

CCSJ calls for urgent action to curb child abuse in TT

CCSJ calls for urgent action to curb child abuse in TT. The Catholic Church believes that the basic moral test of any society is how it treats its most vulnerable members, among whom are our children. We are challenged to respond to the needs of all our brothers and sisters, but those with the greatest needs require the greatest response.

Every child is a gift to humanity. We have a duty to promote the human rights and the dignity of our children and create conditions e.g. safe environments that will enable them to realise their potential. Society cannot turn a blind eye to the heinous crimes that are being committed against the nation's vulnerable children.

Something is seriously wrong with a society in which a grown man is alleged:

- to have thrown a ten-month-old baby out of a window because the baby, Andre Parris, was crying;
- to have beaten a 3 year old child, Hope Collins, with a baton
- to have beaten the children's mother, Karlene Parris.

We need to address issues such as incest which continues to violate the rights of our children. This year, 2012, we celebrate 50 years of our country gaining Independence. After 50 years of Independence, are we going rapidly down the slippery slope? On reading the media report on 16 January, 2012 of the 63 year old father who allegedly raped his 7 year old daughter on more than one occasion, we must ask ourselves: What kind of citizens are we nurturing in TT?

Our society is in need of healing. Our country desperately needs systems in place to protect e.g. our children and those who feel the brunt of domestic violence.

CCSJ agrees with the Newsday Editorial of 16 January which states, inter alia: "Sadly TT has seen too many cases of child abuse, as we still mourn the deaths of Hope Arismendez, Daniel Guerra, Amy Emily Annomothodo, Tecia Henry, Akiel Chambers, and Sean Luke among others, most whom were killed by persons known to them."

While we each have a role to play in promoting human rights, the State has a positive moral responsibility to enhance human dignity, protect human rights, and ensure that the minimum conditions of human dignity are met for all. The State has a duty to create social conditions that allow people to reach their full potential and realise their human dignity.

CCSJ calls on:

- our Government to put systems and safety nets in place to protect the human rights of our children e.g. by moving speedily to establish a fully functional Children's Authority. What is the status of the package of 'children's legislation' that was assented to since 2000, including the Children's Authority Act?
- religious leaders/communities to instill in the hearts and minds of their followers morals and values that will help to build their character and lead them to live by the tenets of their faith;
- all communities to establish victim support groups and restorative justice groups in order to stand in solidarity both with victims of crime and with the perpetrators of crime whom we must help to turn their lives around and become productive, law-abiding citizens;
- educational institutions to play their part in facilitating integral human development, that is, the development of every dimension of a person and of each person e.g. by including in their curriculum educational programmes in ethics, morals, values, and character development;
- those responsible for the criminal justice system to review whether or not the current system deals effectively and efficiently with cases involving child abuse, in particular;
- the Police Service to review their strategies for responding to child abuse. How effective are these strategies?
- the media to examine its role in child abuse prevention. According to Bernadette J. Saunders and Chris Gooddard (<http://www.aifs.gov.au/nch/pubs/issues/issues16/issues16.html>): "The media play a significant role in forming and influencing people's attitudes and behaviour". They say that the media play "an essential role in increasing society's awareness of, and response to, child abuse and neglect". The work of Saunders and Gooddard highlight: "the media's potential power to positively influence child welfare policies, community responses to children and young people, and societal acknowledgement of, and reaction to, child abuse and neglect."