EQUAL OPPORTUNITY TRIBUNAL
Trinidad & Tobago

OPPORTUNITY KNOCKS

Issue 010

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Advancing Equality:

One Case At A Time



The period May to August 2026 was a busy and productive one for the Equal Opportunity Tribunal, as several matters came before Her Honour Madame Justice Donna Prowell-Raphael, Chairman and Judge.

The matters raised important issues relating to alleged discrimination in areas including employment and education, on grounds such as race, sex and disability. The Tribunal presided over various stages of proceedings, including status hearings, directions hearings, pre-trial reviews and trials. Several matters were heard electronically, reflecting the Tribunal's continued use of technology to facilitate access to justice and promote the efficient management of cases.

Among the matters appearing on the Tribunal's court schedule were cases involving educational institutions, public authorities, regional health authorities and private-sector organisations. Each matter was managed in accordance with the Tribunal's established procedures, providing the parties with an opportunity to advance their respective cases and receive appropriate directions from the Court.

The active schedule reflects the Tribunal's continued commitment to hearing and determining complaints brought under the Equal Opportunity Act and to providing an impartial forum for persons seeking redress for alleged discrimination.

As the new law term opens in September, the Tribunal will continue its work of advancing ongoing matters and facilitating the fair and timely administration of justice. Through its judicial functions, the Tribunal remains committed to promoting equality, protecting rights and strengthening public confidence in the country's equal opportunity framework.

To learn more about the Tribunal and read past judgments, interested persons may visit the Equal Opportunity Tribunal's website at www.equalrightscourt.org.

COURT *schedule*

OCT. 6	E.O.T No. 0001 of 2014,0001 of 2015 Afroza Bhanji v. Superpharm Limited
OCT. 6	EOT No. 0002 of 2024 Corinne Gregoire v. Cipriani College of Labour and Cooperative Studies
OCT. 6	EOT No. 0006 of 2016 Sean Ocho v. Water and Sewerage Authority
OCT. 6	EOT No. 0005 of 2020 Parasram Heerah v. Trinidad Cement Limited
OCT. 8	EOT No. 0001 of 2021 Samuel Johnson v. Tobago Regional Health Authority
OCT. 13	EOT No. 0007 of 2026 Robert Sagar v. The University of the West Indies
OCT. 13	EOT No. 0005 of 2017 Nigel Meltz v. Trinidad and Tobago Fire Service
OCT. 13	EOT No. 0001 of 2025 Dr. Kerlene Kennedy v. North Central Regional Health Authority
NOV. 17	E.O.T. No. 0004 of 2017 Coreen Isaac v. The North Central Regional Health Authority

www.equalrightscourt.org/judgements

Strengthening Our Organisation Through Staff Feedback



The Equal Opportunity Tribunal hosted its Annual Staff Feedback Session virtually on Friday 21 August 2026. The annual initiative provides members of staff with a valuable opportunity to share their concerns, experiences and recommendations for strengthening the organisation and improving its operations.

