



**PERMANENT MISSION OF THE REPUBLIC OF GUYANA
TO THE UNITED NATIONS**



STATEMENT

by

**Honourable Ms. Jennifer Webster
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ON BEHALF OF THE CARIBBEAN COMMUNITY (CARICOM)

to the

**Commission on the Status of Women
Fifty-Seventh Session**

***Elimination and Prevention of all Forms of
Violence Against Women and Girls***

**67th SESSION OF THE UNITED NATIONS
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Madame Chair

Deputy Secretary General of the United Nations

Distinguished Ministers

Delegates

Members of Civil Society

Ladies and Gentlemen:

I am indeed honoured to speak on behalf of the Member States of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) on the priority theme: "Elimination and Prevention of all forms of Violence against Women and Girls" at this fifty-seventh session of the Commission on the Status of Women. At the onset, I wish to pledge to you Madame Chair, and the other members of the Bureau, CARICOM's continued support of your stewardship of the Commission during this session.

I take this opportunity to also thank the Secretary-General of the United Nations for the valuable reports prepared for the consideration of Member States and other relevant stakeholders.

CARICOM aligns itself with the statement made by the representative of Fiji on behalf of the Group of 77 and China and by the statement to be delivered by the representative of Cuba on behalf of the Community of Latin American and Caribbean Countries (CELAC).

Madame Chair,

Violence against women and girls is one of the most widespread violations of human rights which is prevalent in every continent and in every culture. It manifests itself in many forms, transcends race and class and occurs in diverse settings. It presents a challenge which causes significant harm to the individual and degrades the fundamental moral and social fabric of the society.

As such, the priority theme "elimination and prevention of all forms of violence against women and girls"- is an issue that commands high priority within our region. Women play a critical role in the socio-economic and political development of the Caribbean, and Member States of the region take pride in the

achievements made in the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of women. In March 2012, on the occasion of International Women's Day, the Secretary-General of CARICOM recognized the significant contribution that women of our Community make to the stability and development of the region, and called for a recommitment of all our efforts to improve equality, justice and peace for all. However, in reaffirming our longstanding commitment to the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, and to the implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, CARICOM Member States recognize that considerable progress needs to be made to fulfill the promise of the Platform for Action and of the Convention. Among the obstacles to the realization of our shared objectives is the continuing violence meted out to women and girls in our societies and throughout the world.

Madame Chair,

As highlighted in the Secretary-General's report before this Commission, violence against women remains a universal phenomenon despite many recent developments. The report estimates that as many as 7 in 10 women experience some level of physical and/or sexual violence at some point in their lifetime. This speaks to a woefully deficient implementation of the measures adopted since the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action to reverse the tide of significant physical and mental trauma experienced by affected women on a daily basis. CARICOM concurs with the Secretary-General's recommendation that the implementation of comprehensive legal frameworks that criminalise violence against women and girls must be accelerated; and that all spheres of society should play an active part to eradicate this terrible scourge.

Madame Chair,

CARICOM countries are not unique in the problems we face to attain the goals and objectives set out in the Beijing Declaration and Platform of Action and other international instruments established to protect the rights of women and girls. One problem which is of great concern to our Governments is that of domestic violence. We have recognized that the endemic culture of violence and widespread gender based violence in particular, demands intensive and extensive

strategic action and multilayered interventions by all of us. The trafficking of humans for sexual or labour exploitation is also a growing concern for CARICOM Member States as the victims of sexual exploitation and trafficking are predominantly young women and girls. Traffickers now routinely use the lure of lucrative job opportunities to target women and girls across the region through websites. It is anticipated that as the region becomes a more networked society, the internet will increasingly facilitate the transnational marketing of sex workers.

Other issues of gender inequality, social exclusion, youth unemployment and violence in schools continue to pose challenges as we attempt to protect our women and girls, and adequately prepare them for their various roles in our societies. Additionally, the lack of resources for proper data collection and research within the region is a fundamental issue which impedes timely and accurate updates on the implementation of national policies aimed at addressing these concerns.

