

Comment

Politics abusing children

A HOMEMADE video of a child being abused and forced to drink milk is yet another window opened into the culture of violence in T&T. You can be sure that had the perpetrator and amateur filmmaker known that police would be searching for them, they would not have uploaded that video. They would have still abused the child, they may have still filmed it but they would not have endangered themselves by sharing it.

Very soon, these videos will no longer be available and the social media window into T&T noir will be closed. What of the thousands of children being similarly brutalised—and then some—who are not filmed and featured in news stories? What of those being savaged as you read this?

There is an epidemic of violence against women and children. Those who write letters to the editor and call in on radio talk shows to ask “What has become of T&T?” have been living under rocks; this has always been a dark, violent place. Social media and greater public awareness are showing us what has existed for generations and what is largely responsible for the explosion of violent criminality in contemporary times.

It has been just over a month since the general elections. All candidates were busy walking up and down streets, traces and

candidate notice the dire circumstances of children, women, the elderly, the disabled, the homeless? How many of them spoke to these issues on the campaign platforms? How many citizens demanded that the fate of children, in particular, occupy a place at the top of their list of national priorities?

Now consider the budget debate in the House of Representatives, the Senate and in the Finance Committee: how much did you hear about children? Did we demand otherwise?

Governments, all governments, need help in the project of governance. Political party supporters do no favours to “their” government when they transmit that “their” government can do no wrong. Of the 23 Government MPs and 15 Government senators, how many of them have worked in the social sector generally and with children’s protection specifically? How many of them have any expertise in this area or are networked with people who do?

Sitting in the gender ministry is an action plan for children and families compiled by former minister Verna St Rose Greaves. After she was unceremoniously removed from the Cabinet, one or two references were drawn from it but follow-through action was discontinued in pure political bad mind. There are three reports from the unneces-

among a body of literature composed over decades on the welfare of children and families.

Forgive me as I repeat ad nauseam that until the Children Act (2012), government after government was satisfied with legislation on children dating back to 1925 and the package of legislation to protect and nurture children drafted under then attorney general Ramesh Lawrence-Maharaj remained untouched under two PNM administrations only to be rushed through Parliament in the dying hours of the Partnership administration. The consequence is that there are legal provisions in place with very few supporting structures.

Two-storey ignorance, as the late Trevor Farrell would say. Governments do not know and they do not know that they do not know. Civil society under each administration has had to massage political egos and ease into the topic to enhance the likelihood of their ideas being adopted.

What is required is committed, national, integrated problem-solving involving all ministries and divisions and political leadership on the welfare of children so no one drops the ball. And where is this effort to be co-ordinated if not in a ministry dedicated to the task? It cannot be done from a desk in a dark corner of a large, unwieldy ministry that has in the past demonstrated its inability to perform this function.

We need more and proper-

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can be enlisted through GATE to provide relevant training. Professional delivery of services along with constant tracking and monitoring of children can reduce the risk of abuse. A fully staffed TTPS Child Protection Unit, a properly resourced Children’s Authority, a few facilities to house and properly care for children in State care and so much more.

Those of us who work in this sector know the problems and we know the solutions. But politics keeps pushing against progress and ultimately abusing those most vulnerable.

To report child abuse, call 996



Sheila Rampersad