



**STATEMENT**

**ON BEHALF OF THE CARIBBEAN COMMUNITY  
(CARICOM)**

**on**

**Item 62 (a) and (b): Advancement of Women**

**by**

**Ms. Donnette Critchlow  
Representative of the Republic of Guyana**

**At the 64<sup>th</sup> Session of the General Assembly  
United Nations headquarters  
New York**

**OCTOBER 12, 2009**

**Please check against delivery**

Mr. Chairman,

I have the honour to speak on behalf of the Member States of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) on the subject of gender equality and the empowerment of women. In so doing, allow me Mr. Chairman to congratulate you as well as the other members of your bureau on your election to guide the work of this Committee and to signal CARICOM's commitment to working closely with you in the achievement of a successful outcome of this session.

CARICOM further expresses its appreciation to the Secretariat, as well as the Committee Chairs for the timely submission of reports on this topic, which greatly facilitate our deliberations on this important issue.

Mr. Chairman,

The international community is currently confronted by many challenges. The financial and economic crisis, issues concerning agriculture and food security and climate change have all impacted states of my region. Although reports point to an abatement of the economic and financial crisis in some parts of the world and for many CARICOM states the adverse impacts of this situation are still unfolding. In its publication entitled "the Global Economic and Financial Crisis: Regional Impacts, Responses and Solutions," ECLAC projects that Latin American and Caribbean States will be affected by a slowdown of exports, low commodity prices, a drop in remittances and tourist income and a contraction in capital flows." CARICOM States have been especially hard hit in these areas and many are constrained in their capacity to respond to the crises due in part to heavy debt burdens.

Notwithstanding these challenges, CARICOM States continue to hold firm to the view that women's rights are human rights. We stand committed to promoting gender equality and the empowerment of women as well as the attainment of agreed regional and international goals, including the objectives of the Convention on the Elimination of

Discrimination Against Women, the Beijing Platform for Action, the Inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment and Eradication of Violence Against Women (Belem do Para) and the Millennium Development Goals. Indicative of our commitment to the aforementioned instruments and goals, we have focused our attention on the following areas: gender based violence, HIV/AIDS, leadership and decision-making, education, poverty and social exclusion and the expansion of economic and trade opportunities for women. Undoubtedly, poverty among women and the existence of inequalities impede the empowerment of women and enhance their risk of violence.

In assessing the situation of women within the Caribbean Community, we are heartened by the incremental progress being made in such areas as education and healthcare, even though these developments have had limited impact on overall empowerment. It is well established for instance that at the regional level women outnumber their male counterparts in secondary and tertiary level institutions. However, men continue to dominate positions of power and decision making in Caribbean societies and inequalities persist between men and women in the non-agricultural sector of the labour market according to the ECLAC report on "Gender Equality, Poverty and Achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs ) in the Caribbean Sub-region."

In the area of health, the Caribbean Secretariat, including Pan Caribbean Partnership against HIV/AIDS (PANCAP) collaborates with UNIFEM to build capacity and provide cross-sector technical support to ensure gender analysis in programme formulation, implementation and monitoring among the health and social sectors. A sub-regional workshop was held earlier this year under the auspices of UNIFEM and has served to equip national representatives with skills to better mainstream gender into national HIV/AIDS policies. However, it is fully recognized that culture, lifestyle and gender roles continue to influence the spread of this epidemic in the region.

Mr. Chairman,

The Fifth CARICOM Women's Affairs Ministers Meeting in 1997 established the target of 30 per cent as the minimum level of women in decision making in the political, public and private sectors by the year 2005. To date, only one state has attained this target though other states have recorded increases, in women's participation in these areas. On the other hand, there are instances where the participation of women has fallen in the region and there is now one state with no women in parliament. This situation is partly due to the fact that CARICOM States do not generally have quota laws on the representation of women in Parliament, in addition to the fact that elections could alter the gender distribution in this important decision-making forum.

Efforts to increase the capacity of women in leadership are ongoing. In a collaborative effort of the Organization of American States, UNIFEM and the Commonwealth Secretariat, the Caribbean Institute for Women in Leadership was launched last July in Barbados. This Institute aims at providing high quality research and training to advance women's leadership and to increase the number of women in politics and decision making at all levels.

Mr. Chairman,

Violence against women continues to be of concern and form an integral part of the Caribbean Special Millennium Development Goals and Targets. To date plans and programmes have been implemented across the region with a view to reducing all forms of gender based violence by 2015. Under the CARICOM/Spain Cooperation Agreement, the region has received funding for an improved framework for research, advocacy, education and policy development for the prevention of gender based violence. In addition, several states have also been collaborating with UN agencies including UNIFEM at the national level to address gender based violence, improve state accountability and the dissemination of statistical information through the Gender

Equality Observatory. CARICOM is also appreciative of the Secretary-General's campaign "Unite to End Violence Against Women" as well as the various initiatives of other agencies of the United Nations, which are aimed at ending violence against women.

CARICOM States also fully support global efforts to end violence against women and girls, especially in situations of conflict and take this opportunity to express our concern at the dramatic shortfall in voluntary contributions received to date by the United Nations Trust Fund to end Violence against Women. We have long held the view that violence against women must be prevented and eliminated as this phenomenon constitutes a violation of the rights of women and undermines economic and social development. We urge those with the capability to do so to contribute generously to this Fund.

Mr. Chairman,

The adoption of General Assembly resolution 63/311 on system wide coherence includes among its provisions a mandate for the creation of a single entity within the United Nations devoted to matters concerning gender equality and the empowerment of women. CARICOM believes that the new entity should be coherent, strong, adequately resourced and responsive to needs of Member States. As a consequence, we look forward to the proposals of the Secretary-General as it relates to the mission statement, structure and functioning of this entity, which would allow for the prompt resumption of negotiations and possible early operationalization of this entity.

Mr. Chairman,

On the occasion of the International Day of Rural Women which will be celebrated on October 15, CARICOM States extend commendations to rural women for their contributions over the years including in the areas of community development and agriculture and food production. As in many other regions of the world, CARICOM

women play a significant role in agriculture and food production and are directly affected by unfavourable terms of international trade in such products. In recognition of the importance of agriculture to rural development and employment, CARICOM Heads of Government adopted in July 2009, the Liliendaal Declaration, which underscored the need to “maximize regional agricultural production to meet our food security and nutrition needs, address poverty alleviation as well as income and employment generation.” We therefore utilize this opportunity to reiterate our call for the end to unfair competition and agricultural trade distortions and an inclusive international economic system.

CARICOM States also urge that at the national level greater efforts be made to ensure the rights of women to land and access to credit, technology and information as a means of enhancing poverty eradication strategies while also contributing to food security. We do hope that the World Summit on Food Security to be held in November in Rome addresses issues pertinent to women including rural women as we chart a course for the future of agriculture and food security.

As it may be obvious from this intervention Mr. Chairman, though progress has been made more needs to be done to truly realize gender equality and the empowerment of women in the Caribbean and throughout the world. Last year, the question was asked “Who Answers to the World’s Women?” It was very clear then, as it is now, that greater accountability is needed. Perhaps the proposal of H.E. Edwin Carrington, Secretary General of CARICOM tabled on the occasion of International Women’s Day this year may be appropriate in its call for consideration to be given to the provision of positive incentives to governments and private institutions which honour gender policies and commitments to women’s rights.

I thank you.