

ALLIANCE FOR STATE ACTION



TO END GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

CIVIL SOCIETY STATEMENT

Trinidad and Tobago. October 24, 2024

To:

Dr. The Honourable Keith Rowley, Prime Minister of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago

The Honourable Fitzgerald Hinds, M.P., Minister of National Security

Mr. David West, Director, Police Complaints Authority

Five women in one week is too much: Call for specific actions to prevent and respond to violence against women and children

October 7: A woman from South Oropouche chopped by men driven in a car by a man known to her.

October 8: 34-year-old Tara "Geeta" Ramsaroop and her 14-month-old daughter Shermaya "Jada" Motilal chopped to death. Her ex-partner has been charged for her killing.

October 10: 50-year-old Sunita Mohammed pushed down in a domestic dispute. Died from head injuries.

October 11: 41-year-old Anna Innis-Burke stabbed. Her 12-year-old son threatened and kidnapped by ex-partner.

October 12: 34-year-old Laura Sankar chopped to death. Her husband has been charged for her killing.

On the 17th October, 2024 the murder rate in Trinidad and Tobago crossed 500 with “experts predicting a record 650 murders by year end” according to the Trinidad and Tobago Guardian. Trinidad and Tobago continues to experience high levels of insecurity, the causes of which include persisting social and economic inequalities. Within this context of increasing violence, the Alliance for State Action to End GBV (“ASA”) calls on specific actions to prevent and respond to violence against women and children.

Four women were killed by people known to them between October 7 to 12, 2024; including the murders of Tara “Geeta” Ramsaroop and her 14-month-old daughter Shermaya “Jada” Motilal on October 8, Sunita Mohammed on October 10, and Laura Sankar on October 12, all allegedly murdered by past or present intimate partners.

These femicides come on the heels of the August 15 femicide of Kiefer Wilson, allegedly run over and killed by her ex-boyfriend. These tragic deaths demonstrate the state's failure to adequately prevent violence against women and children, particularly by male partners with whom they have been in relationships, as evidenced in the judgment of the case of Tot Lampkin v the Attorney General (2024).¹

As reported by the Trinidad Guardian on October 13th, there have been 28 domestic violence murders over 2024 and 34 women killed between January 1 and September 26th, 2024. Additionally, there have been 1,227 cases of domestic violence between January 1 and August 2024.² These numbers point to a widespread societal problem of men's violence against women and its continued threat to women's lives and to their children.

These tragic cases prove that threats and mortal violence do not end when women leave abusive relationships, and that fear and insecurity remain constant. They emphasize the necessity for the state to do more to prevent men's violence against women, to protect women victims following police reports and applications for protection orders, and to punish offenders such that femicide doesn't occur with impunity. We highlight these cases of intimate partner violence even as we are aware of the killing of women by non-partner relatives and family members, such as the case of Marlah Boodram by her son on August 12th, 2024, and the increased insecurity of women in the broader context of rising societal violence and an increased national murder rate.

Inconsistent police efficacy and implementation of legislation, and delays in accessing justice, are only some of the key contributing factors for which the state is responsible. Macro economic conditions of unemployment, rising inflation, increasing gang violence, and a shrinking middle class further exacerbate the socio-political situation. Moreover, decades of research highlight the need to transform social norms that reproduce beliefs in male dominance over women which are at the root of men's intimate partner violence. As we share the nation's grief, and many women's generalized fear of gendered violence, we express deep concern for rising levels of violence which affect all citizens. Nonetheless, we emphasize that lethal male violence against women and children requires urgent attention and accountability.

The Alliance for State Action to End GBV, therefore, demands greater accountability from the state in adequately addressing crime, violence and the rise in femicides. We reiterate our call for a case by case

¹ Derek Achong, Trinidad and Tobago Guardian, "State Held Accountable for Domestic Violence Murder," 18 May, 2024, <https://www.guardian.co.tt/news/state-held-liable-for-domestic-violence-victims-murder-6.2.2003761.114f7f7060>

² Shane Superville, Trinidad and Tobago Guardian, "28 domestic violence murders in 2024–The limitations of protection orders," 13 October, 2024. <https://www.guardian.co.tt/news/28-domestic-violence-murders-in-2024the-limitations-of-protection-orders-6.2.2133087.9d13e6b621>

review of each femicide to analyze key contributing factors, including where protocols and processes, meant to protect and serve survivors, broke down. We are cognizant that, in some of these cases, reports were made to the police and protection orders in place.

