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PRESS RELEASE

IGDS statement on Trinidad and Tobago’s National Gender Policy

The Institute for Gender and Development Studies, The University of the West Indies, St Augustine supports the call to approve a National Gender Policy for Trinidad and Tobago.

The goal of enacting a National Gender Policy for Trinidad and Tobago is not a new one. Activists, practitioners and scholars in the field of Women, Gender and Development are well aware of the first policy document produced in 1987 following an Organization of America States (OAS) CIM meeting held in Washington, USA. The document was presented by the then Minister with the Women’s Affairs portfolio, the Hon Margaret Hector. The content of this document convinced many in the field of the need for a more consultative product. In fact, the need to ground this document in our lived reality as citizens of Trinidad and Tobago, acted as a catalyst for the Non-Governmental Organisations (NGO) movement to embark on its own data collection and policy consultative endeavor towards the production of a National Report on the Status of Women (unpublished).

It is now 2015, and over 25 years have elapsed between the first document presented by Hon. Minister. Hector and today. In addition, we have had nine Ministers serve 11 terms of office of varying lengths in the gender and women’s affairs portfolio. Sitting governments have embarked on National Gender Policy making on a number of occasions, most recently in 1995, 2002, and 2011. The IGDS has been a technical and research partner organization in these undertakings when called upon to provide necessary support. As National Gender Policies have commenced, stalled, been revisited and relegated to the Finance and General Purpose Committee for further consideration, there has been a number of outcome documents. Most notably, we have the drafts of 2004, 2009 and 2012. Each document has its merits.
Even in the midst of differences or concerns that have been expressed by different constituencies, each of the drafts have attempted to move the dialogues and debates forward, establishing in every instance the still urgent need for such a policy to be adopted and implemented. More significantly each document has an invaluable history and context of development.

This protracted process of the T&T National Gender Policy has been one of consultation and deliberation with the widest cross-section of the population, including religious leaders, CBOs and NGOs. To date the trafficking around the gender policy has surpassed any other policy document in the history of Trinidad and Tobago.

At this time, we can all agree on the fact that we need an ideal approved document. But gender is an alive subject, and while it is imperative for progress to be actualized by consolidating and honouring a specific set of goals that meet with wide consensus, we need to recognize these efforts of the past and move forward on the most acceptable and progressive of the documents that have emerged in this passage. These documents have not been solely created as products of party politics but as statements of choices made by people within a country to any government in power. The advocacy, technical input, bureaucratic investment, the voices of our diverse population and the funding provided by the tax payers of Trinidad and Tobago, across a number of administrations necessitates a new kind of action and public engagement around a National Gender Policy. Any sitting government, conscious of the need to build on consensus, and progress in the area of Women, Gender and Development has a responsibility to pursue a course of action that will facilitate Trinidad and Tobago’s approval of a National Gender Policy and Plan of Action for Gender Equity and Equality.

We at the Institute for Gender and Development Studies (IGDS) consistent with our mission to advance social justice, promote gender-responsive human relations and development in the wider society remain committed to the ideals of a National Gender Policy and will always be a partner in the process of achieving progress for this nation.

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