



TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO

PERMANENT MISSION OF TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO TO THE UNITED NATIONS
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Statement

by

H.E. Mr. Rodney Charles

Ambassador/Permanent Representative of the
Republic of Trinidad and Tobago

at

The 56 session of the Commission on the Status of
Women

United Nations Headquarters

March 5, 2012

Madam Chair,

Trinidad and Tobago aligns itself with the statement made by the distinguished Permanent Representative of Algeria on behalf of the G77 and China and by the Permanent Representative of Jamaica on behalf of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), and wishes to add a few words in our national capacity.

Trinidad and Tobago recognizes the importance of gender equality to national development and to lasting peace. As stated specifically in the report of the UN Secretary-General on *"the empowerment of rural women and their role in poverty and hunger eradication, development and current challenges"*, the empowerment of rural women and girls, the priority theme of this year's session of the Commission, is an essential part of the solution to some of today's most serious global challenges related to achieving food security, poverty reduction and sustainable development. Consequently, a number of initiatives have been undertaken to empower all women, including those living in rural areas, and to create an environment in which all citizens could achieve their fullest potential.

In efforts to increase food security, for example, the draft National Policy on Gender and Development seeks to integrate gender equality goals into relevant strategies as a means of ensuring the wellbeing of women and men, as well as their ability to secure sustainable livelihoods and equitable access to productive resources. To enhance the agricultural sector, there will also be an examination of national agricultural data, disaggregated by sex, to determine the gender differentials with regard to land ownership, earnings, crop selection, marketing and other aspects.

Skills development and self-sustainability are two important factors which contribute to improving women's self-confidence, self-worth and independence which redound positively to both their personal and national development. In addition, it reduces the vulnerability of women with respect to situations of domestic violence, including women in rural areas. Towards this end, there are numerous programmes that offer training as well as provide assistance to women who demonstrate the potential to become entrepreneurs. Some of these training programmes continuously retrain women in non-traditional skills to allow them to negotiate better wages and higher levels of employment and to break the stereotyping in the labour market. Such programmes include the Multi Skills Training Programme (MuST); the Youth Training and Employment Partnership Programme (YTEPP); the On the Job Training Programme (OJT); and the Women in Non-traditional Skills Training Programme in which women are trained in fields usually dominated by men, for example, in construction and auto and computer repairs. Start-up kits and other forms of technical and financial assistance are provided to those women who show the potential to own businesses.

In Trinidad and Tobago, the importance of the support provided by Non-governmental and other Community-based organisations in providing assistance to rural women in particular, in a number of areas, is well recognized. Accordingly, a key characteristic of one of the flagship programmes of the Ministry of Community Development is the technical assistance component of the Community Development Fund (CDF) which focuses on the institutional strengthening of the NGO network as well as other community-based organisations.

Madam Chair,

We know that women and girls, and in particular those living in rural areas, are faced with extraordinary burdens as a result of unpaid work including domestic and caregiving responsibilities. Non-communicable diseases contribute significantly to this challenge both by preventing those with such diseases from being economically and physically independent, and by preventing their caregivers from either continuing their education or from engaging in paid work. In efforts to ensure that women and girls in rural communities especially are able to stay healthy, as well as to detect health problems at early stages, NGO's such as the Trinidad and Tobago Family Planning Association and the Trinidad and Tobago Cancer Society assist, for example, in providing rural women with mobile health services, in addition to those available from the network of Health Centres throughout our twin island State operated by the Ministry of Health.

Madam Chair,

A fundamental element of any effort to empower women, including rural women, involves their active participation in decision-making processes. Rural women in Trinidad and Tobago, specifically, are afforded a number of opportunities to participate in decision-making through public consultations, as well as through membership of the Federation of Women's Institute. The Federation, inter alia, benefits from financial support from the Government, seeks to assist at-home women to become self-sufficient and offers services in the areas of education, training, tutoring and others that improve the socio-economic status of rural women. Furthermore, there exists the Network of NGOs for the Advancement of Women which supports all women's organizations locally, including several grass roots women's organizations, and is committed to the aims of the UN Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women. Importantly, there is also the Network of Rural Women Producers (NRWP) in existence for the past 11 years which provides rural women with access to credit for micro-business projects, and assistance to contribute to government policies that are sensitive to and supportive of the special needs of rural women producers and to the elimination of gender biases.

Madam Chair,

In order to reduce the incidence of gender-based violence and promote gender equality, the Government, through its Ministry of Gender, Youth and Child Development, seeks to empower both women and men by addressing gender-specific issues. Through programmes for men and boys such as the Defining Masculine Excellence Programme and the Non-traditional Skills Training for Men (the latter consisting of food preparation and home management courses), the Government aims to stem the tide of problems associated with the concept and perceptions of masculinity. The programme aims to reshape these concepts by addressing the relationships men have with their mothers, life partners, colleagues and employers, anger management and self-esteem. It also helps to achieve a non-gendered distribution of family responsibilities within the home.

The Government of Trinidad and Tobago remains committed to establishing mechanisms to accelerate the achievement of gender equality in political participation and representation at all levels of the electoral process and women's full participation on an equal basis with men in all areas of public life and the private sector, including governmental bodies, the judiciary, trade unions, political parties, employers' organizations, research and academic institutions and national corporations. Noteworthy is the fact that there has been an increase in women's overall participation in national leadership and decision-making.

The Government also intends to embark on a number of activities aimed at improving the lives of residents of rural areas including improving infrastructure, access to health care and education and productive employment.

It should also be noted, Madam Chair, that lasting peace in our nations can only be achieved if women are more involved in peace processes and in all levels of decision-making to contribute to the transformation of their societies. In an attempt to promote this objective, Trinidad and Tobago championed the first ever resolution on "women, disarmament, non-proliferation and arms control" adopted by consensus during the 65th session of the General Assembly, and which will again be addressed in 67th session of the General Assembly. We therefore look forward to the participation and support of delegations in negotiations on the resolution in the upcoming session.

Madam Chair,

In conclusion, Trinidad and Tobago remains committed to working towards eliminating all forms of discrimination and violence against women and improving the lives and livelihoods of all women, including women living in rural areas, and we welcome continued cooperation with local, regional and international partners which would contribute to the achievement of these objectives.

I thank you.
