

International Women's Day: CCSJ calls for unity to end violence against women and girls

The Commission joins the international community on 8 March to observe International Women's Day on the theme: "*Women and men united to end violence against women and girls*".

Around the world the epidemic of violence affects women and girls from every walk of life, every ethnicity, class and religion. The Catholic Church proclaims that the sanctity of human life and the dignity of the human person is the foundation of a moral vision for society. Each of us is created in the image and likeness of God and has an inherent, inviolable dignity which must be protected, defended and enhanced at all stages and in all circumstances.

CCSJ urges everyone to celebrate International Women's Day. Let us commit ourselves to become powerful volunteers for positive change; pray and take action to create conditions that will allow women and girls to achieve their potential and live in dignity.

We are called to promote a culture of life and reject the culture of violence and death that threaten to overwhelm us. If, as Pope Paul VI says, the new name for Peace is Development, we need to examine how much progress we are making as far as women and girls are concerned. Social progress requires the active participation and equality of women and girls. What measures are we taking and what structures have we put in place to eliminate violence against women and girls in T&T? .

Strategies for change and remedies to address the consequences of such violence must be based on a sound analysis of the root causes of such violence and of violence in our country generally.

We are one human family and must stand in solidarity with each other to confront and eradicate injustices. The words of Martin Luther King Jr., that "Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice

everywhere”, must inspire is all to promote respect for human life and dignity and end violence. Women and men must stand together to build communities where men, women, and children can feel safe and secure.

We must create a culture of love and mutual respect—from an early age. Parents and schools must do more to instill in the nation’s children the kind of morals and values that will foster mutual respect, self-esteem, gender equality, and strategies for conflict resolution.

There is an urgent need for improved co-ordination between Government and NGOs, CBOs and faith-based organisations working in this area, as well for as more training for professionals e.g. the courts, the police - and more public education about this issue.

Physical, sexual, psychological, material and other forms of violence against women and girls are major human rights violations of today’s world. How can women participate fully in society; how can humanity progress when many of our women and girls continue to be violated and continue to struggle against poverty; lack of education (There are 130 million children worldwide who are not in school. Two out of every three of these are girls) and basic amenities such as safe water and food; victimization in armed conflict; human trafficking and exploitation; forced prostitution; their condition as refugees; domestic violence; dowry-related violence; child marriages; honour killings; female circumcision; incest; rape; sexual abuse; sexual harassment and intimidation at work, in educational institutions and elsewhere etc.

Let us work together to increase/strengthen our capacity to respond appropriately and effectively to victims of violence who are mainly, but not solely, women and girls. If we are to embrace the concept of Restorative Justice we must become advocates for both

the victims and the perpetrators of violence.

CCSJ calls on the media to play a more proactive role in the struggle to end violence against women and girls. For example, is the media playing its part by suppressing degrading images of women and girls and by increasing public awareness of the issues?

There can be no peace without justice. The long-term success of any strategies will hinge on men's involvement—both in dealing with this problem and in working with women to address the underlying social issues. Change requires a transformation in the attitudes and behaviour of both men and women as well as a review of our laws, practices and institutions.

We must move beyond paper policies that encapsulate lofty words such as 'equality, development, peace' and so on and get down to the business of building a world in which women and girls, men and boys can live their lives as God intended.

Together we can make a difference.