

PRESBYTERIANS RESPOND TO THE IRO STATEMENT

Re: Child Marriage

The Presbyterian Church of Trinidad and Tobago wishes to advise the populace that our representative to the Inter-Religious Organisation (IRO), the Moderator of the Synod, was not informed of nor invited to the meeting of the IRO at which the decision to support Child Marriage was taken, neither were we consulted for an input afterward. As such, we firmly state that our Church does not hold to views expressed in the subsequent statement issued by the Head of the IRO, Bro Harrypersad Maharaj, in defence of Child Marriage.

Our Church holds firm to the belief and practice that Marriage is considered a holy expression of love between consenting adults, which requires a level of responsibility that cannot be expected from children as young as 12, 14 or 16. Neither do we condone statutory rape, which is a very real possibility enflamed by legalised child marriage.

Further, we wish to highlight that the issue of child marriage disproportionately impacts more girls than boys, but both genders are negatively affected. We endorse that both females and males are made in the image of God, and are deserving of our protection from these archaic laws and social predators.

As a member Church of the World Council of Churches (WCC), we support the world-wide initiatives to improve child-wellbeing and engage our communities in defending the rights of the child. In this light, we believe that Child Marriage is inherently detrimental to the life and development of the persons involved. Child Marriage directly conflicts with the rights of the child to leisure and an education, and poses threats to their safety from exploitation and abuse. From our Christ-centered belief of life in abundance for all, we cannot support a practice that has been shown to cause the disruption of education, complications with overall health and wellbeing, and trigger sexual and domestic violence.

The Presbyterian Church of Trinidad and Tobago wishes to express our support of the proposed initiative, being undertaken by the Government of our country, to align the age of marriage with the legal age of consent and adulthood in Trinidad and Tobago. We also wish to call on all citizens, especially parents and guardians, to be vigilant and work together to protect our nation's children from harm in all its forms.