



**MINISTRY OF LABOUR AND SMALL ENTERPRISE DEVELOPMENT**

REMARKS BY

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AT

THE

**MEDIA LAUNCH:**

**NATIONAL WORKPLACE POLICY ON HIV AND AIDS**

**AWARENESS CAMPAIGN**

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LEVEL 6 CONFERENCE ROOM, TOWER C, IWC

Good morning and welcome to the Ministry of Labour and Small Enterprise Development's launch of the National Workplace Policy on HIV and AIDS Awareness Campaign.

In 2017, the Ministry launched the National Workplace Policy on HIV and AIDS. This policy provides the framework for an effective workplace response to HIV and AIDS in Trinidad and Tobago, enabling persons living with HIV and those affected by the Virus to be productive in their places of employment.

In Trinidad and Tobago, 44.4% of new HIV cases fall within the 25 to 44 year age group; without doubt a critical group for the national workforce. With this in mind, the Ministry's HIV Workplace Advocacy Unit continues to educate and sensitize employers that HIV and AIDS is a recognised workplace issue and that there is an urgent need to implement HIV and AIDS policies and programmes at their respective institutions.

Yes, the development and implementation of policies will require careful consideration and consultation with all levels of staff. Certainly,

it will require dedicated effort and time invested, but with the assistance of our Advocacy Officers who provide technical support in both the development and implementation of each organisation's Workplace Policy on HIV and AIDS, I guarantee, the benefits derived from the introduction of these policies will dispel any reservations about what it would take to reach this milestone.

As our country joins the global community in moving towards “**Getting to Zero**”, we at the Ministry of Labour and Small Enterprise Development strongly advocate for employers and employees to take active measures towards fulfilling their obligation of upholding national and international standards for the management of HIV and AIDS.

Here at home, the National Workplace Policy is in alignment with Goals One, Four and Five within Theme One of the Government's National Development Strategy, 'Vision 2030.' These goals incorporate opportunities for decent work, improved access to HIV prevention and encouragement of employers to adopt workplace policies that address protecting the rights, health and wellbeing of staff.

Further afield, as a Member Country of the United Nations, this initiative supports the Sustainable Development Goal 8, which aims to promote “sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all”. In addition to this, the Policy is also aligned with the 2010 ILO Recommendation - HIV and AIDS and the World of Work No. 200 and the ILO Code of Practice on HIV and AIDS and the World of Work.

I wish to remind all employers that workplace policies on HIV and AIDS are beneficial to them and demonstrate their organisations’ commitments to Corporate Social Responsibility. Beyond fulfilling a responsibility to society, each employer that comes on board is ensuring that his or her company is taking a proactive role in safeguarding its most important resource, its human resource. When, as employers, we educate management and staff, we can negate financial and legal issues and reduce operational downtime.

I would like to take this opportunity to reinforce important provisions that **MUST** be included in any Workplace HIV policy. We must

guarantee that workers are not discriminated against based on their actual or even perceived HIV status. Employers should never breach the confidentiality of workers when information is disclosed to them, neither must they force their employees to share their HIV status. The workplace policies that are developed must also protect the rights of current and potential workers with respect to screening. No worker is to be tested for HIV when being considered for employment or a promotion; and being infected with HIV **cannot** be the grounds for dismissal.

The workplace must be a space where our labour force is encouraged to access care and support if they are either infected or affected by HIV. While we would want to ensure that policies are in place, we also encourage employers to implement programmes that target HIV prevention and education as we seek to foster healthy, safe and supportive work environments.

At the Ministry of Labour and Small Enterprise Development we have led the charge in this initiative, having developed and implemented our

very own workplace policy on HIV and AIDS. Our Policy makes provisions for protecting employees living with or affected by HIV, through dispelling the associated stigma and discrimination as we pursue our decent work agenda.

Since the launch of the policy in 2017, the Ministry has also published the National Workplace Policy on HIV and AIDS in braille and our HIV Workplace Advocacy Unit has been making direct engagement with key stakeholders across the nation.

As a forerunner in these efforts, we stand ready as a resource for advice and guidance to organisations as our advocacy for workplace policies on a national scale begins to bear fruit. Through this stage of the public awareness campaign we want to ensure that both employers and employees are not only aware of the need for workplace policies but actively engage in contributing to these policies.

In the coming weeks there will be a social media series educating both employers and employees alike. There will also be the installation of a prominent billboard at City Gate, the main transportation hub in Port of

Spain and the publication of a series of media advertisements. I take this opportunity to urge all employers across all sectors and industries in Trinidad and Tobago to come on board with this most recent initiative by the Ministry of Labour and Small Enterprise Development's HIV Workplace Advocacy Unit.

I would like to thank all the dedicated staff at the Ministry who have been involved in the campaign thus far and assure the public that there is much more to look forward to coming out of the Ministry of Labour and Small Enterprise Development. At the Ministry, we continue to champion the rights of both workers and employers and this is but one of our many initiatives to improve the labour landscape in Trinidad and Tobago.

Ladies and gentlemen, I thank you.