

## *Launch of Joint Regional Spotlight Initiative between the Caribbean Employers' Confederation (CEC) and the Caribbean Congress of Labour (CCL)*



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It is indeed my distinct pleasure to be here at the launch of the Joint Regional project being implemented by the Caribbean Employers' Confederation and the Caribbean Congress of Labour with support from the International Labour Organization (ILO), and UNFPA under the European Union funded Spotlight Initiative.

I am happy that UNFPA is a part of this collaboration because this initiative demonstrates a tangible commitment to addressing gender-based violence (GBV) in the workplace in a meaningful way. It is also an acknowledgement that there is a problem that needs to be fixed and an indication of taking steps in the right direction to address it.

GBV is an enormous impediment to sexual and reproductive health, and is a major human rights issue both globally and here in the Caribbean. In fact, violence against women and girls is one of the most prevalent human rights violations in the world and it knows no social, economic or national boundaries. Survivors of violence can suffer sexual and reproductive health consequences, including forced or unintended pregnancies, unsafe abortions, traumatic fistula, sexually transmitted infections including HIV, and even death - all of which is detrimental to productivity in the workplace.

According to global statistics, one in three women will experience some form of physical or sexual violence in her lifetime. Let's put this into perspective. If you look around in this virtual space, it means that one of every three women here have or will experience some form of physical or sexual violence in her lifetime. This is a very sobering situation. Ladies and gentlemen, the data, numbers and figures may allow this issue to seem like an impersonal one; however, violence against women and girls is not just a statistic to be quoted. It is an issue that has a very real impact on many women and girls that we know. The onus is on us to take action to end this scourge in our society and UNFPA is happy to be collaborating with the CEC, CCL and ILO on this joint initiative that extends to areas in our lives that we sometimes do not even recognize.

As previously mentioned this joint programme is being facilitated under the Spotlight Initiative. Spotlight is a global initiative that seeks to eliminate all forms of violence against women and girls. It pays particular attention to domestic and family violence, sexual and gender-based violence and harmful practices, femicide, trafficking in human beings and sexual and economic (labour) exploitation. As a demonstration of action on the Sustainable Development Goals, the Spotlight Initiative is a significant, concerted and comprehensive investment in gender equality and ending violence to make a transformative difference in the lives of women and girls.

Women worldwide and in the Caribbean are disproportionately affected by GBV including sexual harassment and assault in the workplace. Millions of female employees are forced to work in an intimidating, hostile or humiliating environment, and experience various unwelcome forms of sexual conduct. Women are asked for sexual favours, exposed to inappropriate jokes, innuendos and comments, and unwanted physical contact.

In the Caribbean, the focus of the Spotlight Initiative is on family violence, given its prevalence in the Region. In fact, only last Saturday there was a report in the Trinidad and Tobago media in which a teacher killed his wife in a murder suicide. And this is only one of many similar cases across the Caribbean.

This type of family violence is indeed very tragic and it also has a significant impact on productivity in the workplace and by extension negatively affects regional economies. The economic consequences of violence are felt by the survivors and also by the State. The individual experiencing violence has to consider the costs of medical treatment and legal services. She may have had to take time off from work and have lost earnings.

The State has to consider the costs of health care for survivors of violence, costs associated with legal services, policing, caring for displaced children and even the cost of incarceration, all of which are substantial especially for Small Island Developing States (SIDS).

This joint project is expected to serve as a key avenue to deliver prevention and response support, while also addressing issues of sexual harassment and abuse in the workplace. The project will support the provision of, and access to information on Sexual and Reproductive Health in the workplace. We expect to see an increase in the number of NEOs that promote access to and information on Sexual and Reproductive Health. The baseline will be established from data collected during the first activity of the project.

The project will also support existing efforts in the prevention of gender-based violence and the promotion of Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment in the workplace. Participants will be exposed to concepts, policies and practices for addressing gender-based violence in the workplace (as well as in private settings) through easy-to-understand and relatable text and video. We expect this to lead to an increase in the knowledge of young, vulnerable and marginalised women and male allies about national policies on sexual and reproductive health and rights as well as broaden their understanding of gender equality.

This joint initiative will also provide the knowledge foundation for NEOs and employers to actively seek information and opportunities to address Population Dynamics. This refers to how populations change in size and structure over time. Important factors in population dynamics include rates of reproduction, death and migration. From this it is expected that more NEOs will promote national policies and international development agendas on sexual and reproductive rights HIV and gender equality.

To achieve these results, the initiative will seek to educate both national employers and national labour representative organizations on the link between VAWG including family violence and the world of work during a Joint Regional Virtual Conference. This conference will also serve as a means of gathering baseline data that will support the development of joint policy positions that will act as the foundation for the development of a communication campaign and will also influence subsequent actions.

Activities from this joint initiative will also help to raise awareness and promote positive behaviour modification among the key target audiences through a communication campaign which will be executed across the fifteen participating member states over a two-month period.

The campaign will be designed to reach audiences via both traditional and social media.

A joint policy on gender-based violence that we hope will become a standard for behaviour in the regional workplace will also be produced. One of the aims of that policy will be to raise the awareness of employer and labour representative organisations and highlight the link between violence against women and girls, and the world of work. This heightened awareness is expected to inform a joint regional workplace policy on gender-based violence and protection from sexual exploitation and abuse.

Another similar project was recently implemented in Trinidad and Tobago by our implementing partners, the National Trade Union Centre and the Employers Consultative Association, which resulted in a joint GBV workplace policy which we intend to launch later this year. Encouraged by the success of that national project, we have embarked on this regional effort with the knowledge that it is possible for labour and management to not only come together for a common good, but to do so in an open and transparent manner and lead the charge in addressing gender-based violence in a decisive manner.

The United Nations Population Fund is committed to supporting efforts of this nature; to gain commitments for corporate action against all forms of genderbased violence and we are grateful for all our donors, stakeholders and partners who continue to give us their unwavering support. UNFPA remains committed to continuing to collaborate with you in order to execute our mandate of delivering a world where every pregnancy is wanted, every childbirth is safe and every young person's potential is fulfilled.

I thank the leadership of the Caribbean Employers' Confederation and the Caribbean Congress of Labour and of course our supporting UN Agency the International Labour Organization for accepting the challenge to join us as we pursue this key transformative result of zero gender based violence and harmful practices particularly in the workplace. The impact on our productivity and economies is undeniable and we must continue to work together and support each other in this cause.

Thank you.