Madame Chair,

We concur with the observation made by the Secretary General in his report that the engagement of communities, civil society, men and boys, and young people is necessary to challenge gender stereotypes and social norms that perpetuate violence against women. We are also cognizant of the critical role of community activism in seeking solutions to the problems we face, and in this regard have undertaken several preventative initiatives and measures at the regional level.

In March 2012 on the occasion of International Women's Day, CARICOM launched a series of campaign materials on gender-based violence to promote positive attitudes and behaviours and a more gender sensitive community. These materials were developed by 15 Caribbean artists under the theme "Caribbean Artists UNiTE-ing against gender-based violence". In May 2012 three young women from CARICOM Member States participated in the first Global UNiTE Youth Forum, organized by the Secretary-General's global campaign UNiTE to End Violence against Women, with the objective of engaging young people in addressing violence against women and girls. In July 2012, the first in a series of Global UNiTE

“Orange Day” campaigns to raise awareness about the issue of violence against women and girls was launched in the region. We express our pleasure with the appointment last May of Ms Rawwida Baksh, a CARICOM national to the UN Women’s Global Civil Society Advisory Group.

At the national level in CARICOM Member States, various legislative measures are being enhanced, and monitoring frameworks are being developed, to address gender-based violence. CARICOM takes this opportunity to express our appreciation to UN Women and UNIFEM for their valuable support and assistance in the formulation of programmes and legislative reform initiatives geared towards addressing violence against women in CARICOM Member States. With the support of UNIFEM, a standardized programme titled ‘Partnership for Peace - A Domestic Violence Intervention’ was introduced in several CARICOM Member States to engage men and boys in confronting negative gender stereotypes and to encourage them to accept their role and responsibility in ending violence against women and girls. The further development or elaboration of such programmes at all levels for men and boys which target behavioral change and socialization to counter gender stereotyping should also be encouraged.

We are also appreciative for the support provided by UN Women in the establishment of a Caribbean Young Women’s Transformational Leadership Programme which is geared towards enhancing the leadership and decision-making skills of women, and to the development and empowerment of young women.

Madame Chair, as we move forward, our efforts at addressing violence against women and girls must adopt a multi-sectoral ‘whole of society’ approach, engaging Government and civil society players. The media must also play a responsible role in the sensitization of this issue. Norms and standards developed for gender equality must be reflected in the policies for all related sector areas for coherence of action and sustained impact. In CARICOM, the Council for Human and Social Development, (COHSOD) spanning all social sectors is well placed to spearhead and facilitate this work at the regional level.

CARICOM Heads of Government, at their 24th Inter-Sessional Meeting held in Haiti last month, adopted a *Regional Crime and Security Strategy* which includes as

one of its Strategic areas, ***Crime Prevention***, to be addressed through the CARICOM Social Development and Crime Prevention Action Plan. COHSOD and the Council for National Security and Law enforcement will collaborate on the roll out of this Strategy.

In the upcoming period, increased focus must be placed on the provision of multi-sectoral services encompassing, *inter alia*, law enforcement, with continued training for the police force being a top priority, as well as prevention training, legal assistance and youth- friendly medical care and counseling services. The UNDP 2012 Caribbean Human Development Report - ***'Human Development and the shift towards better Citizen Security'*** highlights the fact that in our region, 'violence against women is disproportionately borne by youth and significantly impacts the girl-child'.

Madame Chair,

We need to reinforce in our homes, the teaching of respect for women, pay critical attention to socio-cultural expressions and stereotypes that degrade women and perpetuate the myth that women are an inferior class to be abused and exploited. We also need to inculcate in our young women a deeper awareness of their own values, and recognition of their own self-respect and the need to demand that respect from others. These are the types of interventions that will no doubt assist in our efforts to prevent and eliminate violence against women and girls.

In conclusion, Madame Chair, there is an urgent need for stronger legislative measures, coupled with a greater civic responsibility, to address the challenge of prevention and elimination of violence against our women and girls and other obstacles to gender equality and women's empowerment. The absence of significant progress in this area will adversely affect achievement of the Millennium Development Goals. The promotion of gender equality and women's empowerment is an unfinished agenda which will undoubtedly require attention in the context of the post 2015 development framework.

I thank you.