



Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago

Ministry of Social Development and Family Services



MEDIA RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Priority: HIGH

Ministry participates in Twitter Spaces Discussion on Breaking Barriers for Persons with Disabilities

Port-of-Spain --- Ensuring full inclusion of persons with disabilities into Trinidad and Tobago's society was the focus of the virtual discussion '**Breaking Barriers for People with Disabilities and the UN in T&T's Roadmap for Inclusion.**' This space was held on August 16th, and was moderated by Development Coordination Officer for Communications and Advocacy at the UN Resident Coordinator's Office, Ms. Faine Richards. The panel discussion featured thought provoking and valuable insights from Jacqueline Johnson, Permanent Secretary at the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services, and Dr. Erica Wheeler, PAHO Representative to Trinidad and Tobago. The virtual event assessed the landscape of discrimination and barriers that preclude access to mainstream education, employment, social inclusion and public services for persons with disabilities.

PS Johnson engaged in discourse on National Policy on Persons with Disabilities, public sector support system, the need for partnerships with key stakeholders and the challenges with the concept of reasonable accommodation in mainstream employment and education. She further described what an inclusive Trinidad and Tobago could look like stating: "With a holistic approach, a lot can be done for persons with disabilities. Some disabilities are not obvious, hence early assessment is critical to assess the health and physical needs of a child. Data on the nature and types of disabilities is also critical, as this will help key stakeholders develop a more targeted approach."

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In addition, PS took the opportunity to brief participants on the Ministry's mandate, its priorities and opportunities for collaboration with stakeholders, such as civil society and non-governmental organizations.

Dr Erica Wheeler stated that therapeutic services and intervention will help early detection, along with more student support services, ongoing training for caregivers, counselling and the hiring of more teaching aids. She also highlighted the importance of empowering Persons with Disabilities, "Allowing capacity to be built amongst 'the community' is necessary, it is my hope for them to feel empowered and speak on the things that matter most to them. This will lead to them having a seat at the table when it comes to ideas and solutions on the way forward" she said.

Providing context to the United Nation's hope for stronger education and employment opportunities, Ms. Faine Richards said that there is indeed a need to deepen inclusion from a broad social perspective, particularly inclusion in mainstream education. She also stated that she is hopeful that recruiters see beyond disability and that employers make accommodations for persons with disabilities, such as purchasing assistive technology to include them in the workplace.

Asenath McEwen, of the Disability Affairs Unit shared inspiring details about her academic journey as a person with partial vision. She is a staunch believer and a supporter of equality, especially when persons with disabilities are included in mainstream education.

Members of the panel called on the general public to advocate for disability access and inclusion, and work together to strengthen the collective efforts for universal access to essential services, similar to those mentioned above, to ensure that persons with disabilities are not left behind.

At the conclusion of the event, participants shared their experiences of promoting inclusion, discussed policy framework and identified challenges, opportunities and solutions to ensuring inclusion and access for persons with disabilities. The virtual space allowed members of the public to ask questions, make comments and share concerns. Several users said that they were grateful for the opportunity of such an open discourse

The Ministry remains committed to supporting the development of a human rights-based inclusion strategy; and deepening the inclusion for persons with disabilities across all sectors.

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For more information:

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