

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



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Let me start by saying that the CCL and the CEC have a long history of productive collaboration so the decision to collaborate on an issue as important as this was an easy one to make. This partnership, under the regional Spotlight Initiative will develop joint regional policies and advocacy strategies for the eradication of Gender-Based Violence (GBV) at the workplace.

When we speak of Gender Based Violence in the world of work, we are referring to a range of unacceptable behaviours and practices, or threats thereof, whether a single or repeated occurrence, that aim at, result in, or are likely to result in physical, psychological, sexual or economic harm, and includes gender-based violence and harassment.

If the trade union movement is to improve operations in the interest of its members, then its representation must extend beyond securing decent wages and other traditional benefits. The leadership of the movement must demonstrate by example its commitment to eradicating all forms of violence against women and girls.

It is no secret, that the leadership of the movement at this time is predominantly male and that is why it is even more important for us as men in leadership to make our position clear as allies of the women at our workplaces and by extension the wider society.

We as a movement must concern ourselves with the wellbeing of all workers, both unionised and non-unionised. With the membership density of only around 20% on average, we must have the full support of employers if we are to create the safe working environments that are necessary for our women. This should not be a contentious issue between employers and unions. The task ahead is not an easy one as the line between family life and the workplace is often blurred and this has become even more of an issue because of COVID 19. We are convinced that this Spotlight Initiative focusing at the workplace, will also contribute to the fight against GBV in the wider community.

According to Cruz and Klinger, from a business case perspective, gender-based violence in the workplace causes pain and suffering which can result in victims' absence from work or leaving their job, ill-health, disability or even death. It can impact on work performance, motivation, staff loyalty, the quality of work and timely production, as well as on the working environment.<sup>1</sup>

Research from the Better Work impact assessment in Viet Nam demonstrated that profitability of garment factories increases as working conditions improved.<sup>2</sup> Better Work found that in factories which were more compliant with labour standards and had better working conditions, workers were more productive than their counterparts in otherwise similar factories.

There is a glaring inconsistency between legislative commitments, policies and action. As the most recent National Women's Health Survey for Trinidad and Tobago reported, "...the inefficacy of law enforcement and lack of appropriate trained police officers continue to be major stumbling blocks for survivors of GBV. Furthermore, the judicial system is plagued with inordinate delays, high costs associated with attorney and appeal fees, inconsistent bail matters, and witness reliability."<sup>3</sup>

Notwithstanding what is a daunting reality, the commitment we make here today signals an opportunity for our places of work to take the lead in this important struggle. We are in full control to ensure that our efforts are not in vain. In the months ahead we must put our shoulders to the wheel and do the hard work to create the necessary framework to safeguard our places of work against all forms of Gender Base Violence. We in the CCL are fully committed to this effort and we are here to be counted as an ally in this cause.

Finally, we take this opportunity to publicly thank Dr Andre Vincent Henry and his dedicated team at the Cipriani College of Labour and Cooperative Studies (CCLCS) for the efforts which they have put in so far and which I have no doubt will be sustained throughout the life of the project.

I thank you and I look forward to any questions at the appropriate time.

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<sup>1</sup> Cruz & Klinger, 2011.

<sup>2</sup> Brown et al., 2014; Better Work, 2015

<sup>3</sup> Pemberton, Cecile and Joseph, Joel. "National Women's Health Survey for Trinidad and Tobago. Final Report." Inter-American Development Bank, 2017,