PRESS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE - UPDATE 1

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The Negative Impact of COVID-19 on Women

Port of Spain, Trinidad and Tobago – 25 March, 2020 (TTO): The Coronavirus (COVID-19) was declared a global pandemic by the World Health Organisation and the precautions taken to mitigate the transmission of this virus and lessen its impact will affect women disproportionately from a social and economic standpoint.

In a statement last week, Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, Executive Director UN Women urged us to “be each other’s keeper” and “take a responsible approach as we all work together mitigate against the impact of COVID-19.” It is necessary to heed this call and stand together as sisters as globally we:

1. **Make up roughly 70% of the workers in the health care and social work system.** Women more often earn less than their male counterparts and are not properly resourced with the necessary protective equipment needed to protect themselves and carry out their jobs to the best of their ability.

2. **Occupy 58% of the jobs in the informal sector** and are more likely to be casual/temporary non unionized workers, sole traders and entrepreneurs. The temporary yet indefinite closure businesses could mean that women labourers who rely on their salaries as the single means to take care of their households now limited in addressing some of the most basic needs of their families.

3. **Are 3 times more likely to engage in unpaid care work** than men. With the closure of schools, the increased need for childcare will be absorbed by women in addition to caring for the elderly, infirm and those infected with COVID-19. **Sadly, because employment is commonly defined only in terms of economic work women are unable to receive unemployment grants.** This is also a clear gender bias as where women bear the main responsibility for the unpaid services within their own household.

4. **Rely on the public health sector for preventative care.** There is evidence that women’s health needs are underprioritized during times of crisis, this includes pre- and post-natal health care, sexual and reproductive health services and provisions for clinical management of sexual assault.

5. **Are at increased risk of intimate partner violence** and other forms of gender-based violence especially during times of crisis. As the movement of people becomes

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more restrictive and limited less and less persons will have access to mental, social and emotional support.

We stand with UN Women in promoting the following recommendations, placing women’s needs and leadership at the heart of effective response to COVID-19:

1. Ensure availability of sex-disaggregated data, including on differing rates of infection, differential economic impacts, differential care burden, and incidence of domestic violence and sexual abuse
2. Embed gender dimensions and gender experts within response plans and budget resources to build gender expertise into response teams
3. Provide priority support to women on the frontlines of the response, for instance, by improving access to women-friendly personal protective equipment and menstrual hygiene products for healthcare workers and caregivers, and flexible working arrangements for women with a burden of care
4. Ensure equal voice for women in decision making in the response and long-term impact planning
5. Ensure that public health messages properly target women including those most marginalized
6. Develop mitigation strategies that specifically target the economic impact of the outbreak on women and build women’s resilience
7. Protect essential health services for women and girls, including sexual and reproductive health services and


Be socially responsible, stay safe and practice protective health measures.

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Caribbean Women in Leadership (CIWIL) is a non-political, multi-partisan, and independent NGO established to monitor, strengthen and increase women’s political participation and leadership in the region through advocacy, networking, research and capacity building initiatives. The Regional Secretariat of CIWIL is headquartered in Port of Spain, Trinidad and Tobago. For more information, visit us at www.ciwil.org or email us at info@ciwil.org.

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