



EUROPEAN UNION PRESS RELEASE

Kingston, February 7, 2013

UTECH launches tolerance and respect project for students and staff

A sensitization project on respect and tolerance was this morning launched at the University of Technology (UTECH). The project "Promotion of Respect, Tolerance and Diversity" was developed in response to the November 2012 assault of one of the university's students who was accused of being a homosexual. Partly funded by the European Union, the sensitization efforts which will be undertaken throughout 2013 will address issues related to respect and tolerance particularly as it affects the rights of minority groups such as Lesbians, Gays, Bi-Sexual and Transgender (LGBT).

The respect and tolerance project though mainly focused on students and staff at the University is also intended to reach the wider society. It will feature sensitization sessions at each of the University's six locations, public forums, a qualitative research and national survey, essay competition among all tertiary students across the island, debates organized by the Students' Union and the purchase of CDs and print materials to be used throughout the project. The University has also committed to modifying its curriculum for the academic year 2013-2014 to address issues of respect, tolerance and diversity.

Addressing the launch, President of UTECH Professor Errol Morrison pointed out that following the well publicized incident several measures have already been put in place and that the project comes as a well needed support to ensuring that change. *"Despite some of the negative publicity which occurred some three months back we are only so happy that we are now moving on to a new threshold... We are not only attempting to reach out to the University community to create that better understanding and appreciation of difference but to reach out to the wider society trying to engender that softer accommodating society."*

Ambassador Paola Amadei, Head of the Delegation of the European Union to Jamaica commended the efforts of the leadership and administration of the University to undertake such a programme adding that only when all Jamaicans are guaranteed equal rights and freedom will it unlock its true potential. *"Discrimination based on sexual orientation will be a specific focus in this project, as individuals still face significant obstacles to full participation in public life, hindering their ability to work, study and integrate in society without discrimination and exclusion. The great diversity of the Jamaican population is aptly represented in its motto 'out of many one people'. To live up to this motto members of society who are considered 'different', should not be discriminated against and to the contrary should be able to exercise the full gamut of their rights in society. "*

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