Remarks delivered at the
Launch of the UWI Gender Policy
Regional Headquarters
May 22nd 2018

Sixty years ago in Brussels, Philip Sherlock, Vice Principal of the University College of the West Indies, represented the University College and the region at the 31st annual conference of the International Institute of Differing Civilizations. The title of the conference was, “Women’s Role in the Development of Tropical and Sub Tropical Countries.” Graduate students, please note this international conference on women was held 17 years before the UN Conference in Mexico City in 1975. Now, in spite of the fact that Sir Philip’s paper was entitled, “The Federation of the West Indies”, I was very pleased that the very second sentence of this paper stated, “The feminist movement presupposes popular democracy and an expanding industrial economy with a high degree of popular education” (Sherlock 1958: 355). In 1958, in the mid twentieth century, Sir Philip correctly identified the vitality of a feminist movement as resting on a foundation of expanding democratic participation,
economic growth and broadening access to education. In 2018, in the second decade of the 21st century, the legacy continues. The University of the West Indies and the Institute of Gender and Development Studies have embedded within our Caribbean academy a commitment to feminist scholarship, democratic governance and the promotion of a digitized economy. This is happening within the context of the 2017-2022, Triple A strategic plan. A plan that is dedicated to expanding access to education, seeking greater alignment between our academic mandate and the imperatives of new economic realities, and doing so while insisting that our academy becomes more agile in how we deal with internal and external threats posed by misalignments, inequities and ingrained prejudices affecting our staff and students and civil society.

The launch of the UWI Gender Policy accentuates The University’s resolve to promote gender justice as one of its five core values, with the other four being integrity, excellence, diversity and student centredness. With the launch of the Gender Policy, the IGDS accepts the charge delivered by Professors Joycelin Massiah, Elsa Leo-Rhynie and Barbara Bailey in their concluding remarks of their book, *The UWI Gender Journey: Recollections and Reflections*. These pioneering
scholars, founding mothers and mountaintop dwellers proclaim, “In terms of the gender journey at the UWI, the path winds onward. The IGDS must remain totally committed to its mission of ensuring that the institution is a space renowned not only for its academic excellence but also for its passion for the promotion of gender justice and social equity, both within and beyond the academy. This has been the vision for thirty years. Academics and activists must continue, through collaborative action, to direct their energies to making the extraordinary vision of the pioneers a reality and to giving substance to renewed vision and as yet uncharted paths” (Massiah, Leo-Rhynie and Bailey 2016: 305).

This gender policy moves the UWI closer to realizing the ideal of a gender just community. Under the leadership of former regional Director, Professor Verene Shepherd and her team of IGDS colleagues, the gender policy declares it is intended to guide the UWI’s actions to mainstream gender across institutions by ensuring gender equity in all the university’s practices, policies, procedures and programmes” (UWI Gender Policy 2018: 7). As I read this, I must confess I miss the joy of active teaching and research. I want to emphasize that the popular conflation of gender and women must be
avoided because the concept of gender is not synonymous nor interchangeable with the concept of woman (Barriteau 1994: 34). The concept of gender denotes two broad areas for analysis. First a system of social relations in which both women and men are socially constituted with differing, often asymmetrical outcomes, and second, methodologies of analysis that can be used to reveal particular insights into conditions affecting the social constituted beings, women or men or other genders.

It is critical that the UWI and the IGDS grasp this theoretical and analytical distinction in promoting gender justice because although representing a minority of cases, there can be conditions of gender injustice for men and boys, even though, given our resiliently patriarchal societies the majority of conditions of gender injustice is experienced by women.

Of the Strategies the UWI gender policy seeks to advance to overturn existing and potential disparities in relations of gender, I am particularly interested in reversing practices that deny members of the UWI community access to gender justice. If the Gender Policy accepts that gender justice represents, “a societal ideal in which there are no asymmetries of access to or allocation of status power
and material resources in a society” (Barretteau 2003). Then the University must introduce a number of measures to dismantle adverse practices of power that affect students and staff. In particular, I am speaking of inequalities of power as it relates to the existence of sexual harassment and sexual relations. Colleagues, we cannot have a gender policy that is dedicated to promoting gender justice and not act decisively to prevent sexual exploitation and sexual harassment of students and vulnerable members of the UWI community. The Gender Policy by its existence, signals that the University is willing to move beyond beautiful words and noble ideals into action. With this gender policy, the University has to insist that sexual harassment, predatory sexual behaviour, and a range of sexually coercive actions are not used to intimidate students or colleagues.

Even as we expand access, promote democratic governance, enshrine values of student centredness and practise inclusivity and diversity, we must ensure that within our community, gender justice for all means freedom from sexual harassment and exploitation for all.

Chair, I am also very pleased that the Gender Policy boldly proclaims that the UWI is an activist University. As an activist university, we cannot only practise traditional political activism. As an activist
university we must embrace the activism that challenges the gender injustices coagulating in misogyny and abuse of power whether political or institutional. I congratulate my colleagues in the IGDS for creating this critical policy document and I pledge the support of the Cave Hill Campus towards its full implementation. Ladies and gentlemen, towards a more perfect University.

I thank you

Eudine Barriteau

May 18, 2018