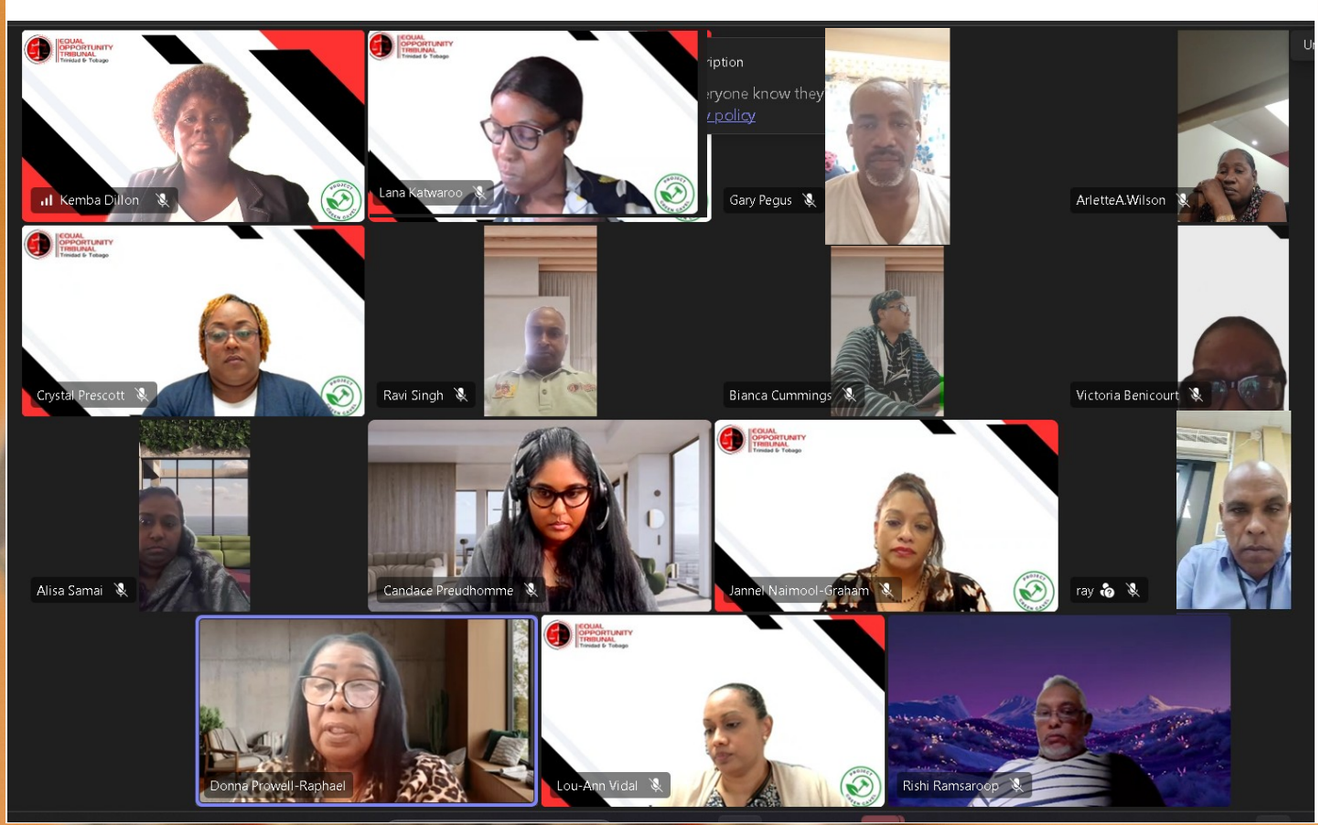
Her Honour Madame Justice Donna Prowell-Raphael, Chairman and Judge of the Equal Opportunity Tribunal, commenced the session by thanking staff for their dedication and continued commitment to the work of the Tribunal. She acknowledged that, despite the challenges encountered, the unwavering support and collective efforts of staff have enabled the Tribunal to continue advancing its mandate and providing access to justice for persons alleging discrimination.

During the session, Her Honour shared important updates on the Tribunal's key organisational priorities and addressed matters of significant concern to staff. The discussion provided an open and constructive forum in which staff members could raise issues, offer recommendations and contribute ideas for the continued development of the Tribunal.

To encourage honest and inclusive participation, staff were given the opportunity to provide feedback both publicly during the session and confidentially through prior submissions. All feedback received was carefully considered, and responses were provided during the discussions.

The session reinforced the Tribunal's commitment to ongoing staff engagement, transparency and collaboration. It also highlighted the important role that each member of staff plays in building a stronger, more responsive and effective organisation.

The Tribunal thanks all members of staff who participated and shared their valuable perspectives. The recommendations and concerns raised will continue to inform the organisation's priorities and guide its efforts to enhance the working environment and improve service delivery.



SPECIAL MESSAGES FROM HER HONOUR MADAME JUSTICE DONNA PROWELL-RAPHAEL, CEOT

Honouring Indian Arrival Day: A Reflection on History, Resilience, and Equality

On Saturday, May 30th, the nation comes together to celebrate Indian Arrival Day, a day that holds deep significance in our shared history. This day commemorates the arrival of the first Indian indentured labourers to Trinidad in May 1845 aboard the ship Fatel Razack. More than just a ship carrying a new labour force, the Fatel Razack brought new social perspectives and cultural influences that would help shape the vibrant, diverse society we know today.

