

EXCHANGE OF EXPERIENCES. PRESENTATIONS BY THE STATES

THEMATIC FOCUS: TWENTY-FIVE YEARS AFTER THE ADOPTION OF THE CONVENTION ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD: “BUILDING PEACEFUL ENVIRONMENTS”

WORKING GROUP 1. LEGISLATION REFORM FOR THE ELIMINATION OF VIOLENCE AGAINST CHILDREN.



Trinidad and Tobago

HON. CLIFTON DECOTEAU

HEAD OF DELEGATION

MINISTER GENDER, YOUTH AND CHILD DEVELOPMENT

“Childhood to Adolescence: Building Peaceful Environments”

Trinidad and Tobago takes this opportunity to share a brief synopsis of its work with the congress in the areas of Child Development and Child Protection.

ACCESS TO EDUCATION FOR ALL

The government of Trinidad and Tobago is committed to child development which is underpinned by the philosophy of equality and equity for all. In this regard, it has made significant investment in child development especially in the areas of education with free universal access to education – from early childhood to tertiary education.

The educational support is not only limited to the academic realm but the state also funds the annual vacation camps programme during the July to August school vacation. At these camps, children and adolescents are taught about child rights, reporting abuse and other child protection matters.

NIÑEZ Y ADOLESCENCIA: CONSTRUYENDO AMBIENTES DE PAZ

CONFERENCIA ESPECIALIZADA INTERAMERICANA DE LA OEA

CHILDHOOD AND ADOLESCENCE: BUILDING ENVIRONMENTS OF PEACE

OAS SPECIALIZED INTER-AMERICAN CONFERENCE

INFÂNCIA E ADOLESCÊNCIA: CONSTRUINDO AMBIENTES DE PAZ

CONFERÊNCIA ESPECIALIZADA INTERAMERICANA DA OEA

L'ENFANCE ET L' ADOLESCENCE: EN CONSTRUISANT ENVIRONNEMENTS DE PAIX

CONFÉRENCE SPÉCIALISÉE INTERAMÉRICAINNE DE L' OEA

Children with Disabilities

The government's programmes increasingly support children with disabilities including disability grants and infrastructural support such as the Autism Support Centre for children with autistic needs. Further, the government is moving to mainstream children with disabilities into the regular school system and other environments.

VIOLENCE AGAINST CHILDREN

Children are facing violence and other abuses including physical abuse, sexual abuse, and neglect. These crimes are evident at the home, school and community levels.

In these settings, the main challenges are:

- **Prevention**
- **Detection**
- **Reporting, and**
- **Intervention.**

Home

In the home sexual abuse is a taboo subject, thereby leading to silence;

School

In the school, teachers are hesitant to report despite legislation which mandates them to report. This is compounded by the lack of clearly defined procedures to facilitate such reporting.

Community

At the community level, reporting and intervention are the greatest challenges due to persistent cultural taboos which foster secrecy and inaction. In addition to this, insufficient reporting mechanisms and support services exacerbate the problem.

LAWS AND LEGISLATIONS

The statistics show that in the past six years, through government advocacy and public education, there has been a general increase in the number of reports of crimes committed against children. This and other approaches are being pursued by the government and partners including civil society organizations and international agencies such as UNICEF, with respect to confronting these challenges faced by our children.

In addition to the foregoing, the government has responded by pushing a number of laws and legislations and developing and implementing a number of policies and programmes. The laws and legislations include:

- Children Act of 2012
- Children's Authority Act of 2000
- Children's Community Residences, Foster Care and Nurseries Act of 2000

The foregoing legislations will be proclaimed shortly since they are currently receiving the attention of our Parliament.

CHILD PROTECTION

The government established the Children's Authority of Trinidad and Tobago to take the lead in managing the child protection system of Trinidad and Tobago. This lead entails a progressive system of child protection including the following:

1. A Child Protection Information Management System which will be a cutting edge case management system which will receive reports and track children as they move through the system.
2. A network of Child Assessment Centers which will serve as 'one-stop-shops' to assess children in need of care and protection.
3. Places of Safety to facilitate the immediate removal of children who are in imminent danger
4. A licensing system to license all Children's Homes in the country.

