

# Dukharan: Govt breaking forex laws



Economist Marla Dukharan PHOTO BY JARYD NILES-MORRIS

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Economist Marla Dukharan has delivered a scathing critique of T&T's economic management, asserting that the country's social contract is "broken."

In a commentary in her Caribbean economic report September 2025 titled, 'What is underpinning the forex crisis in T&T?' which was issued yesterday, Dukharan argues that citizens are, in effect, funding policies that have made their lives worse, a situation she attributes to a combination of rising poverty and the Government's wilful breach of its own laws.

She illustrated her points through two key issues: rising poverty despite increased Government spending and the wilful breach of foreign exchange laws.

"Would you pay someone to hurt you? Would you pay someone to make your life worse? Would you pay someone to steal your money, especially your precious foreign exchange? I would hope not, but in essence, this is what we, the taxpayers in T&T have been doing for the last 15 years at least," she stated.

Dukharan pointed to Government expenditure rising from approximately \$46 billion in 2009 to \$62 billion in 2014—a 30 per cent increase—while poverty levels surged by 50 per cent during the same period.

The proportion of citizens living below the poverty line reportedly grew from 16.7 per cent to 24 per cent. She criticised the lack of updated poverty data, noting that T&T has not measured poverty in over a decade.

“We essentially paid the Government to make us poorer! And T&T, like most Caribbean countries, has failed to measure poverty for over 10 years, so we do not know if we are still paying the Government to make us poorer. But we do know that we are paying the Government and elected policymakers to break our own laws,” Dukharan stated, adding that the absence of current data leaves citizens unaware of whether the situation has improved or worsened.

Dukharan also highlighted longstanding concerns over foreign exchange management.

She referenced the International Monetary Fund’s (IMF) 2016 assessment, which found that the Government’s foreign exchange restrictions were in breach of international agreements and the amended Exchange Control Act of 1993.

That legislation was intended to liberalise access to foreign currency.

Despite this, Dukharan said, de facto foreign exchange controls remain in place, limiting access and transparency.

“Since 1993, the Government amended the Exchange Control Act to ‘liberalise’ access to and remove controls on foreign exchange access. So the foreign exchange restrictions we face today, the (de facto) controls that are currently in place, the calls for ‘transparency’ (and controls) on who has access to foreign exchange, are all in breach of the prevailing laws and agreements that our Government has signed/ enacted on our behalf internationally and domestically.

“We are paying our Government and elected policymakers to break our laws and agreements,” she said, warning that such actions have made citizens worse off and undermined economic stability.

The economist also raised concerns about the role of oversight institutions, including the Central Bank’s Board, the Office of the President and the Opposition.

She questioned how the Government could continue breaching laws without consequence and asked what recourse citizens have when the legislative process is ignored.

“Furthermore, the fact that successive Governments and policymakers are knowingly and wilfully breaking our laws and agreements related to foreign exchange, begs the questions, how can the Government continue to be in breach of the law without any consequences? “Who do we appeal to? What is the point of legislation and the legislative process if the Government can just decide to break the law, and do whatever it wants, in plain sight, for over a decade? Can this type of lawlessness on the part of the state, carry over into other areas beyond foreign exchange? What is the role of the board of the Central Bank and the President in all of this? What is the role of the Opposition? What can we, the ordinary citizens of T&T do about this?” Dukharan asked.

While placing her hopes on the new Prime Minister, she also voiced caution, reminding the public that the same individual presided over the deepening of the foreign exchange problem during a previous tenure.

“My eyes and hopes are on our new Prime Minister, who is saying all the right things this time re transparency and accountability, but who presided over the exacerbation of the foreign exchange problem when she was last in this position,” Dukharan noted.