

CCSJ calls for a budget that meets moral obligations

The Catholic Commission for Social Justice (CCSJ) calls for a national budget that will meet our moral obligations to the people of T&T, particularly the poor and vulnerable. We note that the Government of T&T has developed a National Policy built on the premise of 'Prosperity for All'. Within this context our Government has outlined 7 interconnected pillars, the first of which is "people-centred development".

This priority is in keeping with Catholic Social Justice Principles, the foundation of which is the sanctity of life and the dignity of the human person which we are called upon to enhance and protect. Pope Benedict XVI calls on nations to promote authentic integral human development, that is, the development of each dimension of a person and of every person. The gap between the rich and the poor is growing daily in our country. Many of our people are socially excluded; living on the margins in our land of plenty.

Leela Ramdeen, Chair of CCSJ, says: "We need a budget that will demonstrate that we, as a people, stand in solidarity with the "least" of those among us; a budget that seeks to address the various assaults on human life; one that will build the common good. And remember, justice involves more than 'handouts.' Sustainable development in T&T is possible, but we must heed the words of Pope Benedict XVI who said in his encyclical, *Charity in Truth*: "Development is impossible without upright men and women, without financiers and politicians whose consciences are finely attuned to the requirements of the common good. Both professional competence and moral consistency are necessary." (Pope Benedict XVI, *Charity in Truth*)

Over the past few years T&T has run deficit budgets and further fiscal deficits are projected for the next few budgets. At a time when many countries around the world, particularly in the West, face debt crises, CCSJ urges our Government to consider the short-term and long-term dangers of excess debt on the nation's future economy and the burden that such debt will impose on those who come after us.

As the IMF says: "Large and persistent deficits push up interest rates, reduce investment, and create a burden of indebtedness that is difficult for governments and taxpayers to bear...Most important, they compromise the living standards of current and future generations."

The time has come for us to ensure that the vision we have for our people is one that reflects the right kind of values; one that prioritises at least the basic human rights of citizens in order to improve the quality of their lives and lift them to a "higher, more noble place" (Martin Luther King Jr.). The economy must serve the people, particularly if we wish to use our God-given resources to develop innovative, critical-thinkers for life in our technological age.

We are mere stewards of the resources that God has given to us. An honest assessment of the use of our human, financial, material and other resources in T&T will highlight certain deficiencies which, if we do not address in the near future, will lead to a betrayal of our stewardship.

Let us monitor and evaluate the use of our resources to ensure that we are using these effectively and efficiently. How will the budget draw on the newly-launched Human Development Atlas 2012 (www.planning.gov.tt) e.g. to addresses issues of inequity; to target resources; to avoid wastage, particularly in the public sector etc?

We can and must enhance the quality of our Democracy by listening to the voices of the people; by involving them in a meaningful way in the budget-making process; and by acting in a timely manner to promote equity, equality of opportunity, and citizen security. History will not be kind to us if we let our people cry out in vain.

CCSJ encourages citizens to pray for those involved in the budget-making process that they will be guided to prepare a budget for 1 October that will be just and compassionate; one that will put our people first.

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