



GOVERNMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO
OFFICE OF THE PRIME MINISTER

**MESSAGE TO THE NATION BY
DR THE HONOURABLE KEITH ROWLEY, MP
PRIME MINISTER OF THE REPUBLIC OF TRINIDAD & TOBAGO
ON THE OCCASION OF
INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY 2017**

On behalf of the Government of Trinidad and Tobago, as we celebrate International Women's Day 2017, I take this opportunity to recognize and congratulate the women and girls of Trinidad and Tobago, on the significant contributions you have made and continue to make towards the successful development of our Nation.

Today, in many countries, International Women's Day offers a platform for women to highlight and promote their social, economic, cultural and political achievements. But more importantly International Women's Day has become the focal point for the call for greater action towards gender equity.

At the level of the United Nations, in particular UN Women, this year's focus for International Women's Day is "Women in the Changing World of Work: Planet 50-50 by 2030".

In her message on the occasion of International Women's Day, UN Women Executive Director said, "we want to construct a different world of work for women...we have to start change at home and in the earliest days of school so there are no places in a child's environment where they learn that girls must be less, have less and dream smaller than boys. This will take adjustments in parenting, curricula, educational settings and channels for everyday stereotypes such as TV, advertising and entertainment...it will take determined steps to protect young girls from harmful cultural practices like early marriage and from all forms of violence."

As you know, these are some of the issues currently engaging the attention of this Government. To a very great extent we are fortunate in Trinidad and Tobago in that girls and women have access to equal educational opportunities and may freely participate at all levels of the work force both in the private and public sectors and in all aspects of public affairs.

Where we as a people need to make a stronger effort is in the protection of our children and women from the incidence of domestic violence. We cannot continue to pat ourselves on the back for the local and international accomplishments of our girls and women if at the same time newspaper headlines bombard us with evidence that all is not right in many of our households. This is as much a concern for me as it is for my Government since it points to a real need for increased efforts aimed at re-shaping the behaviour of our men and boys.

As you know, gender related matters and issues affecting our children have been placed by me within the portfolio of the Office of the Prime Minister. The Gender and Child Affairs Division of the Office of the Prime Minister remains focused on facilitating gender equity and equality by developing policies that promote the equal advancement of women and men; by offering programmes which seek to deconstruct stereotyping and more recently, by designing a community based action plan which emphasises the need to reduce Gender Based Violence, specifically violence against women and girls in communities, and to provide help for potential perpetrators and improved support for victims.

There may be challenges as plans are implemented but we must believe that ultimately we will see positive changes in behaviour and attitudes.

Moving forward, I give you the assurance that all avenues will be employed by this Government to maintain a level playing field for our girls and boys, women and men to succeed in fulfillment of their abilities and aspirations, without prejudice for disability and mindful of the fact that gender discrimination, especially in the world of work, may only serve to derail a nation from its own trajectory of economic advancement and progress.

I note that another of the 2017 International Women's Day themes is to "Be Bold For Change" and to strive for a better working, more gender inclusive world.

As your Prime Minister, I want to encourage the girls and women of Trinidad and Tobago to take full advantage of all the opportunities that are open to you – education, internships, decent work, advocacy, political participation - never give up on your dreams.

As men and women, girls and boys; working together in an environment of mutual respect and understanding, we will build a better and stronger Nation. Once again, I say with pride “congratulations and thank you” to the women of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago.