



FEATURE ADDRESS BY
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**MINISTER OF SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT AND FAMILY
SERVICES**

**HANDOVER OF INCLUSIVE PLAYGROUND TO
PRINCESS ELIZABETH CENTRE**

FRIDAY DECEMBER 10TH, 2021

10:00 AM

Good Morning,

It gives me great pleasure to address you today on the occasion of the handover of this inclusive playground here at the Princess Elizabeth Centre. Today's event is a demonstration of the value of public-private partnership in providing much-needed support to vulnerable children in Trinidad and Tobago.

Today's ceremony is indeed timely, given the recent commemoration of the International Day of Persons with Disabilities on 3rd December and subsequently, Universal Children's Day on 20th November.

It is imperative that equality and equity are pursued and provided to all persons with disabilities, so that they too can continue to lead fulfilling and industrious lives along the journey of national development.

The Ministry of Social Development and Family Services is committed to providing effective social services delivery for persons with disabilities, including children. We therefore endorse the initiatives espoused in the National Child Policy, which expresses the Government's commitment to providing a positive future for the children of Trinidad and Tobago. ***Page 7 of the Child Friendly version states: "Improving all policies, programmes and services to support children who are living with disabilities"*** [I took the opportunity to walk with a few copies of the policy which may be made available to the children].

In addition to the Disability Assistance Grant for Minors offered to children with disabilities under the age of 18; the Ministry through the Disability Affairs Unit, offers sensitization training and advocacy in support of the community of persons with disabilities. Our Microsite for Persons with Disabilities, as well as the National Policy for Persons with Disabilities are tangible evidence of our dedication towards accessibility, participation and inclusion of persons with disabilities in everyday life.

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) to which our country is a signatory, endorses support to children with disabilities, declaring that *‘all necessary measures should be employed to ensure the full enjoyment by children with disabilities of all human rights and fundamental freedoms on an equal basis with other children.’*

Article 9 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities speaks to working towards enabling persons with disabilities to live independently and participate fully in all aspects of life. This aligns with the mandate and responsibility of the Ministry to positively transforming the lives of the most vulnerable, including persons with disabilities. The Convention further dictates that appropriate measures should be taken to ensure that persons with disabilities have access, on an equal basis with others, to the physical environment, to transportation, to information and communications and

to other facilities and services open or provided to the public, both in urban and in rural areas.

The Ministry's National Policy for Persons with Disabilities also parallels the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and advises on creating access. As such, Cabinet approved the accessibility standards guideline entitled "Accessible and Usable Buildings and Facilities (2014)", which was developed by the Trinidad and Tobago Bureau of Standards, in collaboration with the community of persons with disabilities and organisations for persons with disabilities. Use of this document would ensure that national standards for accessibility mirror international benchmarks. It will also provide valuable guidelines for persons constructing or refurbishing buildings and the areas which grant access to these buildings, by persons with disabilities.

This playground, I am sure will be a hub for children, family and friends to recreate and socialise in order to build community. Children with disabilities have the same social needs as other children- the need to be loved and respected- the need to play and explore their world with other children and adults, and the need for opportunities to develop and use their bodies and minds to their fullest ability. Therefore, this facility will be put to good use.

Ladies and gentlemen, it is noteworthy that public-private partnerships such as these, facilitate improved accessibility to community development programmes and community facilities and provides equal opportunities for enjoyment of social and cultural life within the

community. Furthermore, the work of the princess Elizabeth Centre is valued and applauded and we at the Ministry continue our commitment in partnering with civil society organizations like these to uplift the vulnerable in our country. I therefore wish to encourage such entities to consider adopting a culture of philanthropy, as has been astutely demonstrated by Angostura this morning

In this regard, I must commend organizations such as Angostura Limited who have consistently demonstrated their commitment to support those most in need in the times that they need it the most. The contribution of this inclusive playground is testament to the organisation's commitment to social corporate responsibility and building people, through communities. This gesture adds significantly towards ensuring that children with disabilities have an opportunity to enjoy their lives in the midst of their challenges. I am satisfied that efforts such as these also aligns with and seamlessly supports the Ministry's obligation and mandate to ensure that no one is left behind.

As I close, I reassure the Centre and Angostura alike, that the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services remains committed to developing and maintaining partnerships in an effort to ensure that the most vulnerable are supported in their most critical time of need.

I take the opportunity to also declare that this playground is officially opened.

I thank you.