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PRESS RELEASE

STATEMENT ON THE PROPOSED MINISTRY OF LABOUR HIRE PRO DRIVERS (HPD) INITIATIVE

The Institute for Gender and Development Studies (IGDS), The University of the West Indies, St Augustine Campus calls upon the Ministry of Labour and Small Enterprise Development to invoke good public policy that expands the life choices of the citizenry when treating with the nation’s unemployment challenges.

The IGDS commends the Government for partnering with the Canadian company Hire Pro Drivers in a bid to address increasing levels of unemployment at home. If this is an avenue through which the Government proposes to reduce the unemployment rate, institutional arrangements must be established to ensure that the needs of local dependent households are satisfied in the absence of those persons employed in Canada. Simultaneously, the human rights of individuals relocating for work must be protected. Consequently, conditions for decent work must form an integral part of the dialogue between government and foreign business in a plan such as this.

Women in Trinidad and Tobago have historically exhibited lower levels of workforce participation and have featured in greater numbers in the unemployment statistics. International Labour Organization (ILO) statistics for Trinidad and Tobago placed the 2015 Labour Force Participation Rate at 50% for women and 71% for men. Over the
period 2008 to 2010 the unemployment rate for women was consistently higher than the figure for men:

- 2008 unemployment: male 3.5%; female 6.2%
- 2009 unemployment: male 4.6%; female 6.3%
- 2010 unemployment: male 5.2%; female 7.0%

As the country grapples with rising unemployment, which is a feature of any period of austerity, it is a development imperative that the public policy responses to these challenges are mindful of the ways in which the sexual division of labour shapes our quality of life.

If good public policy addresses unemployment and employment issues, the approach must be one that takes on board the complex interactions of social, political and economic variables that see women, on average, clustering in lower-paying sectors and experiencing higher levels of unemployment. As employment options are made available to our population, it is imperative that such alternatives do not reinforce current disadvantages inherent in the sexual division of labour, neither must they entrench impediments to personal advancement. Good public policy must include expanding life choices for all, paying particular attention to the vulnerable, while actively seeking to minimize unfortunate fall out from policy decisions.

Additionally, with regard to the Ministry of Labour’s ten-point plan to assist the jobless in our society, the IGDS hopes that special attention is paid to gender relations within the home as a means of reducing incidents of gender-based violence. Periods of austerity demand a peculiar awareness of the threat of incidents of domestic violence, intimate partner violence and abuse. Public policy initiatives must reflect such vigilance.

The Institute for Gender and Development Studies, consistent with its mission — to advance social justice, promote gender-responsive human relations and development in the wider society — remains committed to the ideals of decent work, human security and the elimination of gender-based violence. The IGDS is a willing partner in the process of achieving such progress for this nation.