5. A Juvenile Justice system which focuses on offender management including the rehabilitation of child and adolescent offenders. This new justice system will include the newly established Youth Court project and the youth offender policy which in place to guide the overall modernization of the juvenile justice system.
6. Rehabilitation Centres for male and female child and adolescent offenders, which will support them through the various psycho-social and other crisis which caused them to come into conflict with the law.
7. Monitoring and Support through hotlines i.e.,
 - Domestic Violence hotline (Adolescents, Youths, Adults)
 - Child Line Hotline (for Children and Adolescents)
 - Counseling through the National Family Services Unit and Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) supported by the Ministry of Gender, Youth and Child DevelopmentFurther, considerable progress has also been made in recruiting expert legal and care specialists to staff the Children's Authority of Trinidad and Tobago.
8. A Child Protection Task Force was appointed by the Honourable Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago for a six month period. Since its appointment and establishment, the Task Force reviewed the existing child protection system and made recommendations for its improvement. It further developed an Action Plan to support the implementation of its recommendations and other changes which are necessary. The Action Plan was accepted by the Cabinet of Trinidad and Tobago which is also monitoring its implementation.
9. Further, the government has undertaken the development of disaster plans for children in disaster and emergency situations, with support from UNICEF.
10. The government has also undertaken a comprehensive Child Protection Mapping and Assessment exercise of the entire child protection architecture of Trinidad and Tobago including its system, structures and service provisioning. The aim of this mapping is to focus and strengthen its work in the area of child protection.

POLICIES, STRATEGIES, PROGRAMMES, ACTIONS

The government of Trinidad and Tobago published has undertaken and is undertaking the following:

1. National Strategic Plan for Child Development (NSPCD)
 - The NSPCD establishes the national vision and goals for child development of the country.
2. A National Advisory Council (NAC)
 - The NAC has been established to support and ensure the implementation of the National Strategic Plan for Child Development (NSPCD).
 - The NSPCD comprise a range of stakeholders including government and civil society organizations. Its mandate includes monitoring any emerging issues pertaining to children to ensure such issues are appropriately addressed.
3. A National Child Policy(NCP)
 - The NCP will form the umbrella child policy for the country and constitute various sector specific policies such as policies governing the Nursery Sector, Alternative Care Sector, Persons with Disabilities among others. It will then form the framework for pursuing legislations to give legal life to these policies.
4. A Child Protection Policy and Strategic Framework
5. A National Children's Registry (NCR)
 - The NCR draws from the work of the Inter-American Institute of Children and Adolescents regarding its Universal Children's Registry, aimed at supporting child development, monitoring children at risk and responding to children's needs through coordinated state agency response who will have access to the registry.
6. A National Strategy for Child Rights
7. A 'Children Who Inspire' publication.
 - The publication features stories of 30 children from Trinidad and Tobago from all walks of life to raise awareness about children's Issues and to promote young role models nationally. This will be an ongoing initiative
8. Break the Silence advocacy campaign against Child Sexual Abuse. It included the following activities and approaches:

- A. Street campaign to bring awareness to children that they could speak out about such abuse and to urge the wider public to also break their silence and report any information they have about child sexual abuse.
- B. Interagency collaboration i.e., the design of the campaign was developed by the Gender Division of the University of the West Indies (UWI) and launched in collaboration with the Ministry of Gender, Youth and Child Development with support from UNICEF. This too will continue as part of our public advocacy and public sensitization strategy.
- C. Training i.e., the importance of the Break the Silence Campaign required the government to go further and undertook the following:
 - i. Trained 50 Civil Society Organizations in Community-Based responses to child sexual abuse;
 - ii. Trained 9 media houses in effective, victim-sensitive reporting of cases of Child Sexual abuse and
 - iii. Trained 50 police officers on responding to the victims and families of child sexual abuse. Officers who received this training comprise officers of the recently established Child Protection Unit of the Trinidad and Tobago Police Services.
9. A Respect Me, Respect You Anti Bullying Campaign.
 - This rights based approach was adopted to prevent bullying in various environments where it occurs and seeks to ensure equality, justice and dignity for all citizens starting from early childhood.
 - Anti-bullying programmes receive priority by both the public and the private sectors.
10. National Parenting Programme (NPP).
 - This programme focuses on improving parenting and consequently reducing child abuse found in the home and community settings.
11. International Year of the Family (IYF).

Trinidad and Tobago is celebrating the International Year of the Family with a number of activities including:

 - National family rally in November which saw thousands of children and their families march through the capital city of Port of Spain in support of the family

as the primary institution of love and support; and not the arena for abuse and neglect.

12. National Children's Forum (NCF).

- Trinidad and Tobago hosted its first National Children's Forum.
- Participants of the NCF made presentations using a variety of approaches to present their interpretation and expression on subjects such as crime, family, child protection, poverty and technology.
- The NCF produced the two Children who are among the delegation of Trinidad and Tobago attending this 21st Pan-American Child Congress, together with one parent each providing support as Chaperones, and are fully funded from the coffers of the government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago.

In conclusion, the government of Trinidad and Tobago is fully committed to its child development mandate. This commitment is testimony to our presence here with a delegation of nine. Through our participation we hope to share our experiences and learn more about building peaceful environment for our children in the home, school and community settings. May our combined efforts at this 21st Pan American Child and Adolescent Congress enhance the progressive outcomes which we all want for our children and their future.