Chargé Margaret Diop Remarks: Anti-Domestic Violence Workshop, Public Affairs Section, U.S. Embassy, POS August 6, 2013

SALUTATIONS

- **Dianne Madray**, of Caribbean American Domestic Violence Awareness

- **Margaret Sampson-Browne**, Manager of the Victim and Witness Support Unit

- **The Honorable Justice Joseph Tam**, of the Trinidad and Tobago Family Court

- **Hazel Brown**, Coordinator of the Network of NGOs

- **Diana Mahabir-Wyatt**, Chair of the Trinidad and Tobago Coalition Against Domestic Violence

- **Specially Invited Guests**

- **Members of the Media**

- **Ladies and Gentlemen** . . .

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Good morning, everyone. Welcome to the United States Embassy as we continue to take part in an important public dialogue about domestic violence. I know that gathered in this room today we have some of Trinidad and Tobago's most important leaders in this dialogue. And I know that for you, this is an issue that means more than just talking. You are the ones answering calls in the middle of the night, opening your doors for victims with nowhere else to go, and investing your own personal resources to support those in need.

I want you to know that the U.S. Government recognizes your efforts, and we stand with you in your battle to end this global epidemic of gender-based violence.

The United States is committed to preventing and responding to gender-based violence, including domestic violence, in the Caribbean

region. Last December, the U.S. Department of State's Office of Global Women's Issues hosted the first-ever **Caribbean Dialogue on Rule of Law and Gender-based Violence**. The Dialogue brought together over 80 technical experts and stakeholders from 12 countries, and facilitated critical conversations about strengthening rule of law and the response to gender-based violence. I know several participants from that dialogue here today, and I know that they've been continuing to meet to discuss Trinidad and Tobago's response to this pressing concern.

Globally, one in three women worldwide will experience gender-based violence in her lifetime, and in some countries, up to 70 percent of the female population is affected. According to the United Nations, all Caribbean countries have higher than the global average for rape. These statistics make clear that addressing domestic violence is not just a moral imperative. It is an economic necessity. In addition to the psychological

and emotional tolls we pay, we also pay the medical bills and legal costs. We lose wages and productivity. Businesses lose employees. Families lose primary wage-earners. In short, we simply cannot afford to let gender-based violence continue.

As former Secretary Clinton so often said, "**gender-based violence is not cultural; it's criminal**." In the United States, we've recognized gender-based violence as both a human rights and public health policy concern. The U.S. Congress passed the Violence Against Women Act in 1994 to protect victims of domestic violence and sexual assault. The Act provides 1.6 billion U.S. dollars for the investigation and prosecution of violent crimes against women, imposes automatic and mandatory restitution on those convicted, and allows civil redress in cases prosecutors chose to leave unprosecuted.

One of the greatest successes of the Act is its emphasis on a coordinated community response to domestic violence and sexual assault. Courts, law enforcement, prosecutors, victim services, and the

private bar currently work together in a coordinated effort to combat domestic violence.

Today, I am heartened to see a similar coordinated effort taking place right here in this room. Not only do we have stakeholders from a variety of sectors present, but we have a partnership between our two countries. Together, we are taking a stand. We will no longer allow conversations about domestic violence to occur in whispers and shadows.

I know that today, and going forward, you will continue to shine a bright light on this intolerable violation of human dignity. We at the U.S. Embassy will continue to stay engaged in this dialogue through our small grants programs and through support for events like this. By working together, and by using every tool at our disposal, I know we can achieve real progress in the Caribbean and around the world.

Thank you.