MINISTRY OF NATIONAL SECURITY

RESPONSE TO THE JOINT SELECT COMMITTEE ON HUMAN RIGHTS, EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY

RE: AN INQUIRY INTO THE STATUS OF THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE 2015 REPORT OF THE JOINT SELECT COMMITTEE ON HUMAN RIGHTS, DIVERSITY, THE ENVIRONMENT AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT ON THE EXAMINATION OF PROGRAMMES AND SERVICES WHICH PROVIDE SUPPORT TO VICTIMS OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

HUMAN RESOURCES

4.3. During the period 2015 to 2017, the VWSU, TTPS staff complement increased from fourteen (14) to seventeen (17) VWSOs and persons attached to the Community Policing Unit increased from ninety-one (91) to one hundred and two (102) persons. However, the Committee was informed that three (3) additional VWSOs are required to satisfy the full complement of staff for the VWSU and the VWSU, Tobago Division was awaiting recruitment of staff.

Response

It is hereby noted that while the Committee was informed that three (3) additional officers are required to satisfy the full complement of staff for the Victim & Witness Support Unit (VWSU), interviews have been completed and the TTPS is in the final stages of recruiting six (6) additional Victim and Witness Support Officers (VWSOs) to meet the Cabinet approved staffing complement of twenty (20) VWSOs. Successful candidates will be assigned to staff the Tobago VWSU as well as VWSUs in Trinidad.

INFRASTRUCTURE

4.6. During the period 2015 to 2017, VWSU offices increased from nine (9) to thirteen (13). However, the Committee noted there was an absence of a standard response time for domestic violence reports and all reports are expected to be dealt with promptly within twenty-four (24) hours of receipt of a report.

Response

While there has been an increase in VWSU offices during the period 2015 to 2017 from nine (9) to thirteen (13), it is the policy of the Unit to respond to domestic violence matters within twenty-four (24) hours of a referral being received by the Unit.

PROGRAMMES AND SERVICES

4.9. The Committee was pleased that in addition to the various community outreaches done by the OPM, MSDFS and the VWSU **(Appendix V)**, the MSDFS and the OPM share information on their respective Facebook pages relating to domestic violence programmes and activities.

Response

The Committee is advised that the TTPS frequently updates its Facebook page with information on Domestic Violence as well as other safety information so as to sensitize the public with critical information on aspects of gender-based violence and overall personal safety.

CENTRAL REGISTRY FOR DOMESTIC VIOLENCE (CRDV)

4.14. The Committee was pleased that CRDV was completed in April 2016 and eleven (11) agencies were incorporated into the CRDV. However, the VWSU and agencies from the MOH and various NGOs who provide services for domestic violence are yet to be included **(Table 3 Appendix V)**. Additionally, while the CRDV collects information on domestic violence victims and perpetrators and influenced the creation of the Draft National Policy on Gender and Development, the CRDV has not contributed to data to justify the provision of programmes and services.

Response

To date the VWSU has not been engaged to be incorporated into the Central Registry for Domestic Violence (CRDV)

4.18. The Committee recommends the development of transitional plans in VWSU Tobago Division, TTPS, in order to ensure that services listed in Table 1 of Appendix V can be provided by September 2018.

Response

The TTPS –VWSU is committed to servicing the Tobago Division, in light of this there are ongoing consultations with representatives from the Tobago House of Assembly and other stakeholders towards addressing the issue of Domestic Violence and other aspects of crime victimization in Tobago. Transitional plans developed for treating with victims of domestic violence are as follows:

- Individually tailored emotional support and counselling
- Group support services for family interventions as well as facilitating support groups
- Assistance in sourcing shelters or safe accommodations
- Guidance in developing a safety plan and/or exit plan
- Psychoeducation on client-specific domestic violence safety issues
- Emotional support for clients at court hearings
- Guidance through the criminal justice system with reference to applying for Protection Orders, Custody and Maintenance applications
- Updates on police investigations
- Advocacy and liaison services with social support agencies on behalf of victims
- Workshops / seminars to schools/ tertiary institutions, communities, private organisations, faith-based organisations and other groups within society on domestic violence and other forms of crime victimization
- Referrals for perpetrators to receive counselling

The VWSU has been periodically supporting clients of critical incidents occurring in the Tobago Division. VWSOs are anticipated to assume duty at the VWSU Tobago office in the shortest possible time and thus deliver the comprehensive menu of victim services. However, provisions have been made for the Unit, through its senior VWSOs, to deliver the above mentioned transitional plans in the interim.

4.21. The Committee recommends that in the absence of the financial resources to recruit four (4) VWSOs per division, the VWSU collaborate with tertiary level students to introduce a volunteer programme to supplement the necessary human resources for the services provided by the Unit.

Response

The VWSU welcomes the option to expand its human resources so as to increase service delivery to a wider catchment of the population. In this vein, the VWSU has been providing Practicum Training and Internship placements for students at Tertiary institutions pursuing Bachelor and Post-Graduate programmes across the country for the past ten

(10) years. The TTPS has noted recommendation 4.21 and the feasibility of this initiative will be explored.

4.23. The Committee recommends that by September 2018 all TTPS stations include in its infrastructure private interviewing room for persons who are victims of domestic violence.

Response

The TTPS is in agreement for all TTPS stations to include in its infrastructure, private interviewing rooms for persons who are victims of domestic violence, however this cannot be achieved by September 2018 due to the current financial constraints of the organization.