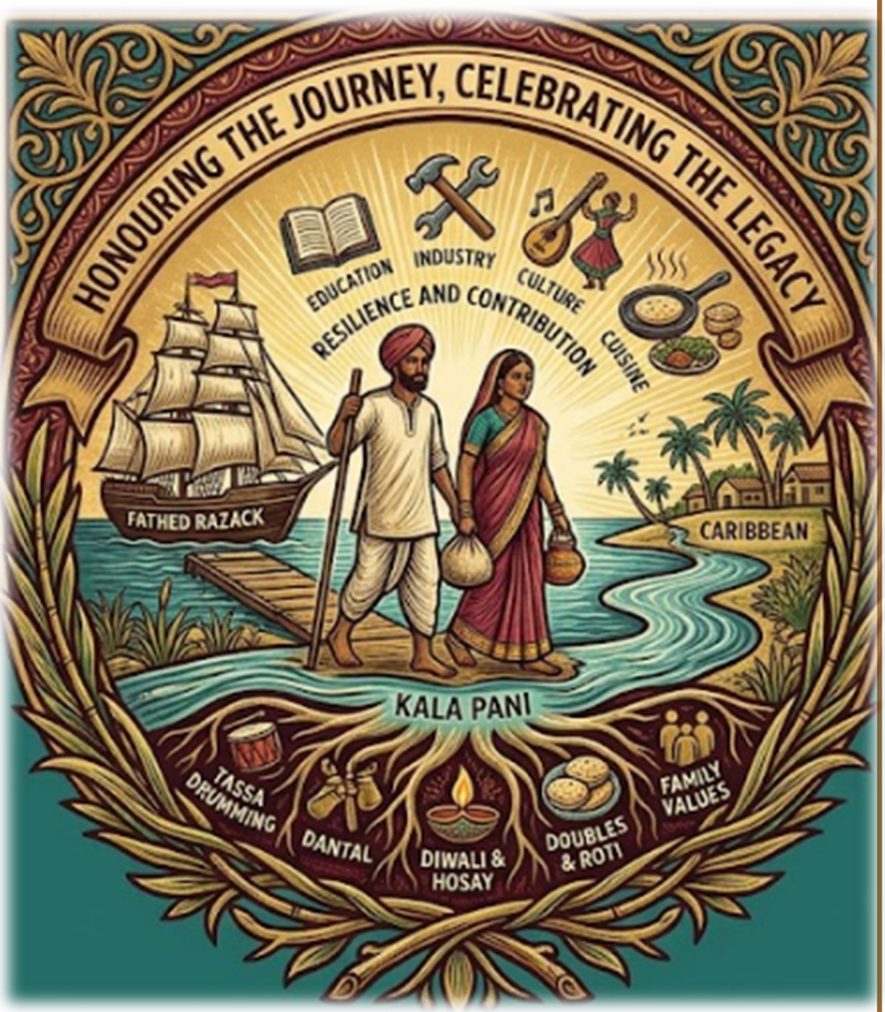
The arrival of these indentured labourers marks a pivotal chapter in our history—one characterized by a significant transition in the labour landscape. Following the abolition of slavery, the need for labour on plantations remained. Indentured labourers from India were brought in to fill this void, stepping into roles that were often difficult and demanding. Their journey was marked by hardship and endurance, but their contributions soon became integral to the nation's identity.

This chapter in the nation's history must be understood through the lens of social assimilation it set in motion. Over time, the descendants of enslaved African and Indian indentured labourers came together, their intertwined stories and blended cultural heritages forming the complex, inimitable society we see today. This rich fusion is a cornerstone of the social pluralism that defines our nation, a society where diverse cultural groups coexist, maintain their unique identities, and contribute to a shared community. The strength found in this legacy of struggle and perseverance continues to guide and enrich the nation.

This year also marks an important milestone for the Tribunal. In 2026, we celebrate the 25th anniversary of the Equal Opportunity Act, which was passed in 2000 and fully assented to in 2001. The Act laid the foundation for the establishment of the Equal Opportunity Tribunal in 2008/2009 as a superior court of record tasked with adjudicating complaints of discrimination, victimisation, and offensive behaviour across both public and private sectors. The Tribunal's jurisdiction covers discrimination on grounds such as race, ethnicity, sex, religion, origin, disability, and marital status.

Reflecting on these milestones of Indian Arrival Day and the 25 years of the Equal Opportunity Act, provides an opportunity to consider the ongoing evolution of our society. Our community is richly diverse, but it also faces challenges. Political shifts, ethnic tensions, and strained relationships between different sectors of society have created a complex and sometimes turbulent social landscape.

