PRESS RELEASE

Statement on November 25th 2016, International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women

VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN REMAINS A CRITICAL ISSUE FOR PUBLIC POLICY INTERVENTION

The Institute for Gender and Development Studies (IGDS) is calling on the Government of Trinidad and Tobago to adopt a public policy agenda that treats with Violence Against Women as an urgent, current and multifaceted challenge to people-centred, equitable development.

On Friday November 25th 2016 as we commemorate the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women, we celebrate the beginning of 16 Days of Activism, which will end on December 10th, Human Rights Day. As we observe November 25th, 2016 we are mindful of the international theme ‘Invest and mobilize to end violence against women’. We in the Anglophone Caribbean have invested energy, resources (both state and non-state) and extensive activism in this area of work. Violence Against Women is the oldest public policy area pertaining to gender equity and equality, around which, regional governments, practitioners, scholars and activist have rallied. At this time in our history, we must recommit to the advancement of relevant responses towards the elimination of violence against women. It is a regional and national imperative for governments, practitioners, and activists to invest resources strategically, building on the work that has been undertaken before, while attending to both traditional and emerging forms of this scourge.

We in Trinidad and Tobago must not convince ourselves that Violence Against Women is no longer a development priority. Neither must we subscribe to the view that the attainment of economic independence for women translates into the absence of violence. We must be clear and resist this and other discourses that seek to flatten our understanding of the place of our embedded notions
of masculinity and femininity in the reproduction of the high levels of violence within our society. In 2016, Caribbean gender systems, and the perceived advancement of women in various arena, may lull us into the belief that Violence Against Women no longer warrants our attention or activism. This is false, now more than ever, we must continue to rally around this issue. An important aspect of this, is the need to resist the persistent conflating of women's economic independence and personal autonomy.

In the face of economic and other advancement by women globally, one in three women around the world experiences violence in their lifetime, often in the hands of someone they know, love and trust. Additionally, among the women who were victims of homicide globally in 2012, almost half were killed by intimate partners or family members. Nationally, according to the work done by WOMATRA, within the last 365 days 17 women and girls were victims of domestic violence. We must also remember, in Trinidad and Tobago, we remain invested in a legal system wedded to provisions which allow girls to be married at ages that can only contribute to the crippling of their capacity to realize their true potential and compromise their fundamental human rights.

To effectively address Violence Against Women we must reflect, and revisit our systems of closely held gendered beliefs. Why can young girls be married with parental consent before the age of majority fostering an acceptance of adult males forming sexual relationships with under-aged girls? Why is it acceptance that the powerless and vulnerable in our society can be beaten? These are not concerns solely for women, neither is it simply a legal issue. The critical need for the development of a holistic, research-informed response from our various public institutions, to give teeth to our disparate legal remedies relating to Violence Against Women cannot be overstated. The place of health provisioning, social services, the protective services and other governmental actors central to this work needs to be recognized and accounted for. We must acknowledge that these attending institutions have been woefully poor in seeking to establish a relevant and consistent agenda on matters of reducing incidents of violence against women.

It is based on these, and other challenges the Institute for Gender and Development Studies calls for priority to be placed on public policy responses that are not burdened with ahistorical ambitions around newness, instead of capitalising on, and investing in the work that has gone before. Towards this end we urge the government to undertake the following:

• Immediately implement the National Strategic Plan on Gender Based Violence and Sexual Violence
• Bring before the Parliament legislation to end Child Marriage in Trinidad and Tobago
• Develop a plan of action to eliminate silos in our processes of data collection on all dimensions of Violence Against Women.

We at the Institute for Gender and Development Studies consistent with our mission to advance social justice, promote gender-responsive human relations and development in the wider society remain committed to the elimination of all forms of violence against women.