



PERMANENT MISSION OF THE REPUBLIC OF GUYANA
TO THE UNITED NATIONS



STATEMENT

ON BEHALF OF THE CARIBBEAN COMMUNITY (CARICOM)

ON

**ITEMS 28 (a) and (b): Advancement of Women and Implementation
of the Outcome of the Fifth World Conference
on Women and of the Special Session
of the General Assembly**

BY

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AT THE

**SIXTY-FIFTH SESSION OF THE
UN GENERAL ASSEMBLY**

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Mr. Chairman,

I speak on behalf of the Member States of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM)¹ on agenda item 28 (a) and (b) concerning the advancement of women. Allow me, Mr. Chairman to congratulate you and the other members of the bureau on your election and to assure you of the full support of CARICOM. I also wish to align our Community with the statement made by Yemen on behalf of the Group of 77 and China.

CARICOM commends the Secretary-General, the Vice Chairperson of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women and the Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences, for the reports provided which we believe would stimulate a meaningful discourse on this issue.

Mr. Chairman,

Gender equality is central to the developmental efforts of CARICOM States, which individually and collectively are working towards the achievement of the internationally agreed objectives and programmes concerned with the empowerment of women, such as the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the Millennium Development Goals. In keeping with outlined priorities, the focus of the region has been concentrated on the elimination of gender based violence and poverty and social exclusion, particularly as it pertains to women, combating and mainstreaming a gender perspective into HIV/AIDS programmes, ensuring the quantitative and qualitative preparation of women for positions in leadership and decision-making, and the education and training of women and girls. Though moderate successes have been achieved, indications are that more needs to be done for the realization of true gender equality and the empowerment of women.

The increasing prevalence of gender based violence is a source of much concern. Under the CARICOM/Spain Cooperation Agreement, a 2 year project is being implemented aimed at improving research, advocacy, public education and policy development with a view to eliminating gender based violence in Member States and the creation of a violence free society across the Caribbean sub-region. The appointment of an Advocate on Gender Justice earlier this year is a first for CARICOM and a strong signal of the seriousness we attach to this issue. Further, with the assistance of UNIFEM, a Working Group of experts has developed a standardized court-based batterer intervention programme for the region, which has so far been introduced in Grenada, St. Lucia, Trinidad & Tobago and Jamaica.

The United Nations Plan of Action on Trafficking in Persons adopted last July by the General Assembly is a welcome initiative, which will complement other mechanisms to address gender based violence and the exploitation of women. As opposed to

¹ Caribbean Community (CARICOM) Member States: Antigua, Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, Dominica, Grenada

Guyana, Haiti, Jamaica, Saint Kitts, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Suriname, Trinidad and Tobago

unilateral and arbitrary approaches, this Plan advocates dialogue, the strengthening of partnerships and multilateral actions, which we in CARICOM see as essential for tackling complex and multidimensional challenges, such as trafficking in persons, especially women and girls. Our States will continue to work with others to ensure that the perpetrators of such crimes are brought to justice and that victims are protected and assisted, as necessary to ensure their physical and psychological wellbeing as well as their reintegration into society.

For far too long, women have borne the brunt of conflicts, including as targets of sexual assault and exploitation. In this regard, CARICOM signals its support for the various initiatives undertaken by the UN to address such violence perpetrated against women and girls in conflict and post conflict situations over the years. We further express our concern at the recent mass rape of more than 300 civilians, including women and girls by rebels in eastern DRC. We welcome the actions taken by the DRC authorities and the UN to apprehend the suspects and urge that measures be adopted urgently to strengthen security in that region. Women everywhere must be able to live free from fear of all forms of violence and abuse, in keeping with their inherent human rights.

CARICOM fully recognizes that entrenched attitudes, practices and often negative stereotypes of women militate against their effective empowerment. We urge for the portrayal of positive images of women and girls in the media, the engagement of men and boys in matters concerning gender equality and the elimination of persistent traditions, cultural and social norms and attitudes which perpetuate discriminatory practices and beliefs and discourage women from asserting their rights.

Mr. Chairman,

The global financial and economic and crises have had devastating effects on many economies, including those of CARICOM States and will likely negatively impact the overall empowerment of women. This situation increases the vulnerabilities of women in the field of employment and could also create difficulties for them in accessing credit, productive resources and even basic social services. As studies have indicated, an unemployed or underemployed woman is at greater risk of exploitation and abuse and much more likely to experience the violation of her human rights.

Last July, the eleventh session of the Regional Conference on Women in Latin America and the Caribbean held in Brasilia explored the theme women's autonomy and economic empowerment and "considered that the measures adopted to ensure macroeconomic stability have not reduced gender inequalities." CARICOM therefore concurs with the analysis of the Secretary General which is contained in document A/65/204, that "policy design must address specific measures to achieve women's economic empowerment." Unless such approaches are adopted as a matter of urgency, gender equality will remain largely a matter of rhetoric and the full potential of women would most likely not be realized.

