



## LAW ASSOCIATION OF TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO

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### **MEDIA RELEASE**

Once again, members of the legal profession have been the subjects of derogatory remarks by the Honourable Minister of National Security and the Honourable Prime Minister.

Addressing the crime of human trafficking, Minister Young again warned that there were persons guilty of aiding and abetting the illegal entry of Venezuelan migrants into Trinidad and Tobago and cited as an example, a statement made in court by a member of the legal team representing migrants that he or she was aware that his or her clients were at that time somewhere out at sea. It goes without saying that if that alone was evidence of aiding and abetting the commission of a crime, the particular lawyer concerned should have already been charged. But it is plain that the statement referred to by the Minister is knowledge that the lawyer could easily have come by from the family or friends of the lawyer's clients or from the public domain without any involvement in human trafficking.

Addressing the legal costs associated with defending legal claims made by migrants, the Honourable Prime Minister informed the public that whereas when the State wins a case in Court it does not recover its legal costs against the unsuccessful litigant, when the State loses and is ordered to pay costs, he said, "it is a bonanza for the lawyers who troll with the other bottom feeders there."

Presumably, the Honourable Prime Minister would not characterise as "bottom feeders" the lawyers in his Cabinet, or those who represent him in court, or from whom he takes advice or with whom he otherwise associates.

The Law Association takes the view that lawyers pursuing their clients' interests and who pursue costs against the State where the State is adjudged by a court of law to have violated the law, are not only carrying out their bounden duty as attorneys at law and fulfilling the highest traditions of the profession, but are acting in the public's interest in upholding the rule of law and ensuring state accountability.

While we accept that the Government of Trinidad and Tobago, like any other citizen, is free to criticise members of the legal profession where there is cause so to do, the danger is that the cumulative attacks by the government on lawyers representing vulnerable migrants and asylum seekers may put those lawyers at risk of defamatory or even physical retaliation by members of the public. We urge the Government to exercise restraint.

As the Law Association has had cause to say on many prior occasions, if an attorney has violated the law, we encourage the relevant state authority to take immediate and decisive action. Unsubstantiated accusations of criminal activities and blanket character assassination by the holders of high office are not only unfair to the countless lawyers honestly and courageously carrying out their duties, but contributes to the de-legitimisation of a profession without which access to justice and the rule of law simply cannot survive.

Law Association of Trinidad & Tobago  
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