



Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago
MINISTRY OF FINANCE

For immediate release

November 26, 2024

MEDIA RELEASE

WIGUT AND OPPOSITION MISLEAD PUBLIC ON UWI SALARY NEGOTIATIONS

The Minister of Finance, Hon. Colm Imbert, MP, has taken note of statements made by representatives of the West Indies Group of University Teachers (WIGUT), who appear to be unaware of who their employer is and with whom they should negotiate terms and conditions of employment. Regrettably, the media, as is often the case, has not researched this matter and has regurgitated the inaccurate statements made by WIGUT and Opposition MPs, verbatim.

It needs to be made clear that the Government is not the employer of academic staff at the UWI and is not a party to their wage agreements, and as such, the Minister of Finance does not and cannot negotiate collective agreements with WIGUT. No Minister of Finance has ever done this, and no legal framework exists for this.

The only role of the Minister of Finance is to advise the Administration at UWI on how much funding the Government can afford to provide to the UWI on an annual basis. This is because the UWI does not generate sufficient income to pay its expenses and relies on the Government for a subvention, which is currently more than \$500 million annually.

Accordingly, contrary to statements published in the Daily Express today, the Minister of Finance has not been engaged in any discussions or negotiations with WIGUT on salaries since he is not their employer. Nor does the Principal of the UWI “negotiate” salaries for UWI academic staff with the Minister of Finance, as inaccurately portrayed in today’s daily Express, since, again, the Minister of Finance is not a party to any collective agreement with WIGUT or the Administration.

Further, it is necessary to correct misinformation put into the public domain by the Opposition MP for Couva South, who demanded that the Minister of Finance take the WIGUT wage dispute to the Industrial Court.

Apart from the fact that the Minister of Finance is not the employer of the academic staff at the UWI, and, therefore, would have no locus standi in any application made to the

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Industrial Court in this matter, as a former senior trade union leader, the Opposition MP for Couva South must know, inter alia, that under the Section 2(3)(c) of the Industrial Relations Act of 1972, ***“no person shall be regarded as a worker, if he is a member of the teaching service as defined in the Education Act, or is employed in a teaching capacity by a University or other institution of higher learning”***.

For the last 52 years WIGUT has had no recourse to the Industrial Court to settle its wage disputes. In that context, it is disturbing and disappointing that the labour spokesman for the Opposition UNC could be so unaware of the law and the factual matrix associated with this matter.

Because the Minister of Finance has no locus in the collective agreement between WIGUT and the UWI Administration, the Minister has not commented on this matter before. However, the Minister had no choice but to correct the record when the Opposition MP attempted to draw him into the matter in the Parliament and made several false, misleading and inflammatory statements.

On a final note, the dispute resolution procedures referred to by the Minister in the Parliament on Friday, November 22, 2024, are the internal Grievance Procedures outlined in the ***“Rules for Academic Staff and Senior Administrative Staff and Professional Staff”*** published by the UWI in May 2015. For the avoidance of doubt, the Minister of Finance is not involved in that dispute resolution process and cannot be, since those are the internal rules and internal grievance procedures of the UWI.

Further, the settlement of any dispute as a result of that Grievance Procedure is a matter for the UWI to manage since the Government has already indicated how much additional funding it can provide to the UWI Administration for the settlement of this wage dispute, namely **\$79 million in backpay and an additional \$12 million per year in recurrent expenditure**.

If the dispute resolution process arrives at a different amount, then the administration at UWI will have to manage its resources carefully.

Unfortunately, all those speaking on this matter seem totally unaware of the facts, history, process and law related to this matter.

- END -

The Honourable Colm Imbert M.P.

Minister of Finance