



MEDIA RELEASE

Tuesday, 11 May 2021

Priority: **HIGH**

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Cox: It's time to band together and play our part in protecting our Women and Girls

Port of Spain... Minister of Social Development and Family Services, Senator the Honourable Donna Cox has stated that the protection of our nation's women and girls is the collective responsibility of the Government, Opposition, the business sector, civil society and the community. This call to action was made by the Minister during her contribution to the debate at the 23rd Sitting of the Senate on the Firearms (Amendment) Act 2021, on Tuesday 11 May, 2021.

According to the Minister, "When the Firearm Amendment Bill 2021 is ultimately enacted into law, it will have the effect of providing a layer of protection to women and girls in particular, and add to the arsenal of tools in the hands of our protective services, with a view to preserving life, despite the criminal or harmful intent of some persons." The Minister launched her contribution stating "As responsible leaders and citizens of this beloved country, we must all agree, that any amendment to existing legislation to change and improve the criminal justice system is most welcome. There were 8336 incidences of criminal activity in 2020 and 2441 incidences of crime as of March 2021. This means that so far this year we have 27 crimes committed per day and therefore the Firearms (Amendment) Bill 2021 for the issuance of pepper spray permits, is now more significant than ever."

Minister Cox highlighted that there are other countries in the Caribbean Region also grappling with increasing calls for the legalization of pepper spray. She noted that there are concerted efforts to have legislation brought to the Jamaican Parliament to do precisely what the Government of Trinidad and Tobago is embarking upon. Reference was drawn to many countries, such as Nigeria, China, Canada and Brazil, as these countries recognize the value of the pepper spray as a key defence mechanism for vulnerable citizens who are in need of protection against the criminal elements.

Minister Cox further highlighted the advantages of using pepper spray, specifically for vulnerable persons. She stated "Vulnerable persons and those who feel themselves endangered or threatened in anyway by another person would benefit from the enactment of the legislation. The opportunities for self-defence are considerably less, and therefore this category of persons have become victims of these assaults."

As part of the Ministry's mandate to help, empower and transform lives, Minister Cox stated "The National Family Services Division spends a significant amount of time counselling victims of crime, in particular family-related issues including violence. In Fiscal 2020, 3,719 persons received counselling from the National Family Services and so far in Fiscal 2021, 2,292 persons were counselled. These included persons who experienced some form of abuse or violence." Also, she recognized that there is a need to accept personal responsibility, in an effort to see a different outcome for Trinidad and Tobago.

In conclusion, Minister Cox stated that the legislation is just one tool for law-abiding citizens to protect themselves and that it is expected to assist the protective services in the efficient execution of their duties.

-End-

For more information:

Communications Unit

Ministry of Social Development and Family Services

(868) 623-2608; Ext 5405/5424/5432

Website: www.social.gov.tt

cceu@social.gov.tt