These realities place new demands on institutions like the Equal Opportunity Tribunal. Our work is more important than ever, as we seek to respond effectively and fairly to the needs and expectations of the public. We recognize that the legacy of those who came before us, the indentured labourers, the descendants of enslaved Africans, and all who have contributed to this nation, must inform how we approach the future.



HAPPY EMANCIPATION DAY

On August 1 each year, Trinidad and Tobago commemorates the 1834 abolition of slavery in the British Empire. The commemoration of African Emancipation Day salutes the persons of African descent who were subjected to the brutality of the transatlantic slave trade, their forced uprooting and transport across the Ocean, as well as those who endured the system of slavery that dehumanised and oppressed them for centuries. It is symbolic of the ongoing struggle against discrimination and the continuing pursuit of equal opportunity for all.

Notably, the Equal Opportunity Tribunal may be regarded as a statutory flagship dedicated to the elimination of discrimination and inequality. Many persons have reached out to the Tribunal, seeking clarity about its role and function. This outreach carries even greater weight and importance, as in recent times the racial and ethnic tension appears to have now assumed global dimensions.

Established by the Equal Opportunity Act in 2001, the Tribunal is the only specialised court of law in the country (and the Caribbean) empowered to determine issues of discrimination, equal opportunity, and offensive behaviour (including hate speech). It became operational around 2008 and held its first trial in 2016. Since then, it has gradually taken on more cases and gained public recognition. Yet, despite this growing awareness, critical questions persist: What is the Tribunal's role? What purpose does it serve? What vision guides its work? What solutions does the Tribunal offer to address the current social justice issues?

Slavery created a deep racial divide in Trinidad's society. Africans were brought here under the brutal conditions of slavery, which left a long legacy of violence, forced labour, and rigid racial hierarchy. The passage of the Slavery Abolition Act by Britain in 1834 was a crucial legal milestone, but it did not bring societal equality. After slavery ended, African descendants were legally free, but colonial society maintained inequalities in land ownership, employment, education, and social status. In effect, the racial hierarchy persisted well beyond emancipation.

Post-emancipation, Indian indentured labourers who migrated from India to work in the sugar cane plantations held a separate social and labour position within the country's plantocracy. While they were integral to the agricultural workforce, their status differed from the formerly enslaved African descendants. Further, during the late 19th and early 20th centuries, significant numbers of Middle Eastern migrants arrived in the country. They typically came as merchants and traders and established themselves in commerce and business. Additionally, migrants from other parts of Asia, including China and India (beyond indentured labourers), also settled in the country. All of these communities have contributed meaningfully to the commercial and social fabric.

Consequently, while race and ethnicity remain visible markers, the underlying forces driving societal fractures are rooted in longstanding perceptions of economic disparities and entrenched networks and interests that transcend ethnic or racial boundaries. This difficult reality suggests that addressing discrimination demands not only attention to the overt pointers of race and ethnicity but also a keen awareness of the inherent structures of power, economic inequality and discrimination.

It is within this challenging context that the Equal Opportunity Tribunal operates. More than half of the complaints referred to it by the Equal Opportunity Commission allege racial and/or ethnic discrimination. The Tribunal is tasked with hearing and determining these complaints impartially without fear or favour, hearing each side and balancing the competing interests. It has the authority to compel evidence and require attendance at hearings to uncover the facts. It is empowered to issue a range of powerful remedies, including declarations, injunctions, reinstatement orders, and awards of damages to successful litigants. It also has the power to punish contempt, ensuring respect for its processes and decisions.

The commemoration of African Emancipation Day is a reminder that legal freedom alone is not enough if people continue to face prejudice, inequality, or discrimination. Institutions like the Tribunal matter because they help transform the promise of equal opportunity and non-discrimination into everyday reality. However, the Tribunal has its limits. While it can lawfully resolve discrimination cases, it cannot directly heal deep historical wounds, economic disparities, or broader social divisions. Moreover, its effectiveness depends on public awareness, accessibility, and adequate resources, so that those affected are able to engage with the remedies it offers.

While African Emancipation Day marks a momentous historical milestone for persons of African descent, it must be understood as part of the ongoing story of nationhood. The apparent deepening of racial tensions underscores the continuing challenge of moving beyond division toward a more inclusive and equitable society. In this journey, institutions like the Equal Opportunity Tribunal play a vital role, guiding the path toward non-discrimination and the realisation of equal opportunity for all.