

CCSJ calls on citizens to promote human rights

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December 10, International Human Rights Day, is a day when the world observes the UN's ratification of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948.

Sixty six years on and we still have not learned how to live in peace and harmony with each other. Violation of human rights plagues every society in our world on a daily basis. And such violation takes place not only in countries in which wars are being waged, but in our own country of Trinidad and Tobago where life continues to be devalued in a myriad of ways.

The sanctity of life and the dignity of the human person are the foundations of any civilised society. And since we all say we love our country, we must recognise that promoting and protecting human rights is everyone's business. Catholics are called to see human rights within the context of the "gift" of life from God. We have a duty to promote and enhance this gift at all stages and in all circumstances.

While we fight for our rights, we must acknowledge the inextricable link between rights and duties/responsibilities. To call for rights without accepting the responsibilities which flow from these rights is hypocritical. Therefore, CCSJ calls on all citizens to accept the responsibilities which flow from these rights; to put their hands on the plough (Luke 9:62) and work to create a society/world in which human rights can become a reality.

We cannot afford to be complacent. If we are to move from rhetoric and policy to practice, we must heed the words of Eleanor Roosevelt, who chaired the committee that produced the first Draft of the Declaration. She rightly said that the ideals of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights will "carry no weight unless the people know them, unless the people understand them, unless the people demand that they be lived." Many of these rights are enshrined in our Constitution, but there is a general

lack of awareness of them. CCSJ calls for a national drive to educate the public – at all levels – on “Rights and Responsibilities.”

We recall St Pope John XXIII’s prophetic Charter of Rights outlined in his 1963 Encyclical: *Peace on Earth* in which he stated that human rights are inviolable and universal: “...every person has the right to life, to bodily integrity and to the means which are suitable to the proper development of life; these are primarily food, clothing, shelter, rest, medical care, and finally, the necessary social services. Therefore a human being also has the right to security in cases of sickness, inability to work, widowhood, old age, unemployment, or in any other case in which one is deprived of the means of subsistence through no fault of one’s own...the right to take an active part in public affairs and to contribute one’s part to the common good of the citizens...It is clearly laid down that the paramount task that is assigned to government officials is that of recognising, respecting, reconciling, protecting and promoting the rights and duties of citizens.” (#11, 26, 77).

We call on our Government to embrace Collaborative Governance and to use the resources of the nation to create a human rights culture. The 1948 Declaration reminds us that “every organ of society” has human rights responsibilities. Therefore, together, as agents of change, as champions of human rights, let us respect, promote, and protect human rights and build the common good.

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