



*The
Bahamas*

**COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN
FIFTY-SIXTH SESSION**

STATEMENT

by

**Her Excellency Dr. Paulette A. Bethel
Ambassador/Permanent Representative**

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Madam Chair,

The Bahamas congratulates you and the members of the Bureau on your election to this 56th session of the Commission on the Status of Women. I assure you of my delegation's full cooperation and support. The Bahamas aligns itself with the statements made by the Permanent Representative of Algeria on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, as well as the statements made by the Permanent Representatives of Jamaica and Chile on behalf of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) and the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC) respectively.

The Bahamas renews its commitment to the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and to the outcome of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly. The Bahamas continues to make progress, despite its vulnerabilities, in the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of women at the national level and has undertaken a number of initiatives in this regard. I am pleased to report that The Bahamas has completed the initial draft of its Gender Policy, which was undertaken with the assistance of the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) Sub-regional Office for the Caribbean. I take this opportunity to extend my Government's appreciation to UNFPA for its valuable assistance. Once approved and implemented, this policy will enable the Government to mainstream a gender perspective into national development policy, programmes and initiatives.

I am pleased also to inform that The Bahamas was a co-sponsor, for the second time, of the resolution on *'Women and Political Participation'* indicative of the Government's commitment to enhancing the participation of women in political processes and leadership positions. While there are a significant number of Bahamian women in key leadership positions, both in public service and in the private sector, we recognize, however, that more needs to be done to increase the number of women in political decision-making processes. As the country prepares to conduct its General Elections, we have seen a significant increase in the number of women offering for political office. Of the 38 available parliamentary seats, there are 17 female candidates seeking elected office.

The Bahamas is committed also to implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). The Committee is scheduled to consider The Bahamas' periodic reports at its upcoming fifty-second session in July. My delegation looks forward to participating in the session and to working with the Committee.

Madam Chair,

The theme of this year's session - ***"The empowerment of rural women and their role in poverty and hunger eradication, development and current challenges"*** – is relevant to the sustainability of rural communities and to food security. My delegation thanks the Secretary-General for the reports submitted on the priority theme. The Bahamas applauds rural women and the work they do to generate income to provide for their families and to enhance food security as a means of alleviating poverty and hunger, and contributing to the development of their respective countries. The Bahamas commends the United Nations for its annual observance on 15 October of

International Day of Rural Women and also for next week's observance of International Women's Day, whose theme also calls for the empowerment of rural women.

As an archipelagic State, The Bahamas is spread over 100,000 square miles of the Atlantic Ocean and comprises hundreds of islands and cays, a large number of which are remote and rural. Many of the residents of these remote Family Island communities rely heavily on agricultural and fisheries production as a way of life. With a population of approximately 354,000, it is estimated that 15 per cent of persons in The Bahamas live in rural communities. With increased migration of young people to the densely populated capital, it is not surprising that older persons, in particular women, play a significant role in rural Family Island communities throughout The Bahamas. Many are farmers who, for decades, have cultivated and harvested their own crops and vegetable products for their own subsistence and for local market consumption. Some are also entrepreneurs and owners of small and medium-sized agricultural and handicraft enterprises.

Madam Chair,

As the report of the Secretary-General notes, agriculture provides a livelihood for 86 per cent of rural women and men and employment for about 1.3 billion smallholder farmers and landless workers in developing countries. Agricultural development is a key factor in the further development of The Bahamas and also a means to achieve food security, while contributing to a decrease in the country's significant food import bill. By a Parliamentary Act in 1981, the Government established The Bahamas Agricultural and Industrial Corporation (BAIC) to encourage the development of agriculture, commercial and industrial development in The Bahamas. Since its inception, BAIC has embarked on an ambitious programme and provides a number of incentives to persons, including women, who are interested in becoming involved in farming and industrial type businesses or are already involved in such ventures. The Corporation has recently provided assistance to two professional young Bahamian women, both of whom have made the unprecedented decision to relocate from the densely populated capital to the rural Family Island community to pursue entrepreneurship in citrus production. BAIC's overall objective is to promote policies and initiatives that not only result in the development of a modern agriculture sector but also utilize best practices.

Other opportunities to empower rural women in our Family Islands involve training in the production of handicrafts, gifts and souvenir products. The production of handicraft items has been a long tradition of Bahamian women, particularly in rural Family Island communities. The Corporation has trained to-date more than 3,000 persons, the majority of whom are young women, in the handicraft industry to empower them to use their creative skills and talents to become business owners.

Madam Chair,

The report of the Secretary-General on the priority theme details many of the challenges faced by rural women across regions. We have heard first-hand accounts and national perspectives of these challenges during the course of the last few days.

Given the geographical archipelagic structure of The Bahamas we, too, face a number of challenges in the duplication and provision of services, and the development of infrastructure in the Family Islands. The Bahamas Government is cognizant of the importance of rural development and has embarked on a series of infrastructural development projects in education, health, transportation, energy and other related services throughout the Family Islands to enhance the delivery of services, and ultimately, to improve the livelihood of the residents of these rural and primarily agricultural communities. These improvements will enhance educational training and employment opportunities for local residents, and more importantly, increase distribution and access of their agricultural, fisheries and other local products to markets. However, significant, additional budgetary resources and the attendant need for duplication of services more often than not prohibit the comprehensive and sustainable implementation of Government policy. Terminated access to international development assistance due to “graduation” has contributed to an exacerbation of challenges in this regard.

Nevertheless, The Bahamas is committed to improvements in her rural population. The continued support and responsiveness to our vulnerabilities and unique challenges by the United Nations system and all relevant stakeholders is therefore vital to the achievement of our objectives.

Thank you.

