



Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago  
**MINISTRY OF FINANCE**

For immediate release

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## **MEDIA RELEASE**

### **False and Misleading Article in the Sunday Guardian**

### **Regarding the 2020 Industrial Court Decision on a Collective Agreement for NP**

The Minister of Finance, Hon. Colm Imbert, MP, has taken note of a false, misleading, and mischievous article in the Sunday Guardian, *entitled "Imbert Wrong on NP Wage Settlement"* written by Curtis Williams about a recent decision of the Industrial Court on a collective agreement between the Oilfield Workers Trade Union and the Trinidad and Tobago National Petroleum Marketing Company.

In this article, the writer claimed that statements made by the Minister of Finance about this Industrial Court decision were untrue, specifically that this decision caused NP to move from a break-even position to a loss position and quoted a representative of the trade union as stating that it was a negotiated settlement. The union representative further said that the Minister of Finance had said the wage increase was 11% when it was in fact 7%.

However, none of the assertions made in the article are accurate.

The truth is that on December 4, 2019 the Industrial Court ruled on a trade dispute (Trade dispute No. GSD-TD 510/2018) in favour of the OWTU regarding the payment of Cost of Living Allowance (COLA) and denied NP's application that the dispute be dismissed for want of prosecution. In that decision, the Court ordered NP to resume payment of COLA. This was a decision of the Court and was not as the Guardian article inaccurately alleged a "negotiated settlement".

The Union subsequently sought an interpretation of the effective date of the consolidation of COLA, arguing that on a proper interpretation of the pleadings and facts in the matter, the consolidation of COLA should be retroactive to 2011. There was no dispute between

the parties on this interpretation of the facts and this was ordered by consent on December 19, 2019.

Subsequently, on January 22, 2020, the Industrial Court in making its decision on TD Nos. 97, 98 and 99 of 2014 awarded the OWTU a 7% increase with consolidation of COLA. This was also not a “negotiated settlement”.

For the avoidance of doubt, the Minister’s exact words, in giving an example of the effect of significant wage increases at this time, at the press conference on February 10, 2021 were as follows:

*“By way of example, the Industrial Court has determined a wage increase for National Petroleum with consolidation of COLA going back 9 years to 2011. The effective wage increases were in excess of 20% and having implemented the increases, NP has moved from barely breaking even to a loss position of over \$50 million in 2020, which is just not sustainable.”*

It is noteworthy that contrary to the statement attributed by the Guardian to the OWTU spokesperson that the Minister did not refer to a wage increase of 11% at this press conference. Instead, the Minister said that, with the consolidation of COLA, the **EFFECTIVE** wage increases were in excess of 20%. In reality, the effective wage increases are reportedly far more than 20%, but the Minister exercised caution in his statement.

In summary, the statements made in the Guardian article are completely erroneous and clearly as a result of poor research or deliberate mischief.

There were in fact two (2) **DECISIONS** (not settlements) made by the Industrial Court with respect to the collective agreement at NP, one on December 4, 2019 on COLA and another on January 22, 2020 on **WAGES** and other cost items. These decisions cannot by any stretch of the imagination be described as negotiated settlements. There was also a consent order on December 19, 2019, clarifying the interpretation of an aspect of the December 4, 2019 decision of the Court on COLA.

The reality is that the manpower cost increases that resulted from these matters have placed NP in a loss position. No stretching of the truth can change that fact and it is highly irresponsible of the Guardian to seek to promote a false view of reality.

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The Honourable Colm Imbert M.P.  
Minister of Finance