

Speech by the Hon. Dr. Lillian Boyce, Minister of Education, Youth, Sports, Culture, Arts, Gender Affairs and Social Development, for International Human Rights Day, October 24, 2006.

Today we in the Turks and Caicos Islands join the rest of the world in celebrating International Human Rights Day.

The government of the Turks and Caicos Islands takes the protection of human rights extremely seriously, and we believe that human rights should be placed, and remain, high on our national agenda.

We believe that Human Rights are fundamentally guaranteed to all, regardless of origin, race, gender, religion, nationality, age or political affiliation.

Indeed, these are some of the rights that are secured and embedded in our new Constitution, which include Fundamental rights and freedoms of the individual, Protection of right to life, Protection from inhuman treatment, Protection from slavery and forced labour, Protection from wrongful arrest or detention, Provisions to secure protection of law, Protection of right of prisoners to humane treatment, Protection for private and family life and for privacy of home and other property, Protection of right to marry, Protection of right to education, Protection of freedom of expression, Protection of freedom of assembly and association, Protection of freedom of movement, Protection from discrimination, Protection from deprivation of property, and Provisions for periods of public emergency, and the Enforcement of fundamental rights.

It is fair and true to say that the Turks and Caicos Islands has a decent track record as it relates to the protection of the rights of its citizens and residents.

But although this is proudly the case, we find it necessary to have a more formal structure in place, which, among other things, ensure that are human rights policies are in line with international standards.

To this end, Government has recently established a Human Rights Commission which will be working everyday and will be located at Graceway House. It will have a full-time chairperson, Ms. Doreen Quelch-Misick and includes other distinguished members of the community.

Our intention is to set-up different committees and sub-groups and have an officer who will investigate reports of human rights abuses and submit them to the Human Rights Commission so they can address and represent people whose rights may have been infringed.

Today as we mark International Human Rights Day, I wish to end this address by taking this opportunity to encourage our people to read and become familiar with the Constitution so that they would know their Constitutional Rights and their Human Rights. That is why our Government made sure that over seven thousand copies of the constitution were distributed throughout our country and our schools. I appeal to our people to please get a copy and read.

I also wish to remind the country at large that as a Government, we will continue to ensure that the rights of all residents of the Turks and Caicos Islands are always protected.