



GOVERNMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO
MINISTRY OF TRADE AND INDUSTRY

International Women's Day 2016 – 'Pledge for Parity'

**ASSOCIATION OF FEMALE EXECUTIVES
OF TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO'S (AFETT)
'WOMEN OF INFLUENCE'
AWARDS AND LUNCHEON**

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R E M A R K S

**SENATOR THE HONOURABLE PAULA GOPEE-SCOON
MINISTER OF TRADE AND INDUSTRY**

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11 MARCH 2016
HYATT REGENCY HOTEL

Good morning to you all!

It is a personal pleasure for me to join the female executives at another of your events ... having attended and spoke at your Breakfast Meeting in October last year.

I wish to begin by wishing each one of you present this morning 'a Happy International Women's Day!' As a matter of fact, we should be celebrated all year round for who we are and what we bring to the table.

We in Government attach significant importance to women and gender affairs thus it is no surprise that this Unit sits within the Office of the Prime Minister. Its mandate is to spearhead the national portfolio on gender equality and empowerment.

It is well established that trade creates jobs for women. Researchers have also found a positive and significant relationship between exports and women's share of employment.

Thus, I am pleased to be at the helm of the Ministry with the mandate to increase non-energy exports which will in turn contribute positively to the employment and empowerment of women.

WOMEN OF SUBSTANCE

As women of substance, we make great leaders; won't you agree?

Leadership is about who you ARE and what you DO. Effective leaders have a clear sense of themselves – their strengths, values, and leadership beliefs that guide them and create a sense of integrity – which impacts their decisions, relationships, overall results. They also understand their impact on those around them, and how to leverage this impact to gain commitment and build alliances.

There is no question that women have many leadership strengths that are useful in today's economy.

Women are really good at:

- coping well with the complexities of modern business;
- managing the interpersonal realities that build creative, collaborative and productive teams; and
- taking considered risk and investing wisely to achieve a broad range of returns.
- The question therefore is what can WE do?

MENTORSHIP AND SERVICE IN PUBLIC OFFICE

At this time when there is a call for 'global gender parity', not enough of us have answered the call to service in public life, in its various platforms and to mentor the young and those in less fortunate circumstances who have not been afforded the opportunities given to us.

Every child has the potential to succeed at school if given the proper encouragement, motivation, and techniques to work with.

In this regard, I applaud AFETT's REACH Mentorship Programme, and you female executives who invest your time in participating in this activity.

Moreso, recognizing and encouraging our young female University students with the bursaries issued through your Women's Development Fund is a laudable initiative.

The supportive, healthy relationships formed during mentoring are both immediate and long-term and contribute to a host of benefits; including:

- Healthier relationships and lifestyle choices
- Better attitude about school
- Enhanced self-esteem and self-confidence
- Improved behavior, both at home and at school
- Stronger relationships with parents, teachers, and peers
- Improved interpersonal skills
- Decreased likelihood of initiating drug and alcohol use
- Decreased violent behavior

A 1995 study of the Big Brothers Big Sisters (BBBS) program found that mentored youth earned higher grades than a similar group of young people who were not so favoured. Further, some twelve years later, the 2007 study of the same Big Brothers Big Sisters program found youth in school-based mentoring programs turned in higher quality class work, did better academically, and completed more of their assignments than their peers who did not have mentors.

According to the United Nation's 'Millennium Development Goals Report 2014' on Trinidad and Tobago, as a country, we are 'resolute in our promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of women as evidenced by the ratification of the Convention on All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in 1990'.

While the World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Index 2015 ranks Trinidad and Tobago as 46th of 145 countries.

There is however still much work to be done. For instance, while many countries continue to invest in education – including ours – parity in the workplace still does not exist.

We know that female enrollment at UWI exceeded that of male enrolment in six out of seven faculties for the academic years of 2005/6 to 2009/10. What is worrying though is that data reflected a gender bias with men having a higher labour force participation rate which averaged 73% over a five year period of 2009 – 2012.

While statistics bode well and it has improved, still not enough women have come forward to **serve**.

Thus, I call on you professional and experienced women to get involved in public life to **serve** your country.

We can do so in our communities, through our community groups, serve on Boards, get active with NGOs and sporting groups, get involved in the schools, get involved in politics.

Mother Teresa, an international bastion in service, said "I can do things you cannot, you can do things I cannot; **together** we can do great things."

We need more women leaders in all spheres of management and governing!

GENDER EQUALITY

While I appreciate that opportunities, incentives and compensation are not always distributed equally or equitably, it is the responsibility of government and groups such as AFETT to ensure that these inequalities are rectified.

I wish to congratulate our Award Recipients – our Social Entrepreneur; our Business Pioneer, and our National Spirit Awardee.

CONCLUSION

Mentoring and serving are active ways of ensuring parity, diminishing the unjust circumstances brought against our mothers and daughters. It certainly adds more value than just raising a voice.

Now is an opportune time in our nation's development, as the Government seeks to re-build the economy and get us back on a path of sustainable development and growth of our people, including our women.

In closing, I extend my appreciation to Ms. Joseph and the other members of AFETT for inviting me here today.

And my parting words to you young ladies are words that Oprah Winfrey lives by ... words of Mahatma Gandhi who said *'become the change you want to see in the world'*.

Let us do our part.

I thank you.