this new headquarters symbolizes the convergence of both history and modernity, and will serve as a beacon of light for the future.

Under the visionary and astute leadership of our Prime Minister, Dr. the Honourable Keith Rowley, we embark on this transformative project to provide better services to the people of Trinidad and Tobago. The consolidation of our Ministry's Head office into a single location will not only save approximately \$14.7 million dollars annually in rental costs but also streamline our operations, leading to improved efficiency in service delivery.

Overall the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services spends approximately Twenty-Three Million Nine Hundred and Forty-Six Thousand, Six hundred and Seventy-Five dollars and Forty Eight cents (\$23,946,675.48) annually in rental costs, on facilities which service the poor and vulnerable in our society.

The new headquarters will encompass ten floors of office space with appropriate and convenient access for our persons with disabilities, visitors and staff, a parking structure for 200 cars, and ample space for site works and landscaping. It will house essential facilities such as administration offices, conference rooms, training facilities, and customer service and counselling areas. Furthermore, this project extends beyond the physical structure. It further demonstrates the heart of the Ministry to deliver premium social services towards the achievement of sustainable development; and it represents our commitment to improving the well-being of individuals and families across our nation, advocating for equality, inclusion, and social justice.

The Ministry serves thousands of clients, providing grants, counselling, psychosocial support, and assistance to vulnerable populations.

Presently, 2024 the Ministry serves;

- Senior Citizens Pension: 111,694 elderly citizens.
- Public Assistance extends support to 16,317 individuals, upholding the dignity and welfare of all citizens.
- Disability Assistance Grants provide aid to 21,652 adults, with an additional 3,701 minors requiring specialized assistance.
- National Social Development Program (NSDP) empowered 214 individuals, who lost household appliances in natural disasters.
- Subventions to 24 civil society groups benefit 31,006 clients.
- Counseling and Psychosocial Services support 7,602 individuals, half of which receive counseling for suicide ideations.

- We continue to cherish and care for the elderly, addressing 182 reported cases of elder abuse in 2023. We also support Homes for Older Persons, ensuring dignified care for 107 individuals aged 60 and above.

We also have a Sowing Empowerment through Entrepreneurial Development (SEED) Programme which facilitates entrepreneurial endeavours and foster economic independence for the vulnerable. Our efforts exemplify a strategic approach to governance, prioritizing the welfare and empowerment of our citizens. Through targeted interventions and collaborative partnerships, we endeavour to build a more equitable and resilient society.

Ladies and Gentlemen, in addition to the transformative impact this project will have on our Ministry and the citizens we serve, it is essential to highlight the benefits of this project not only for the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services, but also the broader community by providing meaningful employment

opportunities during the construction phase for both skilled and unskilled workers in various fields.

- Since this Head Office will be digitalized, clients will have access to online applications, information and services;
- Shorter application timeframe for approvals;
- Faster response rate for queries;
- Clients will get automatic notifications as each step in their transaction is completed;
- As we look to the future, we anticipate increased client satisfaction because the number of the Ministry's Offices clients have to visit to get services will be reduced; overall, the construction of our headquarters and the digitalization of our services will provide a better experience for our clients.

The comfort and job satisfaction among staff is expected to result in increased productivity; plus, the cost savings from eliminating the Ministry's rental properties are positive outcomes we look forward too. Our goal is to foster resilience, self-reliance, and inclusiveness within our society, ensuring that no one is left behind.

I sincerely thank each staff member for their patience and commitment to working in our existing facilities. The wait is certainly worth it.

All this is possible ladies and gentlemen, because of the support and indeed, the guidance of the Honourable Prime Minister. On behalf of all of our staff and clients, Prime Minister, I thank you for your vision for the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services. I also wish to thank the dedicated members of our Executive and Management and the staff for their commitment to this project. Together, let us turn the sod and lay the foundation for a brighter tomorrow.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I thank you.

May God Bless You.