

## 100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of International Women's Day

On Tues 8 March, people around the world will observe the 100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of International Women's Day. The theme this year is: "*Equal access to Education, Training and Science and Technology: Pathway to Decent work for Women.*"

While we celebrate the achievements of women/girls in TT and throughout the world – in all spheres of human endeavour, let us strive to remove the obstacles that prevent many from achieving their full potential.

The call for equity and equality for women and girls is greater than ever today. Pope Benedict XVI reminds us in his encyclical, *Charity in Truth*, that authentic development means the development of each dimension of a person and of all persons. Too many of our women and girls are being left behind.

As the PM, Kamla Persad-Bissessar reminded women who gathered recently at the 10<sup>th</sup> Annual International Women's Celebration organized by the Interclub of TT, of the 774 million illiterate persons in the world; two-thirds are women and girls, many of whom live in poverty on the margins of their societies. I firmly believe that at the heart of the problem is the human heart. Let us open our hearts and build right relationships, as God intended.

Here in TT, although our girls outstrip boys in academic performance, the top positions in the public and private sectors are generally male dominated (see 2008 International Labour Office Report by Prof. Rhoda Reddock and Yvonne Bobb-Smith).

In his *Letter to Women* (1995), Pope John Paul II rightly noted that society owes much to the "genius of women...The various sectors of society, nations and states, and the progress of all humanity, are certainly deeply indebted to the contribution of women!"

He made a "*heartfelt appeal* that everyone, and in a special way States and international institutions, should make every effort to ensure that women regain full respect for their dignity and role... May Mary, Queen of Love, watch over women and their mission in service of humanity, of peace, of the spread of God's Kingdom!"

I urge women to persevere, to inspire and empower each other, to strive to participate at all levels of society, to share your God-given talents generously, and to work hand in hand with our boys and men to build the common good.