



MINISTRY OF SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

GREETINGS BY

THE HONOURABLE ANTHONY ROBERTS

MINISTER OF SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

AT THE OFFICIAL LAUNCH OF CHILDLINE-TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO

SERVICES

HOSTED BY UNICEF

WEDNESDAY 12 SEPTEMBER 2007

10:00AM

BALLROOM

CROWNE PLAZA

PORT-OF-SPAIN

- Madame Chairperson
- Senator the Honourable Joan Yuille-Williams – Minister of Community Development , Culture and Gender Affairs
- Mr Yohannes Vedenig – UNICEF Representative for Guyana, Suriname and Trinidad and Tobago
- Mrs Diana Mahabir-Wyatt – Chairman, Coalition Against Domestic Violence and Chairman of Childline
- Ms Christine Williams of the Ministry of Education
- Barbara Stewart representative for Secretary of Education, Youth Affairs and Sport
- Ms Mary Moonan- Co-ordinator, Childline
- Senior Government Officers
- Representatives of the United Nations Agencies and Non-Governmental Organisations
- Specially Invited Guests
- Members of the Media
- Ladies and Gentlemen

Good Morning.

I am honoured to join you today at the official launch of the expansion of Childline Services in Trinidad and Tobago, and to bring greetings on behalf of the Ministry of Social Development.

Ladies and Gentlemen, I wish to commend the Board and staff of Childline and the Trinidad and Tobago Coalition Against Domestic Violence for your invaluable service to the children of our nation. I also extend my thanks and appreciation to UNICEF and the corporate stakeholders, who have combined their expertise and resources, towards ensuring that the services of Childline can now be more easily accessed by young persons who are at risk or who are victims of abuse and violence.

I strongly believe that is primarily through such collaborations and partnerships among the private sector, civil society, Government, Regional and International Agencies that we can successfully address and alleviate many of the social ills which plague our communities.

Ladies and Gentlemen, I wish to affirm that this Government is committed to working with our NGOs to influence and effect changes in attitude and behaviour among our citizens, particularly as they relate to issues concerning the family and family life. As we are all very much aware, it is very often at the level of the family that many of our children suffer the worst abuses.

As the Ministry charged with the responsibility not only to drive the implementation of Government's social sector objectives, but moreso to help, empower and transform the lives of our most vulnerable citizens, we are committed to ensuring that every avenue is utilized in the care and protection of our children.

As you are aware Trinidad and Tobago is signatory to the 1990 World Declaration on the Survival, Protection and Development of Children and ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1991. To satisfy our obligations under these conventions, the Government, through the Ministry of Social Development, has formulated a National Plan of Action for Children:

This 2nd NPA for the period 2006-2010 focuses on 4 key areas and they are:

- Providing Quality Education
- Promoting Healthy Lives
- Combatting HIV/AIDS and
- Protecting children from abuse, exploitation and violence.

Ladies and Gentlemen, the Ministry of Social Development, at this time, is collaborating with all other Government Ministries and Agencies which have a responsibility to ensure the full implementation of this Plan.

As you are also aware, ladies and gentlemen, the Government is also making legislative changes to protect the rights of our children. The Package of Children's Legislation has been approved by Cabinet and was laid in Parliament. This package of Legislation now consists of:

- *The Children's Authority Amendment Bill 2007,*
- *The Family Court Bill 2007,*
- *The Children's Community Residences, Foster Care and Nurseries Amendment Bill 2007*
- *The Status of Children Amendment Bill 2007*
- *The Adoption of Children Amendment Bill 2007*
- *The International Child Abduction Bill 2007(The Hague Convention)*
- *The Children's Bill 2007 (1925 piece of legislation now updated to treat with the current realities of Trinidad and Tobago)*

Ladies and gentlemen, I know that, at times, many of you may feel frustrated by what you may believe is the slow pace at which many initiatives are being implemented. There is also the temptation to look for shortcuts, quick results and fast gains. But as I have said before, Legislation impacting the lives of the children of our Nation should not be done because of political expediency. And as those of us who work in the social arena understand; when dealing with people and in particular our young people, we must thoroughly examine the legislation and exercise due caution and care.

What we must also strive to ensure, is that our programmes are delivered to our targetted audiences in a manner that is appealing, relevant and empathetic to their circumstances.

With this in mind, the Ministry of Social Development will continue to collaborate with the NGO sector to deliver the appropriate social support services, not only to assist our children but also the wider community. Ladies and gentlemen, the Ministry will continue to collaborate with our NGOs on several new programmes and policies being developed by the Ministry of Social Development.

Soon to be implemented, are the National Parenting Programme as well as an Integrated National Counseling Programme which will offer advice, guidance and counseling support on the wide range of issues which now confront our families. A National Policy on the Family will also be brought to the public for review and comment.

In the interim, ladies and gentlemen, the Ministry continues its family engagement through the National Family Services Division which also works closely with Childline. The National Family Services facilitates an on-going Family Life Management Programme throughout the country, in issues such as Life Skills for Adolescents; Support for Parents and Caregivers of Children; Combatting Violence in the Family and Parents Skills. The Division also manages the Scholarship Programme for Children who reside at Children's Homes. This Government-sponsored programme, aims to broaden the opportunities for the holistic and positive development of children in care, outside the area of academics.

Ladies and Gentlemen, the Community Mediation Services Division of the Ministry of Social Development supports the Government's thrust to create peaceful families and communities, which will offer a safe haven for our children. As we speak programmes are being executed in several communities throughout Trinidad and Tobago in:

- Anger Management for Parents, Adolescents and Teens;
- Building Trust and Managing Conflict in Families and Communities;
- and
- Leadership Skills Development.

My friends, these are only a few of the areas in which the Government is focusing its efforts, in order to re-build the delicate social fabric of our society. Let us remember, however, that it will take the collaborative efforts of all sectors of the community to bring about positive societal changes. Together we will create a society fit for children and for all of us, as citizens of Trinidad and Tobago.

In closing, I wish to once again applaud the officers and staff of ChildLine for your dedicated service to the children of Trinidad and Tobago. Yours is not an easy task, to gain the trust of persons who may have been violated by individuals who are supposed

to protect them. You offer solace to children, at perhaps their darkest hour and I commend you on your commitment.

May God continue to bless all of us and our beautiful nation. Ladies and Gentlemen, I thank you.