

'LET'S COME TOGETHER' Q&A SERIES WITH THE IPPF TRUSTEES

In conversation with

Professor Rose-Marie Belle Antoine



An MA volunteer, Professor Rose-Marie Belle Antoine has held the role of Pro Vice-Chancellor of Graduate Studies and Research at the University of the West Indies since 2021.

Professor Antoine has been President of the Family Planning Association of Trinidad and Tobago since 2015. Amongst the skills required for the Board of Trustees, Professor Antoine can point to legal expertise, SRHR leadership and networks, and national governance.

Tell us a bit about yourself, your journey to being a part of the Board of Trustees (BoT) and what your role entails.

I was asked to be President of FPATT - Trinidad and Tobago in 2015, 2 years after my return to Trinidad. I then attended IPPF meetings in my region, which were turbulent (Latin America and the Caribbean).

There was a move to sever from the Federation, a move I was against. I disagreed with several of the proposals/plans presented since I believed them to not be sound. I was the only person from the Caribbean to eventually refuse to sever, at great risk, since the Regional body (now dismantled) threatened and did withdraw our funding when I refused, on behalf of my organisation, to sign the various severance and other documents.

Later, I assisted in persuading some of the Caribbean entities to return to IPPF. Apparently, they viewed me as a leader. I was lobbied to put my name forward as a Trustee, which I eventually did, not knowing what to expect.

I see myself as a balanced voice at the BoT, and I can bring my legal and administrative experience and human rights background forward to contribute to planning and strategy.

What do you see as the key mandate of the BoT?

To unify and lead like-minded organisations to present a strong, persuasive presence globally on SRHR. Also to support affiliates to be able to serve our constituents excellently.

Member, Board of Trustees

Our world is changing fast. What do you think are the key priorities for IPPF at this time? What should we do more of and less of?

- Sadly, the key priority is to revisit the fight to regain some of what we thought we had won in terms of SRHR.
- Infuse enthusiasm for and understanding of SRHR into young people - the next generation, just as climate change has caught their attention.
- Less of treating issues as insular and separate, which clouds the overall mission.
- More litigation globally - assisting NGOs who wish to do so in their own countries but may not have the resources to do so.
- Continue to work more directly with MAs since there is still remoteness.

The capacity of people to access/realize their SRHR has long been influenced by the shifting tides of politics. What advice do you have for affiliates who are tirelessly advocating for SRHR and trying to navigate the systems?

- Make unusual allies, including the Church. It worked for HIV. At first, churches were hostile, but this changed over time. It just takes one or two vocal persons from within who are open-minded.
- Work across borders.
- Focus on young people.

Bias in health care settings impacts reproductive health. FPATT is committed to its engagement with marginalized communities. How has the organisation successfully addressed this issue?

-Bias comes in many forms - gender, race, etc. The concentrated focus on LGBTIQ issues gained the trust of that community and enabled many gender barriers to be crossed. However, there is a danger of it being too separate from general SRHR issues.

-In terms of race, the issue was invisibilized but has now come to the fore. IPPF is confronting it squarely, which is the first step. I hope that the race agenda will be broadened to transcend race barriers not only in the internal organization but in our services- as a clear commitment.

-Great success in migrant communities that were invariably marginalized.

As the Pro Vice-Chancellor and Principal at the University of the West Indies you've been described as a 'history maker and modern-day freedom fighter'. We would love to know more about the initiatives that have gained you this reputation.

-I started an international Human Rights clinic at my university, the Faculty of Law. I was the first to call what happened in the Dominican Republic in terms of denying Haitians born there citizenship - racism and not 'migrant' issues. This resulted in a historic mission to that country by the IACHR.

-As IACHR Rapporteur, I initiated Public Hearings on race discrimination and injustice for black persons in North America.

-I was the first to introduce HIV Law to the University syllabus in the early 1990s and was asked by my region CARICOM to spearhead an initiative to make HIV part of the general anti-discrimination policy. The UN eventually adopted it.

-I initiated a historic constitutional challenge in Trinidad against remand injustices where remandees wait as much as 21 years for their cases to come to trial. Ongoing. This followed an international hearing before the IACHR airing this issue.

If you had to name some flagship programmes/initiatives you would wish MAs to replicate, which ones would those be and why?

I wish IPPF to do more of the litigation, such as when we challenged the UK government on aid.

You are an expert in Labour Law. What aspects of this speciality can you bring to the BoT to further strengthen equity and equality in IPPF programmes.

-The work currently being carried out in terms of safeguarding is interesting, and I can contribute towards its implementation.

-More work can be done/more attention paid to the real inequities across regions/countries, which impacts IPPF's ability to do its work.

-Better benchmarks using our own knowledge on the ground instead of often right-wing International Monetary Fund thresholds should be used to determine the real state of countries we deal with. Some countries are classified as middle-income and do not qualify easily for aid, whereas in reality, there are huge pockets of poverty and wealth is focused only on a few. While this raises the GDP, the breadth and depth of the inequality is not realized with these false markers and our mission is thereby compromised. IPPF needs to challenge these constructs if it is to be meaningful. The Caribbean is clearly one such example.

'Come together' is the Strategy for IPPF. How can we turn this inward and strengthen the interaction and solidarity between the BoT and affiliated organisations? How do you see the new Federation's strategy guide its work?

The greatest deficit is the continued alienation between IPPF and many affiliates. There needs to be a real physical presence. Visits between IPPF and affiliates for example. Sending newsletters and emails is not enough.

**In conversation with Professor Rose-Marie Belle Antoine
Member, Board of Trustees**

My own deputy ED and youth officer were blown away when they attended the AGM. It was only then that IPPF became real to them.

We also need to make opportunities for affiliates to partner directly with IPPF on key projects to create a common purpose. People integrate when they work together with focus and commitment.

What words of encouragement or inspiration can you share with affiliates across the Federation?

Stay strong. You are part of a great mission.



Describe yourself in three words.

Independent, Critical thinker, Courageous.

Any hobbies or interests that you enjoy doing outside of work?

I am a trained classical singer; I also love gardening /landscaping and painting.

If you could offer the team a motto, what would it be?

Think Big. We can do this.

If your life was a book, what would the title be?

'Never a Dull Moment to Overcome'

What's the most helpful habit you've developed?

Prayer with a self-help, pragmatic attitude.

What would your campaign slogan be if you ran for office?

Hmm. Not sure if that applies to me at all, but I guess:
'No Drama - Just Get it Done.'

Do you have a question for Rose-Marie?

Write to: governance@ippf.org