



**Senator the Honourable Donna Cox
Minister of Social Development and Family Services**

OPENING REMARKS

MEETING WITH BUSINESS COMMUNITY ON STREET DWELLING

Monday January 18, 2021

Dr. Linda Baboolal Room
Cabildo Chambers
St. Vincent Street
Port of Spain

11.00 a.m.

Salutations

Good morning and welcome to each of you. On behalf of the Government, allow me to extend best wishes to you and your organizations, and your families too, for a happy, prosperous and productive 2021. I sincerely appreciate the time you're taking today from your busy schedules to join this dialogue with us at the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services.

When I perused the list of those who had accepted our invitation, my faith in Trinidad and Tobago was again renewed, for I see amongst us today patriots answering a call to serve, responding as you have in the past, to make this place called Trinbago, a better place for all, especially under the current circumstances.

A significant portion of this Ministry's mandate is the protection of the rights, and enhancement of the quality of life of the most vulnerable populations in our country, and I am certain we could all agree that our street-dwellers constitute one such segment. The circumstances which led to them being there are manifold, the conditions under which they live are less than ideal, and continued proof of their existence on our shopfronts, pavements and streets, constitute an eyesore from which we can neither turn a blind eye nor pretend that we are comfortable.

Like so many of the seemingly intractable societal ills confronting successive administrations, the issue of street dwellers cannot simply be wished away or deemed a problem to be solved only by the Government. Indeed there is a role for the Government, but input from corporate Trinidad and the wider NGO/CBO community is also of paramount importance.

Ladies and gentlemen, today's meeting comes on the heels of another which was held last December, where we engaged in similar discussions with those who are responsible for policy development and implementation. Even more recently, I had the good fortune of a very fruitful interaction with the Commissioner of Police, who has promised the full support of the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service in whatever initiatives we ultimately decide to undertake, mindful of their own responsibility for the safety and protection of all citizens, irrespective of their walk of life.

I recently met with the Minister of Rural Development and Local Government, who pledged the support of the Municipal Police. I also received a commitment of assistance from the Minister of Health, Mayor of Port of Spain and UTT.

This morning's session is therefore further manifestation of the Government's commitment to both building the resilience of our people, and doing so in collaboration with all interested stakeholders, as this matter affects us all. I am of the view that a more productive use of the time and expertise we have available today, would be to move beyond identifying and bemoaning what we know already exists. Sufficient trees have lost their lives to produce the paper on which these reports have been written.

More importantly for us, I believe, is the articulation of a way forward, one that takes us to solutions. I am confident that with the expertise gathered in this room, the identification of available resources, and the commitment to a solution or solutions, as simple and as complex as they might be, we are in a much better place to move forward with an agreeable and sustainable way forward.

The strength of any society is measured by how it cares for those who are least able to do for themselves. I believe that our work today can strengthen our society to ensure that no person is left behind. As such, I look forward to a productive meeting and beyond today, the continued establishment of a nurturing and inclusive environment for all citizens.

May God reward you for your contributions today and may God bless our nation.

I thank you.