



# **SAINT LUCIA**

## **STATEMENT BY**

**Ms. Lera Pascal, Director – Gender Relations  
Ministry of Health, Human Services, Family Affairs  
and Gender Relations**

**TO THE  
THIRTY-FIFTH SESSION OF THE UNITED NATIONS COMMITTEE  
ON THE  
ELIMINATION OF DISCRIMINATION AGAINST WOMEN**

-

**NEW YORK**

**23 MAY 2006**

(Check against delivery)

Chairperson,

I bring warm greetings from the sun swept island state of St Lucia, still sizzling from the sizzling sounds of its Chrystal Jazz Festival. If per chance you can get away from your busy schedules around this time next year, then, St Lucia Jazz – the greatest party in the Caribbean is the place to be.

With a total area of two hundred and thirty eight square miles, St Lucia can very easily be described as one of the most pristinely beautiful islands anywhere. We boast the world's only drive-in volcano and the majestic twin pitons thought by many to be among the highest coastal regions in this hemisphere.

The one hundred and sixty thousand people who call St Lucia home, are proud and industrious striving progressively to take their place in the world. We have given the world two Nobel Laureates – one in Economics and the other in Literature. These are merely two of the many good things which come from St Lucia.

St Lucia attained political independence from Britain on 22<sup>nd</sup> February 1979. During its twenty-seven years of nationhood, the island has made tremendous strides in charting a course of success for its people. Indeed, the challenges which beset small island developing states (SIDS) are many, and are always present but we have been able to withstand and remain on course as a result of forward thinking and prudent governance.

St. Lucia prides itself in being among countries with an impeccable record for human rights and dignity of persons. It is this commitment to the integrity of and respect for persons which propelled the government in 1982 to take that important step and accede to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women.

Moreover, the constitution of St Lucia prohibits all forms of discrimination and guarantees fundamental rights and freedoms to all its citizens.

Permit me, chairperson, at this juncture to express profound regret and sincere apologies for the inordinate delay in presenting St Lucia's report to the committee. I assure members that this is not in any way indicative of a lack of interest on the part of St Lucia in fulfilling the obligations of the convention. In fact, by word and deed, the government of St Lucia has demonstrated unwavering commitment to the ideals of CEDAW, through its impressive record of policies and programmes which seek to improve the condition of our women.

## **Article 10 – Education**

Even prior to acceding to the CEDAW Convention, St Lucia had had a place at the primary school for every child of that age; however, up until 2005, only a fraction of the number of students of secondary schools age were able to obtain a place because the number of school places at that level was well short of what was needed.

In keeping with its promise to the people of St Lucia, the government will, at the commencement of the 2006 – 2007 academic year, realize the goal of universal secondary education. It means that every child who is a secondary school age will be guaranteed a place.

In St Lucia the trend has been for girls to out perform their male counterparts at all levels of the education system. This phenomenon is of grave concern to the policy makers; but while efforts are being made to help the boys to improve every encouragement is being given to the girls to continue to excel. Our tertiary institutions show higher registration of females than males.

The secondary school curriculum is broad based and there are no restrictions as to the subjects male and female students may select. Increasingly, girls are pursuing non-traditional subjects areas such as Small Engines; Woods, Technical Drawing and Electricity among others. They have equal access to all training opportunities as their male counterparts.

In 2001 a comprehensive Health and Family Life Curriculum was introduced at both the primary and secondary school levels. The objective of this innovative educational tool was to address in a professional, non-threatening and confidential manner, the issues which young people face in growing up, in order to foster the development of wholesome attitudes and behaviours.

Provision is made for the appointment of counselors at all secondary schools while the primary schools will access the services of the District Counselor based at the Education District office.

## **Article 11 – Employment**

In honouring its commitment to protecting the rights of workers, the government passed the Equality of Opportunity and Treatment in Employment and Occupation Act which came into force on April 2000. This Act is intended to protect workers from discriminatory practices in the workplace. The significant thing about this Act is that it speaks to gender related grounds for discrimination and thus protects the rights of the working woman. This Act revokes the law (the Agricultural Worker Minimum Wage Order 1972 No. 12; amended in 1979 No. 56) which gave women working in the agricultural sector lower wages than men for the same work.

Under this Act, it is a crime for an employer or any person in authority to use sexual harassment to determine the type of treatment and opportunities an employee receives.

The effects of globalization and new trading regimes have negatively impacted the local banana industry and the women, who were the bedrock of that industry were dealt a severe blow. The sudden loss of their means of livelihood left them improvised indeed.

Alongside the demise of the banana industry is the expansion and growth of the tourism sector. Many women who were displaced from the banana sector find employment opportunities in tourism, either directly by working in the hotels and resorts or indirectly by providing goods and services for the tourist.

Large numbers of women also find employment opportunities in the rapidly expanding Information and Communication Technology (ICT) sector, particularly in terms of call centres telemarketing and other types of back office support.

## **Article 12 – Health**

Recognizing that the nation's health is its wealth, the Ministry of Health, Human Services, Family Affairs and Gender Relations embarked on a comprehensive Health Sector Reform programme which sought to revitalize and modernize the entire health sector, to enable it to provide an effective and efficient service to its clients.

An important aspect of Health Sector Reform is the institutionalization of Universal Health Care (UHC). Under the UHC all health care services at the various health institutions will be free of cost at the point of delivery. Government has designed a mechanism whereby these costs will be offset through special taxation. The implication is that people of St Lucia and in particular the indigent will no longer have to "pay" as it were for medical and health services.

Women are the main users of the primary health services especially with regard to maternal and child health. UHC will therefore positively impact the lives of these women.

