



CHAIRMAN'S EMANCIPATION DAY MESSAGE

EMANCIPATION DAY: THE CROSSROADS OF FREEDOM, CULTURE, AND UNITY

Today we gather to commemorate a day of utmost significance in the history of Trinidad and Tobago - Emancipation Day. It marks the legal end of a dark era and the sunrise of freedom for enslaved Africans on the 1st of August 1834.

The transatlantic slave trade with its extreme brutality constituted a horrific and dehumanising institutionalised operation foisted upon Africans that was sanctioned by British rule and codified into laws and or norms of its colonies. The passing of the Abolition Act in 1833 within the British Empire signified a pivot towards a life embracing compassion and humanity for dispossessed Africans. Emancipation Day, thus, stands as a beacon, a symbol of our ancestors' pain, their struggle for freedom and testament to the indomitable resilience of the human spirit.

Yet, our observance of Emancipation Day must be contextualised within the broader historical experiences that have shaped our nation. Following the abolition of slavery, the British sought to fill the labour gap by implementing a system of indentureship. This led to the arrival of East Indians in Trinidad and Tobago, commencing on the 30th of May 1845. Sadly, they confronted severe and oppressive working conditions. Many historical analysts have noted that the structure of indentureship effectively perpetuated labour exploitation, a characteristic all too familiar from the era of slavery. Indentureship was more than a reinvention of servitude: it was a continuation of devaluing human labour and dignity by the British of persons of a different ethnicity under a new guise.

The termination of indentureship in 1917 marked another notable milestone on the path to human rights and freedom. Over time, both African and Indian cultures have become indispensable parts of our diverse island ethos. The akin experiences of adversity and triumph, and the unified aspiration for independence, have the potential to engender a sense of purpose within the society. This commonality can act as catalysts connecting the nation through the history of our ancestors' courage and resilience.

At the Equal Opportunity Tribunal, we have the privilege to carry forward the torch lit by our ancestors. We bear a solemn duty to uphold the values of freedom, equality, and justice that they struggled for. Our responsibility is to ensure equitable treatment for all, irrespective of race, religion, ethnicity, or social status. It is our mission to foster respect among all the diverse ethnicities in Trinidad and Tobago.

As we honour our past, we must also mould our future. Observances such as Emancipation Day serve as potent reminders of the sacrifices made by our ancestors, and they instil in us the lessons that will light our path towards a more equitable society. Emancipation Day can be regarded as a call to action for each of us to continue to stridently promote equality and fairness. Collectively, we can build a society that is true to the values our ancestors fought for, and ensure a future made possible by our past.

As I conclude, I want to express my deep gratitude to all of you for your commitment and dedication to the values we hold dear. Thank you for standing with the Equal Opportunity Tribunal today in celebrating the spirit of Emancipation Day. Together, we can, and will, make a difference. My family joins with me in wishing you a reflective and insightful Emancipation celebration.

Her Honour Donna Prowell-Raphael
CEOT
July 28th 2023



**EQUAL
OPPORTUNITY
TRIBUNAL**
Trinidad & Tobago