As it pertains to power and decision making, CARICOM is delighted to report on the election last May of Prime Minister Kamla Persad-Bissessar, the first female Head of Government of Trinidad and Tobago and the fourth overall for the region. Some

CARICOM States are close to or have already attained the ECOSOC endorsed target of 30% of women in positions at decision making levels. Varying strategies have been employed to improve the quantitative and qualitative participation of women in leadership and decision making positions, given that many CARICOM states do not have a quota system with regard to the political participation of women.

Mr. Chairman,

It is heartening to note that the 2009 UNAIDS AIDS Epidemic Update reports that the rate of new HIV infections seems to have stabilized, treatment coverage has substantially increased and mother to child transmission of this epidemic reduced. However, the report also notes that women account for about half of all the infections in the region and that adolescent and young women also record higher rates of prevalence of this disease in comparison to their male counterparts. These trends are worrying and must be addressed urgently, even though the elimination of stigma and discrimination against persons living with HIV, has emerged as one of the priorities of the Community. As the World's Women 2010 (Trends and Statistics) notes, "the toll exacted by HIV/AIDS on the lives of women extends beyond their physical health to the families and communities that depend on them." Even prior to this seeming "feminization" of the epidemic, governments across the region had either developed or were in the process of developing National Strategic Plans aimed at a more gender sensitive approach to addressing HIV/AIDS. The continued assistance of the international community in combating this epidemic is therefore vital.

Mr. Chairman,

Over the past decade, we have seen a number of significant successes with regard to the advancement of women, none more so than the recent establishment of UN Women. CARICOM welcomes the establishment of this new gender entity, even as we note the marginal increase in the percentage of women in the professional and higher categories within the UN system, as recorded in the Secretary General's report A/65/334. CARICOM also welcomes the appointment of former Chilean President Michelle Bachelet as the Under Secretary General and Head of UN Women. We look forward to engaging fully with her and this new office as the States of our Community strive to eliminate the remaining barriers to gender equality and the empowerment of women.

In this regard, I take the opportunity to remind of the endorsement by CARICOM Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the candidatures of Grenada and St. Vincent and the Grenadines to serve as members on the Executive Board of United Nations Women, occupying two of the six seats allocated to the Group of Latin America and the Caribbean States. This Executive Board offers an unprecedented opportunity for all states to be involved in the work of the UN as it relates to gender equality and the empowerment of women. On this basis and in consideration of our longstanding commitment and active participation in the advancement of women, CARICOM would be appreciative of the support of these two candidatures during the ECOSOC elections, which is scheduled to be held in November.

Mr. Chairman,

Health and development are inextricably linked and while communicable diseases by their very nature tend to garner attention, non-communicable diseases, though increasingly prevalent, are often overlooked. It has been acknowledged that “the costs associated with treating NCDs and related complications could push entire households into poverty, severely limiting family members’ prospects for the future, especially those of women and girls, on whose shoulders traditionally rests the burden of caring for the sick.” In addition, it is also widely recognized that women are disproportionately affected by NCDs. To address this growing epidemic, CARICOM with the support of other Member States, spearheaded an initiative to convene a High Level Meeting on the “Prevention and Control of NCDs” next September. It is our sincere hope that this Meeting would enjoy the highest level of participation and support and provide a great opportunity to address in depth the effects of NCDs on development and societies, including its impact on the lives of women.

Mr. Chairman,

During January this year, our sister CARICOM State Haiti was struck by a devastating earthquake. The expressions of support were sincere and overwhelming. We wish to thank those States which have so far fulfilled their pledges to contribute to the reconstruction efforts. CARICOM wishes to remind that to date only approximately 30% of the amount pledged has been received, and further that over 1 million Haitians still live in temporary shelter. We therefore urge states to continue to make good on their pledges and commitments. We also pause to recall the outstanding contributions made to gender equality by women's rights activists such as Magalie Marcelin, Anne-Marie Coriolan (a CEDAW candidate for this year's elections held in June), Myrna Narcisse and Myriam Merlet all of whom perished in the disaster.

Mr. Chairman,

CARICOM recognizes that the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of women is an evolving process. Our States are committed to making our contributions in this regard and underscore the need for greater advocacy, accelerated updating of legislation and the strengthening of national women's machineries, which are just a few of the prerequisites for progress. In conclusion, please also allow me to express CARICOM's appreciation for the efforts and initiatives undertaken by the United Nations and the Secretary-General in the area of gender equality and the advancement of women.

I thank you.