Inkeeping with its programme of health reform, the Ministry of Health has begun work upgrading and refurbishing all health centres thus improving health services to the people of the rural areas.

The spread of the HIV/AIDS and in particular the feminization of the pandemic is a grave concern to the government and no effort is being spared to bring this killer virus under control. So strong is governments' resolve to fight the pandemic that the Prime Minister himself has taken on the mantle of chairmanship of the National AIDS Committee.

The Ministry of Health through its Bureau of Health Promotion has trained a number of health care professionals and is offering voluntary counseling and testing (VTC) services island -wide. Anti-retroviral treatment is available free of cost to expectant HIV positive women to prevent infection of the unborn child.

Reproductive health is included as one of the eight health priority areas outlined in the Strategic Plan of the Ministry of Health for the period 2005 – 2010. No doubt, this will redound to the well needed improvements in health and reproductive services.

Women now have easy access to contraceptives and a range of contraceptive devices are available at the health centres and at the St Lucia Planned Parenthood Association. Many of these services are free but sometimes a nominal fee is charged. The morning after pill also is available from the St Lucia Planned Parenthood Association. Girls above the age of fifteen (15) do not require parental consent to obtain contraceptive.

Abortion on demand is not available in St Lucia however, the Criminal Code which came into effect in January 2005 permits abortion but only under certain conditions.

## **Violence Against Women**

The government of St Lucia recognizes that the effective management of this critical social problem requires a strategic and multifaceted approach involving government and civil society including faith-based organizations. This is predicated on the fact that gender is a powerful influence on the behaviour of men and women towards each other and in the family community and society.

The underlying factor which makes women and girls so vulnerable to acts of violence is the difference in status accorded to men and women in that the masculine gender is associated with control, power and headship, while the feminine gender is associated with subordination and subjection. Faith based organizations play a significant role in perpetuating such attitudes.

In its effort to address such prevailing attitudes, the Ministry of Health, through the Division of Gender Relations has developed a three pronged approach to combating violence against women. The three main areas are:

1. public awareness, education and sensitization
2. safety and rehabilitation of victims
3. therapeutic intervention for perpetrators

In that regard the Division of Gender Relations have successfully implemented the following:

- Domestic Violence sensitization education and training for:
  - a) all ranks of the police force
  - b) members of the Judiciary
  - c) Human Resource Managers of the public and private sectors
  - d) Leaders of faith-based organization
  - e) School principals and teachers
  
- To provide safety and rehabilitation for victims of domestic violence, the Women's Support Centre was opened in October 2001. The Centre accepts women and their children who are fleeing from life threatening domestic violence situations. Presently the shelter is funded and managed entirely by government but plans are afoot to form a not-for-profit organization to oversee the affairs of the institution thus giving it more autonomy. The Centre offers a homely and secure environment to its clients and provides them with counseling services, assists them in developing personal safety plans. It offers support in helping them to rebuild their lives. Clients remain at the Centre on a needs basis, of course, some requiring more time than others.
  
- Whereas most domestic violence programmes are victim centered, it is critical that the cause of domestic violence must also be addressed. In 2002, the Ministry of Health developed the Men's Resource Centre Project (MRC) which had the following objectives:
  - Promote constructive national discussion on issues of gender and relationships.
  - Improve the understanding of gender relations and the responsibilities of men to their families and to the wider community
  - Determine and address the needs and challenges facing men in their daily lives
  - Plan and implement interventions aimed at issue clarification and initiate projects to address specific areas.

It is important that the communities accept that they have a role to play in fighting the scourge of domestic violence. The Division of Gender Relations, with funding from the Canada Gender Equity Fund, implemented the Community Response Team Project. Through this endeavour, a number of civic-minded volunteers from various communities were trained and given tools with which they could make initial interventions in situations of domestic violence in their respective communities. The community response teams also play a vital role in educating their communities about gender-based violence.

In terms of legislation regarding violence against women, the Domestic Violence (Summary Proceedings) Act 1994 was passed in St Lucia. It affords victims of domestic violence protection from their abusers by granting one of three specific orders viz Protection, Occupation and Tenancy Order.

St Lucia is signatory to the Inter – American Convention on the Prevention Punishment and Eradication of Violence Against Women (also known as the Convention of Balem de Para) to which it acceded in November 1994. This is one of the instruments pioneered by the Inter American Commission on Women of the Organization of American States (OAS), to address the problem of violence against women.

Whereas the new Criminal Code of St Lucia does not specifically address the issue of trafficking in persons, there are sections in that code under which a person or persons engaging in such an activity can be prosecuted.

In 2004, St Lucia was invited to participate in a project sponsored by the International Organization for Migration pertaining to human trafficking in the Caribbean. Part of that project was to carry out an initial investigation as to whether or not trafficking in persons was taking place in St Lucia. The research did not reveal any evidence of such activities taking place. There are however some anecdotal evidence which warrant further investigation.

Cognizant that our borders are fairly open i.e. there are many beaches and coves where smuggling can easily take place in the cover of night; knowing that we are a tourist economy i.e. there is extensive inward and outward migration flows; St Lucia finds itself very vulnerable to the incidence of trafficking in persons.

The Division of Gender Relations, with funding from the International Organization on Migration has undertaken a number of initiatives aimed at raising public knowledge and awareness of the phenomenon of trafficking in persons. A number of frontline community activists have been trained and sensitized that they will be able to detect persons who may be victims and how they should respond.

In July this year, the International Organization for Migration will be sponsoring a counter-trafficking training workshop for the police and law enforcement officials as part of their effort to build capacity to fight against the trafficking on the island.

St Lucia is a small developing country with limited resources but despite our limitations, we endeavour to create a just and equitable state for our citizens.