

Friday, January 21, 2022


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Minister of Culture, Gender, Entertainment and Sport, Olivia Grange (seated left), signs a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU), which will see the Government partnering with the UWI Open Campus to provide training and research in the area of sexual harassment over the next three years. Pro Vice-Chancellor and Principal, University of the West Indies (UWI) Open Campus, Dr Luz Longworth (seated, right), also signed the document. Observing (from left) are: Permanent Secretary in the Culture Ministry, Denzil Thorpe; Senior Director, Gender Affairs, Bureau of Gender Affairs, Sharon Coburn Robinson; University Director of the Institute for Gender and Development Studies, UWI Mona Campus, Professor Opal Palmer Adisa; and Head, Hugh Shearer Labour Studies Institute, UWI Open Campus, Danny Roberts. (Photo: JIS)

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Gov't partners with UWI for research on sexual harassment

Saturday, February 29, 2020

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KINGSTON, Jamaica— The Government will be partnering with the University of the West Indies (UWI), Open Campus, over the next three years, to provide training and research on sexual harassment in the workplace and related matters.

Specifically, the collaboration is between the Bureau of Gender Affairs (BGA), under the Ministry of Culture, Gender, Entertainment and Sport, and the Hugh Shearer Labour Studies Institute.

The partnership will see the Institute providing special training through seminars, lectures and workshops coordinated by the Bureau. Training will cover the areas of sexual harassment, workplace bullying, emotional intelligence, labour laws, grievance handling and good industrial relations practices.

Both parties signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to formalise this partnership during a ceremony at the UWI Regional Headquarters on February 28.

The emphasis will be on providing support to combat the stigma of sexual harassment through research and the areas of training identified. It is expected to contribute to an appreciation among public sector workers of the importance of promoting an environment free of sexual harassment, in which all categories of workers are treated with respect and dignity.

Minister of Culture, Gender, Entertainment and Sport, Olivia Grange, who participated in the signing, said the MoU has been entered into at an opportune time, in light of “the increasing incidents of violence and abuse of our women.”

She noted that through the MoU, the intent is to explore the impact on productivity of sexual harassment and the implications for workplace competitiveness.

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“We would also want to examine the link between sexual harassment and the society; the existing and potential costs in legal related terms; the cost associated with the re-orientation of victims back into the society; the loss of skilled workers; and the psychologically-related costs that are often associated with these abuses,” she said.

She pointed out that the Ministry's collaboration with the UWI Open Campus will assist in defining the scope of the research agenda, “and to better prepare us for the challenges in combatting sexual harassment in the workplace.”

Grange said an important benefit from this collaboration is in the area of training, which will focus on prevention of sexual harassment.

“In that regard, we must create a vision of a new Jamaica where respect, tolerance and dignity and a high self-esteem are seen as the norm for workplace behaviours, and that organisations take the time and make the effort to offer mentorship and specialised training for persons who have been socialised to show disrespect for women,” she said.

In her remarks, Pro Vice-Chancellor and Principal, UWI Open Campus, Dr Luz Longworth, said through ongoing training, the Institute has been working to address the issue of sexual harassment.

“Over the last year or two, the Institute has been at the forefront of training and sensitisation in over 30 organisations in Jamaica and the region in both the public and private sectors and they have dealt with not only sexual harassment, but also workplace bullying, and in guiding policy development and implementation in the workforce,” she said.

Dr Longworth argued that knowing what is happening in the workplace is important to ensuring the improvement of labour relations in Jamaica.

She noted that Jamaica's “own culturally nuanced approach to gender interactions in the workplace needs to be explored. They need to be scrutinised and most importantly, they need to be researched in order to guide our policy development.”

“We know that there is a dearth of that type of research in the Caribbean which will guide policy and practice in some of our major industries,” she said.

She noted for instance, that research needs to be done on the local hospitality industry, pointing to research from the United Kingdom (UK) which revealed that nine out of every 10 workers in the sector have experienced some form of sexual harassment.

Dr Longworth also pointed to the need to explore the situation of domestic workers as

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