

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



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I want to start by endorsing my colleague – Andre Lewis, President of the CCL has just said: A safe workplace is a human right. I believe that we can easily agree that making workplaces across the Caribbean comfortable for our women and girls has to be a high priority. We have a long and sordid history in this area and it's a timely endeavour and we will be working tirelessly and earnestly to fix. So, I heartily endorse Andre's comments.

The Caribbean Employers' Confederation is genuinely pleased to have the opportunity to be one of the regional organizations selected to implement the Spotlight Initiative. I take this opportunity to thank the United Nations Population Fund for this opportunity. The Confederation is equally enthused to have the opportunity to jointly deliver this initiative with the Caribbean Congress of Labour and with the support of the ILO Decent Work Team and Office for the Caribbean. We are acutely aware that this Initiative provides an opportunity for Employers and Labour to play an important role in eradicating violence against women and girls. We are committed to being leaders and active campaigners for this cause.

You see, the vision of the Caribbean Employers' Confederation - is "To be the main advocate for the resolution of labour market issues for Caribbean Employers and to be the coordinating body for the development of the social responsibility of enterprises in the Caribbean territories."

Advocacy and activism aren't new to us. We have upheld this vision for the past 60 (sixty) plus years and continue to respond to evolving needs. This is why the development of Joint Regional Policies and Advocacy Strategies to eradicate Gender-Based violence at the workplace is a matter that we fully endorse.

Gender-Based Violence affects Employers because we have seen it impact morale negatively, reduce productivity and is at the base of poor performance. Greater than that, Gender-Based Violence is quite simply, an infringement on an individual's basic human rights.

I will acknowledge, that all of us here today do not have all the answers, but a collaborative approach, like this, can certainly make real and tangible improvements to the lives of women and girls. And by extension men and boys also, because it is not just women and girls who can be liberated from the stain of violence. It liberates men also, because we are all fathers, brothers, and sons and in liberating some, we are liberating all.

Ladies and Gentlemen, the drivers of the Spotlight Initiative have directed their focus towards a workplace approach. There isn't a better time for us to bring this issue to the forefront. This project is being launched in a period where the lockdown measures of COVID-19 have painfully revealed the violence and vulnerability that many of our Women and Girls experience.

The circumstances of having to work from home, or not having a job to go to over the past two years have left untold numbers of women and girls exposed to violent partners or relatives. The violence that they experience has been physical, sexual, emotional, economic or psychological. In many cases, they have experienced a combination of some or all of the above. For months, these survivors would have been on the receiving end of these abhorrent acts without the reprieve of school or work. We just cannot allow this to continue.

But, ladies and gentlemen, the pendulum swings in both directions. Or to paraphrase Martin Luther King, "the arc of the universe tends toward justice." And in this instance, progress may be slow but it will have to be steady with our guidance and leadership.

These same remote working options also mean that an organisation like the CEC can engage its membership – which spans 14 (fourteen) member states in the Caribbean and thousands of employers – to create sound policies to expand the reach of support to respond to and prevent family violence. Again, the option to work from anywhere means that we can effectively collaborate with our social partners like the Caribbean Congress of Labour (CCL). The CCL has been a long-standing partner to the Caribbean Employers' Confederation. We will continue to maintain positive relations with the Labour Movement as we see ourselves as social partners working for the sustained growth and development of our respective members. This sustained growth and development cannot happen if our membership is experiencing violence.

At this point, I must commend the UNFPA for the work that they have done through this initiative. Since the commencement of this regional programme, you have made the Spotlight Initiative a household name across our region. I am genuinely pleased that you have seen the value of employing a Workplace approach as an added dimension to achieving your goal of eliminating violence against women and girls.

As we move forward, for this project, I'd like to underscore the CEC's endorsement and willingness to working with the Caribbean Congress of Labour to co-operate across the region for the implementation of a policies supported by action.

The underlying base of gender-based violence is rooted in long-standing historical, cultural practices. The hardest change is the change of mindsets in a society that has been male-dominated for centuries. We, as men, we have the responsibility to change the minds of our colleagues and the younger men to move away from a lot of cultural and historical issues. It is necessary. We will lead by example and we will lead as mentors and we have a commitment to making this happen.

Thank you very much for the opportunity.