



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

World Social Work Day 2024
Interfaith Service

March 20, 2024

SALUTATIONS:

Permanent Secretaries- Mrs Lenor Baptiste- Simmons and Mr Ryan Ramcharan;

Deputy Permanent Secretaries- Ms Wendy Guy-Hernandez and Ms Vera Deonanan-Balkaran;

All Managers, Supervisors and Staff of the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services

Members of our religious organizations

Representatives of the various external social work groups

Members of the Media

Ladies and Gentlemen

I am truly delighted to see so many dedicated Social Service Providers gathered here today. Your presence is a testament to your commitment to giving thanks as we mark World Social Work Day 2024. The occasion of this Interfaith Service offers us an opportunity both for spiritual reflection and to refill our cups, as we continue to fulfill our vital roles and responsibilities here at the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services to the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

There can be no question as to the pivotal role played by Social Workers in delivering essential services at the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services. You are the cornerstone of this Ministry and this year's theme, '**Buen Vivir: Shared Future for Transformative Change**', encapsulates the essence of our collective mission towards building a more equitable and sustainable world. We can do this with transformation in mind, particularly now that we are striving for a more holistic and multi-faceted way to deliver social services, all bearing in mind the human element, through our client focused mindset.

'Buen Vivir', or *'good living'*, originates from the indigenous cultures of Latin America, emphasizing harmony with nature, community well-being, and social justice. It beckons us to envision a world where every individual, regardless of their background or circumstance, can thrive in dignity and fulfillment.

In our pursuit of transformative change, you play a pivotal role as catalysts for progress. You are the champions of empowerment, working tirelessly to uplift marginalized communities, advocating for the voiceless; and challenging the many systemic injustices. Today, we celebrate your unwavering dedication and commitment to creating a more just and inclusive society.

As Minister of Social Development and Family Services, I am acutely aware of the challenges facing our society- particularly at the community level. Yet, amidst these challenges, we find inspiration in the resilience and solidarity demonstrated by individuals, communities, and social workers like yourselves who work on the proverbial frontline. You are the heart and soul of our efforts to promote social justice and transformative change.

Colleagues, rest assured that I am, and the Government and people of Trinidad and Tobago are deeply appreciative of the work you do. I continue to believe that your work is both noble and sacred, and in the context of our religious underpinnings, your work responds to the call that whatsoever we do unto the least of God's creation, we do unto Him.

Today, as we mark World Social Work Day, we are reminded of our duty to create a culture of care in the wider society. This culture of care calls for a common, supportive, and inclusive commitment to protecting and promoting the dignity of all, a willingness to show care and compassion, a willingness to work for reconciliation and healing among families, and to advance mutual respect and acceptance for all our vulnerable populations.

It is my earnest wish that as Social Workers, we never yield to the temptation to disregard others, especially those in greatest need and to look the other way. Instead, may we continue to strive daily in concrete and practical ways, to form a community composed of brothers and sisters who accept and care for each other.

It is only this culture of care that can effectively combat the culture of indifference, waste, and confrontation so prevalent in our time, and which reduces persons to statistics, and their lived realities to cases to be worked.

Even as we celebrate you today though, I wish to add a word of caution to you gathered here, and by extension to all Social Workers. As you work tirelessly to empower the marginalized, and build bridges of understanding and compassion across divides, you often de-prioritize your personal well-being. As I have learned over the years, you cannot pour from an empty cup, and the ‘***Good Living***’ you seek for others, you must also practice for yourselves. We need to acknowledge that neglecting your own physical, mental, emotional and spiritual needs will have adverse effects not only on you, but also on the quality of care you are able to provide to your clients.

I therefore implore you to prioritize self-care by devising a personalized plan, tailored to your needs and well-being.

This plan should encompass various mental, spiritual and physical strategies aimed at cultivating healthy habits, establishing clear boundaries, seeking and accepting assistance when necessary, and finding moments of solace to center yourselves for inner peace. By nurturing your own well-being, you not only reinforce your resilience but also enhance your capacity to support and uplift those who rely on your guidance and compassion.

Ladies and Gentlemen, as we reflect on the theme of '***Buen Vivir***', let us recommit ourselves to building a shared future rooted in empathy, equity, and sustainability. In celebration of World Social Work Day and in recognition of the International Day of Happiness Day which is celebrated today, let us draw inspiration from the guiding principles of '***Buen Vivir***' as we continue on this journey towards a more just and compassionate world. Together, let us strive to realize our shared vision of a future where every person, regardless of their circumstances, can live a life of dignity, equality, harmony and fulfillment.

The culture of care which you embody, through which we are seeking to transform the lives of our clients, will enable us to esteem the value and dignity of every person with whom we have an encounter, and thus afford them the opportunity to engage in *‘Good Living’*.

And so, I extend my heartfelt gratitude to each of you for your unwavering dedication, tireless commitment, and invaluable service in empowering and transforming lives throughout the years. Despite the inevitable challenges that may arise, let us remain steadfast in our resolve to prioritize the well-being of those we serve. Together, let us strive for a future where every individual has the opportunity to thrive and flourish.

On behalf of the Executive of the Ministry, I express heartfelt congratulations and sincere appreciation not only to the Social Workers within our Ministry, but also to all Social Workers, community activists, educators, non-governmental organizations, and civic groups across Trinidad & Tobago.

Your tireless efforts and unwavering dedication are commendable, and they have undoubtedly made a significant difference in the lives of the vulnerable sectors of our society.

Thank you once again for your remarkable contributions, and may today's gathering inspire and invigorate you as we create a more compassionate, equitable, and inclusive society for all.

God bless you all!