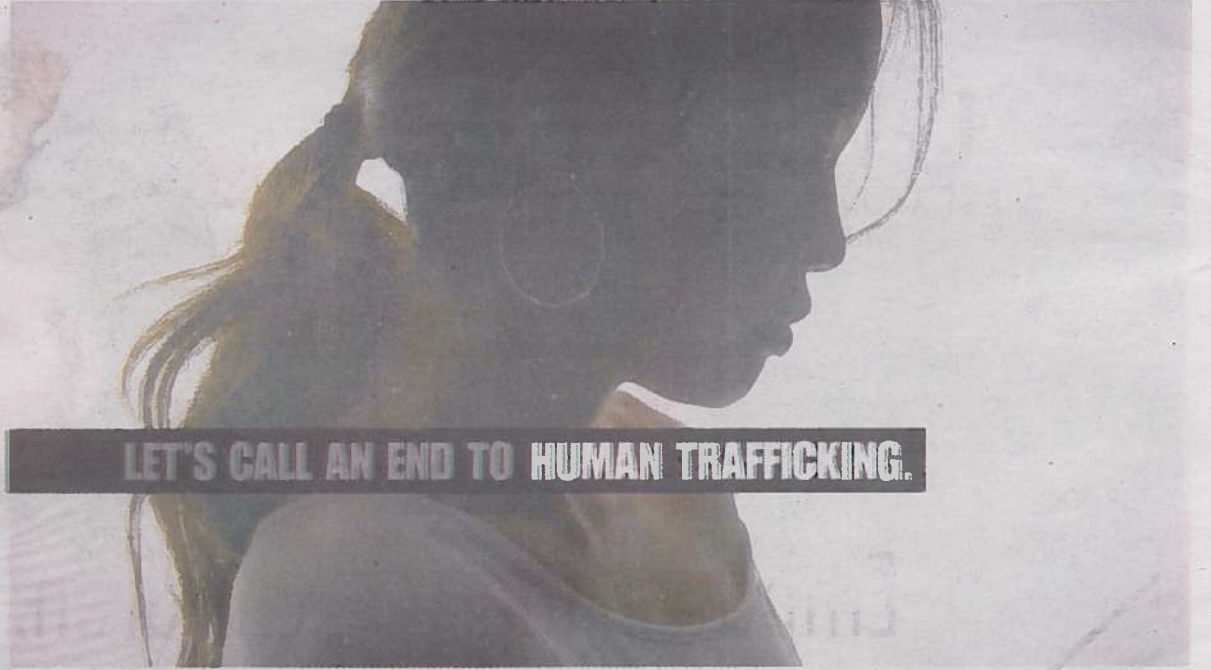




# Universal Children's Day

## 20 November

### Simone de la Bastide: More needs to be done to protect children



The recent cases of violence against children are unfortunately just a handful of the multitude of cases of violence or abuse children have been subjected to. The regularity and extent of such incidences not only speak to the perpetrators of the act but also highlight that there is a severely low detection rate as well as proper infrastructural support to properly address such cases.

With today being International Children's Day, for Simone de la Bastide, founder of The Children's Ark, it's imperative that now more than ever, so much more needs to be done to protect the nation's children. This directly falls in line with the aim of the NGO which seeks "to improve the lives and living conditions of our nation's marginalised children, whether challenged, underprivileged, abused, abandoned, addicted or otherwise."

"Children are our greatest asset," de la Bastide said. "We need to protect and guide our children in all that they do and watch and protect them as they



Simone de la Bastide

develop and grow." It can't all fall on the NGOs and authorities, however. The general public, she says also has a large role in protecting children. She stated that there is a severe lack of awareness amongst the people when it comes to recognising when a child may be in harm's way, whether it be sexual abuse, violence or trafficking, an issue she says, is on the rise in Trinidad and Tobago.

As a result, The Children's Ark recently launched an awareness and prevention programme to sensitise the public about the very real dangers of child trafficking in Trinidad and Tobago. It's a "very serious issue," she said. It has also reached epidemic levels internationally.

"Approximately 1.2 million children are trafficked worldwide every year." The extensive programme, which was launched just six months ago, includes visits to schools across the country, introducing multimedia software which will further educate on child trafficking prevention and social media campaigns.

While the NGO is doing its part, there still isn't enough public awareness or proper infrastructure to assist with preventative measures or handle and treat with cases of child abuse or violence as they come. "Social services are greatly lacking, whether with funding or training."

On if she believes with the recent change in government if she foresees more funding being allocated to social services and more stringency in relation to the Children's Act, de la Bastide said, "Well, it's a wait and-see-process. Finances and implementation is always vital in securing the welfare of the children." It's of even more importance with cases such as three-year-old Arti Remkelawan, who is currently fighting for her life after her father slit her throat, killed her mother and then himself. "It's extremely upsetting...unfortunate is not the proper word to describe the horror of what happened to her."

"Authorities need to pay more attention and do more...the government, the authorities, the public, everyone concerned really need to protect our children. Religion and family play a large role as well; something is lacking and we have lost our way."

