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MEDIA RELEASE

Institute for Gender and Development Studies (IGDS)

Statement on

The Appointment of President Paula-Mae Weekes

The Institute for Gender and Development Studies (IGDS), The University of the West Indies, St Augustine Campus uses this opportunity to congratulate Her Excellency Paula-Mae Weekes on her inauguration as the sixth President of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago and first woman to occupy the post.

The appointment of President Paula-Mae Weekes is a momentous occasion in our country’s history. While President Weekes in her words, ‘defines her role as humble first servant with a mandate to render service with enthusiasm’, her appointment affords us the opportunity to broaden our national discussion on women’s political power. We must renew our commitment to achieving the goal of equal participation of women and men in political and economic decision-making processes as a means of strengthening our democracy. As women globally, assert the need to #PressForProgress locally, as we must continue to #PressForGenderJustice. It is increasingly evident that women’s equal access to positions of power and decision-making goes beyond a demand for simple justice or democracy. Increasingly, women’s presence is becoming a necessary condition for their interests and concerns to be taken into account. The
appointment of President Weekes must propel us to ensure that women occupy offices which shape the equality and equity our society needs.

President Weekes is well qualified for her position and her legacy of excellence in her chosen profession combined with her history of ‘stretching herself beyond her known limits’ in her personal endeavors makes her appointment is an inspiration to every citizen and a cause for celebration. This appointment is a welcomed departure from limited masculine representations of political governance, strength and power. It symbolizes a necessary and timely opportunity for us to give up our traditional expectations of how power is exercised, negotiated and effects change. This appointment characterizes the ways in which Caribbean women have historically challenged gender systems, claimed power and advanced the idea of social justice in a region that is not always open to such ideas.

As we celebrate President Weekes’ presence as our new Head of State, as she reminds us of our ‘interlinked destinies’ and the need for us to ‘mobilize forces and resources to make Trinidad & Tobago a better place’ we at the IGDS stand in solidarity with her. We rally with her call for us to reform our ‘climate of violence’. We also support her appeal to commit ourselves to use of non-violent language as a means of contributing to the reduction of the levels of violence in our nation.

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 congratulate Her Excellency on her achievement and join with the rest of the national community to honour this historic milestone in our country’s development.

Congratulations to Her Excellency Paula-Mae Weekes.