

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
for
HUMAN RIGHTS AND THE ELDERLY IN TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO

The Division of Ageing, which was established in 2003 in the former Ministry of Social Development, is the umbrella agency responsible for the coordination of policy initiatives on ageing in Trinidad and Tobago. The Division's mandate is multi-pronged, namely to serve as a resource for older persons; raise public awareness on issues related to ageing and older persons; conduct sensitization campaigns; promote meaningful participation of older persons in society; and encourage healthy and active ageing.

The elderly are seen as vulnerable because biological, psychological and social ageing predispose the ageing person to frailty, infirmity, and in many cases dependency, setting the older person apart from the rest of the population in need of special protection and rights. They are the prime target to be victims of poverty, exclusion and marginalization, and may suffer from the effects of negative stereotyping. An examination of demographic trends (over 13% or 177,000 persons of the total population is aged 60 years and over) and changes in the population structure suggest that there is need for a more focused and integrated approach to manage issues relating to population ageing and ageing itself, especially since older persons comprise the fastest growing segment of the population. Furthermore, the demographic transition is occurring at such an unprecedented rate that it is critical that the government of Trinidad and Tobago, through the Ministry of the People and Social Development, take a proactive stance to address the challenges of an ageing population in order to mitigate some of its negative effects, namely social, political and economic destabilization.

Although the aforementioned undergirded the development and implementation of legislation, policies, and a package of integrated programmes and projects to cater to the needs of older persons in Trinidad and Tobago, more has to be done to stem the increase in the number of elder abuse cases (some of which are under-reported) and reports of poverty among the elderly.

Based on the above, an aggressive campaign needs to be conducted, not only to: (i) educate the general populace on ageing; (ii) ensure that issues associated with ageing and older persons are integrated into national development plans; and (iii) ‘positivize’ the imaging of ageing so as to attenuate the elements of ageism; but also to aid in the development of legislation to protect the human rights of our elderly. In this way, Trinidad and Tobago can fashion a response that validates the importance of our elderly population and the part they will play in securing a sustainable future.

In order to meet the Government’s objectives on ageing and to treat with the escalation of violence and crime against the elderly, the Ministry through the Division of Ageing proposes to conduct three (3) one-day Seminars during the fiscal year 2013 on ‘Human Rights and the Elderly in Trinidad and Tobago.’ Each Seminar proposes to address Elder Abuse and the Family; Rights of the Elderly; Implications of Population Ageing – Changes in age structure; and Will Preparation and Estate Management. It is intended that the Seminars be multifaceted: (i) to collect/collate primary data for a situational analysis; (ii) to develop legislative policy; and (iii) to inform the elderly of the available avenues to seek help and/or redress. Two (2) of the said Seminars were held in March and May 2013 in Trinidad and Tobago respectively, attracting a collective audience of approximately 700 older persons (i.e., aged 60 years and over). The third seminar is proposed for August 2013, after which a radio talk show hosted by the Division of Ageing is proposed for listeners (particularly elderly shut-ins) to call in and speak directly with age-related legal, medical, policy experts and NGOs on ageing issues.

The goal of the Seminar is to highlight, educate and sensitize the nation on the various legal concerns and issues affecting the elderly, in order to formulate policies and [omnibus] legislation for their protection, since the majority of older persons in Trinidad and Tobago reside in their domiciles in the community.

The Seminars comprise a panel of five (5) to seven (7) experts in the fields of criminal and civil law, Will preparation and estate management, human rights, and policing, to present in thematic sessions with a question-and-answer component. The Ministry of the People and Social Development, through the Division of Ageing, proposes to initiate legislation to specifically

protect the elderly of Trinidad and Tobago. In existence, there is the National Policy on Ageing; and the legislation on the Homes for Older Persons awaits proclamation, which would control, regulate and monitor all institutions and care facilities for the elderly in Trinidad and Tobago, to ensure that standards of care are maintained at international best practice levels. Provision is made in the Homes for Older Persons Act No. 20 of 2007 for various forms of elder abuse in institutions to be included as a separate clause and be treated as an offence with penalties.

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Date: May 20, 2013