The Ministry of Education and the Children's Authority are pivotal to addressing family violence. The Ministry of Education is responsible for ensuring that children's educational and social well-being are prioritized, identifying students at risk due to domestic violence, and providing student support services that are rooted in safeguarding. The Children's Authority, mandated to safeguard children's freedom from abuse, must collaborate closely with the police when family violence is reported, conducting investigations and removing children from dangerous environments when necessary. However, effective intervention requires streamlined coordination between these agencies to ensure that protective measures are promptly activated. The current system often faces challenges due to delays in communication, bureaucratic inefficiencies, and poor oversight. The recent events highlight the need for more efficient inter-agency collaboration to protect children from the impact of family violence.

We urge the state to determine the extent to which the Trinidad and Tobago Police Services ("TTPS"), the Ministry of National Security, the Ministry of Legal Affairs, and the Children's Authority of Trinidad and Tobago adhered to their legislative responsibility in each case and we call on Members of the Cabinet, Ministers, the TTPS, the courts and court bearers to execute their mandate in a moral and efficient manner with the safety and security of the citizenry as paramount.

The Alliance for State Action to End GBV acknowledges our shared history of trauma and the need for a "whole of society approach" which is integrated across state institutions with a responsibility for ending violence and supporting survivors. We caution against indifference and desensitization to violence in our society and particularly to family violence. While we call for an immediate response by the government, including the Cabinet, and relevant ministries and institutions, we reiterate our commitment to community-based solutions and long term interventions at the local government level that build trust and reduce divisions as we come together to heal past wounds.

Some civil society organisations (CSOs) which are currently providing such community support are: The Coalition Against Domestic Violence (psycho-social and legal support), The Shelter (safe shelter), Conflict Women (business training and start up capital), Families In Action (skills training, MHPSS & capacity building), the Rape Crisis Society (psycho-social support), Living Water Community (migrant support), CEDAW Committee of Trinidad and Tobago (behaviour change training) and CAISO Sex and Justice (support to the LGBTQIA community). Given their crucial role, we call for increased involvement of CSOs in decision-making related to the state's response to violence.

We believe that with the right support, partnerships, and safeguarding mechanisms in place, Trinidad and Tobago can flourish into a safe space for women and children, and greater peace for all. To this end, the safety of citizens, whether in their homes or in their communities, must be the government's priority at this time.

List of Organisations

Break the Silence Network (Break the Silence: End Child Sexual Abuse)

Caribbean Association for Feminist Research and Action, Trinidad and Tobago (CAFRA)

CAISO: Sex and Gender Justice

CEDAW Committee of Trinidad and Tobago

Coalition Against Domestic Violence (CADV)

Conflict Women

Families in Action (FIA)

Feminitt Caribbean

Institute for Gender and Development Studies, The UWI (IGDS)

Mamatoto

Millennium Sistahs T&T

Secure A Vibrant Environment (SAVE) Foundation

Single Mothers Association of Trinidad and Tobago (SMATT)

Soroptimist International Trinidad and Tobago (SITT)

The Network of NGOs T&T for the Advancement of Women

The Shelter

WOMANTRA

Women's Institute for Alternative Development (WINAD)

Women Working for Social Progress (Workingwomen)

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About the Alliance for State Action to End Gender-Based Violence

The Alliance for State Action to End Gender-Based Violence is a network of NGOs in Trinidad and Tobago working in solidarity to monitor state action and advocate for state accountability to prevent and respond effectively to end gender-based violence.

Learn more at: <https://www.facebook.com/GBVActionTT>

For further information, please get in touch **Alliance for State Action to End Gender-Based Violence** via email at allianceforstateaction@gmail.com Tel: 1 (868) 689-9471