



THE UNIVERSITY OF THE WEST INDIES

MONA, JAMAICA, WEST INDIES

INSTITUTE FOR GENDER AND DEVELOPMENT STUDIES

REGIONAL COORDINATING OFFICE

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Message for International Women's Day 2021

“Women in leadership: Achieving an equal future in a COVID-19 world.”

The Caribbean has produced some exceptional women in leadership and continues to do so during this period of crisis. Women such as President of Trinidad and Tobago, Paula-Mae Weekes; Prime Minister of Barbados, Mia Mottley; Prime Minister of Aruba and the Honorable Evelyn Wever-Crowes have guided efforts that have helped to keep COVID-19 infection and death rates in the Caribbean among the lowest in the Americas region.

This year, International Women's Day, March 8, salutes strong women leaders through its theme ***“Women in leadership: Achieving an equal future in a COVID-19 world”*** to honour the efforts by women and girls around the world in shaping a more equal future and recovery from the pandemic. Now more than ever in this period of uncertainty, economic disparity and rising crime rates, we need leadership that manifests feminist principles of inclusivity, diversity and community rejuvenation.

Sadly, since the start of the pandemic, the Caribbean has had one of the highest rates of increase in domestic violence and violence against women. Nearly half of all women surveyed in five Caribbean countries in 2020, reported facing at least one form of domestic violence, either physical, sexual, economic, or emotional. This data reflects a society in crisis, which we must work to change.

The Institute for Gender & Development Studies (IGDS) of The University of the West Indies is working to reverse this trend through the teaching, research and training we conduct on gender awareness and equity. As part of our mandate and responsibility to help end gender-based violence

(GBV) and violence against women and girls (VAWG), The RCO received a grant from the EU-UN Spotlight Initiative to work to reform local legislation intended to reduce VAWG and family violence in Jamaica. We understand that having laws that address our modern reality is the first major step in bringing awareness to eradicating GBV. In addition, the IGDS, Mona Unit was recently invited by the Mona Social Services to partner on two projects to empower women from the August Town community, who have been affected by GBV through capacity building and resilience workshops. Our units at the Cave Hill and St Augustine campuses are also doing work in this area.

Every reported incident of femicide and indeed, violence against women and girls in our region is an indictment on us all. The beheading of Kerry-Ann Hunter in Jamaica, murders of UWI, St. Augustine students Andrea Bharatt and Suzette Sylvester in Trinidad and Tobago, and the disappearance of UWI Mona student Jasmine Dean, emphasises the need to educate our citizenry on GBV and eliminate the violence that threatens to destroy our beloved islands. We call on all our citizens to take responsibility for creating and actively maintaining safe spaces for our women. Men must also educate and check each other to guarantee that all our communities are safe for all, especially our children.

Women leaders through the region must join with those globally to find practical, fast and lasting solutions to the plight of women in the Caribbean. Education is crucial and will increase women's ability to have power and influence over their own lives. We at the IGDS champion the cause of quality education, good health, fair and effective laws, and reproductive rights that will lead to gender equality and peace and inclusivity for sustainable development throughout Caribbean.

Closing gender gaps in entrepreneurship is one very important means of reducing poverty and spurring growth and innovation. The IGDS is working to ensure that each woman and girl can reach her full potential. The women leaders that have gone before, and those who are coming to maturity in the midst of this crisis, will need the commitment of each of us to actively participate to ensure Generation and Gender Equality.

#IWD2021#InternationalWomensDay#SpotlightEndViolence#IGDSRCO