



# STATEMENT

BY

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Madam Chairperson,

Guyana is honoured to participate in today's discussion on gender equality and the empowerment of women. We welcome the opportunity to share our experiences particularly as it relates to the priority theme: "the empowerment of rural women and their role in poverty and hunger eradication, development and current challenges." This Commission affords us the opportunity to evaluate progress, in keeping with national priorities and international obligations, and to recommit to addressing the challenges faced in this important endeavour.

Madam Chairperson,

Guyana accords high priority to gender equality and women's empowerment. Our national policy initiatives and programmes currently emphasise the elimination of gender based violence, expansion of economic opportunities for women, and the promotion of increased participation of women in leadership and decision making.

Our country has registered successes in several areas of critical concern, including education, health, women and the environment, and women in politics and decision making. Education, which is compulsory, is provided free of cost up to age 15 and is universal at the primary level, due largely to incremental expenditure on this sector combined with incentives to encourage school attendance. The out performance of men by their female counterparts, including at the tertiary level is engaging the attention of officials as we strive towards true gender equality in this sector.

Legislative provisions such as the Representation of the Peoples Act stipulation that women comprise at least 33% of the candidates on the slates of political parties, combined with practical measures are serving to foster the increasing participation of women in public life and decision making. Women have served at the highest levels in Guyana, as Head of State and Government, as head of the Judiciary, and in other positions of influence in government. And as of January this year, we can now also boast of having the first female Colonel in the Caribbean. Moreover, Community representation of women in Parliament, has significantly increased and now stands at

twenty one (21) of the sixty five (65) members of Parliament, over 30 per cent, as compared to 1992 when only twelve (12) of the sixty-five (65) Parliamentarians were women. Ongoing leadership training and outreach programmes are part of the methodology in building a cadre of women leaders capable of equal participation in all spheres of public and private life.

Despite the enactment of Domestic Violence legislation (1996), which provides various remedies to aid victims of violence and complementary practical programmes to provide shelter, support to such victims as well as training in life and income generating skills, challenges abound in eliminating violence against women. As such, efforts will be intensified this year to re-invigorate the “Stamp it Out” campaign to end sexual violence and abuse, especially against women and girls.

Recognition of the nexus between economic empowerment and enhancement of the status of women and poverty eradication has led the Government to adopt new approaches to assist single parents, in particular, women to acquire skills and resources to establish micro-enterprises. Capacity-building workshops are held frequently to enhance the entrepreneurial capabilities of women and a special trade fair was held in 2011. In June 2010, the innovative Women of Worth Programme was launched affording single women who would not otherwise qualify for commercial loans, to access credit to establish or expand existing businesses. This programme has been deemed as a model for the region by the Executive Secretary of the Economic Commission on Latin America and the Caribbean, Ms. Alicia Bárcena.

It would be remiss of me, if I fail to reaffirm my country’s support for UN Women, which has been assiduously working to promote gender equality and the empowerment of women, in accordance with its strategic plan.

Madam Chairperson,

Agriculture is fundamental to economic growth, employment, export earnings and sustainable development of Guyana and there is clear acknowledgement of the important role played by rural women in the eradication of poverty and hunger and in overall development. Rural women in Guyana already have legal rights to land, and can access financial services, extension services and technology. Our Agricultural

Diversification Strategy seeks to improve the living conditions of poor and rural households and is complemented by the appointment of gender representatives in all administrative regions of the country as well as active support (financial and technical) to the rural women's organizations. Additionally, the Ministry of Agriculture works closely with the Ministry of Amerindian Affairs and the Women's Affairs Bureau to facilitate processes, through which these organizations can influence decisions regarding resources, strategies and interventions for agricultural diversification and income generation. In this context, Guyana commends agencies such as the Inter-American Institute for Cooperation in Agriculture and the FAO for their continued support of national initiatives to empower rural women.

Madam Chair,

Our discussion on the empowerment of rural women would be pointless, if we failed to accord attention to the current challenging global economic environment and the need for the revamping of the international trading system, especially as it relates to agricultural products. My country's experiences point to the importance of international cooperation to assist developing states to implement appropriate programmes for rural women.

Guyana remains committed to the achievement of gender equality and the empowerment of all women, including women from rural communities. We stand ready to do our part but wish to underscore the need for continued efforts to project positive images of women, remove the remaining obstacles to their full participation in public life and decision making at all levels, promote their economic productivity and empowerment and eliminate entrenched attitudes and practices which perpetuate inequalities and discrimination.

I thank you.