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**STATEMENT AT THE ADOPTION OF THE OUTCOME OF THE
UNIVERSAL PERIODIC REVIEW OF TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO**

GENEVA, SEPTEMBER 22ND 2016

Mr. President

Distinguished Members of Council

Colleague Observers of the Council

Ladies and Gentlemen

It is indeed a privilege to address the Human Rights Council today, at the adoption of the report of the Working Group on Trinidad and Tobago's second cycle Universal Periodic Review. This process of scrutiny of our Human Rights protection mechanism has served Trinidad and Tobago in many useful ways, primarily helping us to refine the way in which vulnerable groups are protected. I take this opportunity to express deep gratitude to the various stakeholders involved in the entire country review process, namely, the members of our Troika, the various delegations that made recommendations, members of Civil Society and the diligent UPR Secretariat as well as technical support received from the Office of the High Commissioner on Human Rights.

Mr. President

Trinidad and Tobago remains committed as a nation to take all steps necessary to better the standard of living of its people. With continued efforts to enhance human rights protection mechanisms, through legislation and policy development along with the implementation of strong social protection programs, this goal can be achieved. The Government of Trinidad and Tobago has had this at the forefront of its mind since in office and it is in fact processes such as UPR that have assisted in guiding social planning strategy.

Mr. President

At the 25th session of the Human Rights Council, on May 10th 2016, Trinidad and Tobago received 157 conclusions and / or recommendations from the Universal Periodic Review Working Group. Of that number, 70 enjoyed the support of Trinidad and Tobago, 1 was deemed to have already been implemented, 19 did not enjoy the support of Trinidad and Tobago and of the remaining 67 recommendations, Trinidad and Tobago provided a detailed written response to each issue indicating the Government's position in relation to the recommendations that were agreed would be further examined.

Mr. President

Disabilities:

Trinidad and Tobago is thoroughly committed to improving the rights of all vulnerable groups. As such the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) was ratified on June 25th 2015. This demonstrates a natural progression of an issue that has been taken very seriously by the GOTT and signifies the Government's firm commitment to ensuring that persons with disabilities in our country are afforded proper protection under the law from discrimination. Trinidad and Tobago's ratification of the convention will now further propel legislation, policies and programmes aimed at providing opportunities for persons with disabilities to realise their -fullest potential.

Women:

Trinidad and Tobago recently concluded the review of the country's combined 4th to 7th periodic report for the Convention on the Elimination of all forms Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). From the successful completion of the review the Government via the Gender Affairs Division in the Office of the Prime Minister is designing a plan to implement the recommendations from the review.

Children:

The Children's Act of 2012 was proclaimed on May 18 2015 and, in this legislation, the definition of “child” is now “a person under the age of 18 years”. This brings our definition of a child in line with international standards. The Act deals with a series of offences that affect children in Trinidad and Tobago. The GOTT sees our children as the cornerstone of our great nation and will be working relentlessly towards achieving healthy environments for the upliftment of our children today and in the future.

The GOTT is fully committed to the future of our children and thus recognises that child marriage is an issue that Trinidad and Tobago that needs to be dealt with. The inconsistencies in various pieces of domestic legislation in relation to the age of consent to marriage and the age of a child are being addressed. The state has embarked on a nationwide public consultation process on the matter taking into consideration the views of various stakeholders and even the specific views of younger citizens. Once completed national policies will be developed and will be used to amend existing legislation.

Mr. President

Trafficking:

Trafficking in persons is recognized as a serious crime in Trinidad and Tobago. Because of our geographical location unfortunately our nation has found itself as a prime point of transit for victims of this heinous crime. The GOTT developed a national policy on Human Trafficking and then worked with Civil Society to create legislation that criminalizes all forms of human trafficking and which also provides extensive protections to trafficking victims. A Counter Trafficking Unit was established in January 2013, under the Trinidad and Tobago Trafficking in Persons Act 2011, to give effect to the United Nations Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children. The GOTT has increased funding for the Trafficking Unit and established a national task force against trafficking of persons and a task force steering committee, which was mandated to prepare a draft national plan of action on human trafficking and same is currently before the national task force for consideration.

Mr. President

Capital Punishment

Trinidad and Tobago's position in regards to capital punishment to date stands unchanged. As a sovereign nation which observes the rule of law while this remains part of our legislation as a penalty for specific criminal activity, it shall be maintained within the strict bounds of due process and all the afforded safe guards. To sign or ratify any instrument which would be in contravention with the current domestic legislative framework is an exercise in futility. This does not mean that Trinidad and Tobago condones the issues around torture or other degrading forms of treatment to anyone.

Corporal Punishment:

The scope of the issue of the use of corporal punishment to discipline children has been an inherent cultural practice. Trinidad and Tobago is changing systemically and institutionally to veer away from such a practice. The Children Act of 2012 makes it illegal to administer corporal punishment in schools while for parents and legal guardians the position is maintained. There has been on-going national debate to change the view of corporal punishment being used in the homes.

Mr. President

The GOTT would like to make it abundantly clear that every citizen of Trinidad and Tobago will have the protection of the written Constitution and all State agencies have a duty to protect every citizen of Trinidad and Tobago. The issue of discrimination on the basis of HIV/AIDS and/or sexual orientation continues to be one of paramount consideration. Attitudes towards these aforementioned issues in Trinidad and Tobago are drastically changing. The GOTT continues to work towards enhancing the rights of all individuals.

No country has a perfect record on human rights and governance. And Trinidad and Tobago is no different. It is always a work in progress. And we will continue to work on improving, on cultivating values, on building resilience, to the many challenges we face every day. We are certainly inspired more than ever, confident that we can count on your support, as we continue on this journey to build resilience through our challenges to complete our own Trinbagonian Story.

The GOTT intends to maintain a high level of ambition regarding the protection of human rights on a national level. The UPR process will continue to constitute a vital part of this work.

I thank you once again for this opportunity.