



Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago

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

RE-LAUNCH OF THE CENTENARIAN PROGRAMME

MONDAY DECEMBER 13, 2021

11:00 am

Good Morning,

It gives me extreme pleasure to address you and officially launch the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services' **National Centenarian Programme** which recognizes and honours citizens of Trinidad and Tobago, who have achieved the milestone of attaining the age of 100 years and above.

The Ministry through its Division of Ageing (DOA) focuses on ageing issues in Trinidad and Tobago, and embraces various roles and responsibilities, one being to “*develop and implement programmes and projects for the benefit of older persons*” whilst recognizing the contributions of our senior citizens and how they positively influence the advancement of our society.

Achieving the milestone of a Centenarian is no easy feat. These blessed, resilient individuals would have survived two (2) World Wars and experienced the perils of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Ladies and gentlemen, there is increasing evidence that the world's population is ageing. As fertility declines and life expectancy increases, the proportion of older persons is projected to grow across the world. In fact, the United Nations predicted that in 2021, the number of centenarians will increase to approximately 573,000 persons. Likewise, the World Health Organisation (WHO) expects that by the year 2050, there will be two billion people in the world over the age of 60, and the

number of people aged 80 and older will quadruple in the period 2000 to 2050. The WHO also estimates that between 25 and 30 percent of persons over the age of 85 have some degree of cognitive decline, and by 2050, 80% of older people will live in low and middle-income countries.

These statistics are very important to all of us, for a number of reasons. Among the things we must now consider include the fact that since people are living longer, healthy lifestyles must be placed in focus.

It therefore means that our system of healthcare must continue its transformation with a much deeper focus on appropriate treatment for conditions which commonly affect the elderly. It also means that our economic planning must ensure that the medical, financial and legislative support needs for older persons, are given greater attention; and so too, must our public transport system and our public education strategies related to ageing.

Ladies and gentlemen, beyond the statistics and the global phenomenon of increasing aged populations, the elderly also occupy a special place in society as our teachers. Being the child of someone who is almost a Nonagenarian, (90 years), a big part of my understanding of adult life, it challenges, religion and spirituality, as well as making the right choices and leading a decent life, came from my mother, my grandparents, and in some cases my older uncles and aunts.

The Launch of a National Centenarian Programme therefore, is meant to, among other things, honour and elevate elders as important and resourceful members of society who continue to contribute to the success of communities and our nation.

As such the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services strives to ensure that all centenarians continue to receive the recognition that their status deserves. The celebration of centenarians presents an opportunity to highlight their unique perspective and wisdom about life and serve as an opportunity to salute their achievements and contributions to the development of our country.

These treasured citizens can provide insight into historical events which they would have experienced first-hand, that would have serve to boost their well-being. Centenarians can present a positive picture of ageing, which can serve to counteract negative stereotypes, and possibly provide valuable research which can aid in the quest for healthier and longer lives for all of us.

Census information continues to be sought from various stakeholders on for estimating the number of centenarians that might exist in Trinidad and Tobago. To this end, the Ministry will be calling on all citizens to provide information on centenarians at the community level so that a registry can be built for use across all Government Ministries and Agencies.

In previous times, the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services would have acknowledged this milestone of our elders often by a visit from myself and a team, where they would be presented with a Certificate of Recognition, and other tokens of appreciation and this would be highlighted in the media.

However, with the National Centenarians Programme, a more structured approach will be taken to ensure ALL of T&T's centenarians are celebrated and honoured in 2022 and beyond; giving consideration to the COVID-19 pandemic and related Health protocols, whilst providing a duty of care to senior citizens. Among the proposed activities to recognise of our Centenarians would be a celebration of "National Centenarians Day" (on September 22), once COVID-19 regulations allow. The full schedule of activities will be announced to the national community following this launch, so stay tuned to hear how you can contribute towards celebrating our elderly.

The Ministry of Social Development and Family Services remains dedicated to enhancing the lives of *ALL* older persons. For the first time this year, a Grandparenting Programme was hosted to provide support for grandparents who are taking care of their grandchildren. This was coordinated by National Family Services Division. The Holy Bible instructs us to '*Stand up in the presence of the elderly, and show respect for the aged*' (Lev. 19: 32). As such, the Ministry will continue to

pursue a multi-faceted approach that focuses on initiatives to honour, respect and support this community.

As I close ladies and gentlemen, I wish to remind you that the aging population of our country are the men and women who fought, sacrificed and endured so that, today, we can enjoy the comforts and liberties that we do.

You and I are standing here today, because of the guidance and care of our elders. We are where we are today - empowered to make a positive difference, because of the guidance and care of our elders. Now, as they approach their tender years, *we* all are the ones who must make it *our duty* to ensure that their lives are underlined by **dignity, compassion and comfort.**

During a recent visit to a centenarian - Anne Lamont, at age 100, she encouraged persons to, *“Think positively, enjoy your children, enjoy your life.”*

I wish to commend the Division of Ageing for spearheading this initiative and offer them my continued support. I thank you for the courtesy of your attention, and may God continue to bless us all.