Institute for Gender and Development Studies (IGDS)

Statement on

The Firing of Minister Daryl Smith

The Institute for Gender and Development Studies (IGDS), The University of the West Indies, St Augustine congratulates the Prime Minister on his decision to relieve Mr. Daryl Smith of his ministerial portfolio. This decision was necessary in light of the current case against him for sexual harassment in the Industrial Court and the numerous allegations in the public domain about his persistent sexual harassment of colleagues.

The number and the scale of the allegations of sexual harassment being levelled against former Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs demanded more than a shift in ministerial responsibility. If the allegations of sexual harassment appearing in the news media bare any kernel of truth, Minister Smith has proven his inability to manage power in a just, gender sensitive and non-predatory fashion. In light of this, he could not continue to serve as a Minister of Government with the ability to engage in similar patterns of behavior and to make vulnerable another group of female workers in an alternative location. The decision by the Prime Minister to have Mr. Smith demit office is a welcomed one and one that needs to be congratulated.
Unchecked workplace sexual harassment compromises the work environment. Unchecked workplace sexual harassment emanating from the individual holding the highest office within a given organization however, facilitates the acceptance of sexually predatory behaviours as organizational norms. Additionally, it negates the capacity of workplaces to promote equality of opportunity and advancement. Ultimately the Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago as the employer of the largest number of employees in the country, bares a peculiar responsibility to ensure every employee is safe from all forms of workplace abuse.

In 2003 the International Labour Organization amended its Discrimination Convention (1958, No. 111) to express the view that sexual harassment is a form of sexual discrimination. Sexual harassment in the workplace refers to any verbal or physical act of a sexual nature, performed in recruitment or in the workplace by a boss, manager, employee, client or customer of a working unit, that is unwelcome by the person receiving it and has caused the person to feel violated, insulted, and or produced an unbearable hostile environment for that individual. Sexual harassment is not a joke, neither is it a culturally specific, national expression of affection. As a national community we must not become co-perpetrators of this form of violence, by becoming indifferent to incidents of sexual harassment.

The Hon Prime Minister must be applauded for using this opportunity to reject this form of sexual violence. We at the Institute for Gender and Development Studies, consistent with our mission to advance social justice, promote gender-responsive human relations and gender transformative development in the wider society, use this opportunity to reiterate that sexual violence has no place in the home, the street or the workplace. We have a collective responsibility to take a stance against all forms of violence against women.

Well done Dr Rowley, we urge you to maintain this position in the future.