



Sunday 21st February 2021

Media Statement

STATEMENT ON ASA WRIGHT NATURE CENTRE

In March 2020, with the closure of the country's borders to international travel the Asa Wright Nature Centre was forced to close its ecolodge. It was the Centre's hope that this would be temporary, and that the business of the Centre could continue on a limited scale. However, since March 2020, the Centre has not generated any income from its ecolodge and there has been little or no work available for employees. Sadly, nearly a year later, there is no indication as to when the eco-tourism sector will recover from the ongoing pandemic.

It was against this backdrop, that the Board after a review of its finances and in an effort to avoid the risk of insolvency took a unanimous decision to permanently close its business. A consequence of this decision was that employees had to be dismissed.

The Board notes with concern, publicised allegations in relation to the closure of its business which calls into question the good faith and propriety of such action. The Board wishes to reiterate that the decision to close permanently was taken reluctantly and only after receipt of legal advice as to the appropriate manner of such closure. The Board has acted in accordance with this legal advice and rejects any assertion that it breached any legal obligation to its employees or otherwise.

As many persons may not be aware, most of the employees of the Centre are represented by the Government Industrial and General Workers Union, which is the recognised majority union. As such the Board is obligated by law to deal directly with the Union and not the workers personally. The Board has honoured this legal obligation though there may be workers who disagreed with this process.

The Union has now reported seven disputes to the Ministry of Labour. It is unfortunate that claims now being advanced by the Union before the Ministry of Labour have now found themselves in the public arena. The Board has been advised that is obligated to respect the confidentiality and exclusivity of the conciliation processes which has already been engaged and to not disclose those discussions. The Board has at all times been respectful of its legal obligations and is confident that its conduct will be vindicated by any Court before which these matters are raised.

Since the closure, there has been an outpouring of support for the Centre. Over the past few weeks, the Board has worked tirelessly to put into place measures for the protection, monitoring and maintenance of our lands and the animals that call it their home. In the weeks ahead, the Board will continue to explore ways to protect and fulfil its conservation mission and services in a sustainable way for Trinidad & Tobago and the international community. We look forward to the continued and invaluable support of our friends, volunteers, and champions.

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