

**Statement issued by
The Twenty-Third Meeting
of the Council for Human and Social Development (COHSOD XXIII)
on sexual abuse of children in the Caribbean Region**

The Twenty-Third Meeting of the CARICOM Council on Human and Social Development (COHSOD XXIII) views with grave concern the alarming prevalence of sexual abuse of children in Member States. COHSOD reviewed the overwhelming evidence documented in recent studies that points to new and emerging forms of abuse against both girls and boys. COHSOD denounces all forms of abuse of children, recognizing that other forms of abuse provide preconditions and the environment for sexual abuse.

COHSOD emphasizes the need to challenge concertedly and decisively, the deeply entrenched cultural practices and norms that condone violence and violate the rights of our children and youth.

COHSOD further recognizes the urgent need to expose these atrocities, remove the veil of secrecy and break the silence that shrouds these practices. COHSOD also recognized the interrelated and mutually reinforcing nature of all forms of abuse - physical, sexual, emotional, mental, and neglect, including medical neglect - and agreed to take urgent collaborative action to ensure that all perpetrators are brought to justice and that they receive the full force of the law.

In dealing with this pressing issue, COHSOD will continue to advocate with Member States for the creation of safe spaces in which victims and others affected are free to report and speak out against sexual abuse without fear of recrimination. COHSOD will focus on plugging the gaps in existing legislation to guarantee mandatory reporting of sexual abuse and enforce full protection for the region's children.

COHSOD recognized the imperative of developing an integrated approach - combining strong responsive and preventive measures that emphasize child care and protection, and those to end impunity.

Accepting that no form of violence against children - particularly sexual violence - can be justified or condoned, COHSOD is committed to working collaboratively with partners and stakeholders to launch public education campaigns to promote the message that children have the right to justice, and to a safe and nurturing environment.

The COHSOD resolved to work together to build a region that is safe for all children.

**Providence, Guyana
10 July 2012**