



PERMANENT MISSION OF THE REPUBLIC OF GUYANA
TO THE UNITED NATIONS



STATEMENT

BY

**MR. GEORGE TALBOT
CHARGÉ d' AFFAIRES a.i.**

ON BEHALF OF THE CARIBBEAN COMMUNITY (CARICOM)

ON

**AGENDA ITEM 28:
ADVANCEMENT OF WOMEN**

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Mr. Chairman,

I am honoured to speak on behalf of the Member States of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) on agenda item 28, Advancement of Women and Implementation of the outcome of the Fourth World Conference on Women and of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly. Allow me first to congratulate you and the other members of the Bureau on your election and to reaffirm CARICOM's full support in the successful fulfillment of your mandate.

CARICOM similarly commends the Secretary-General and the relevant UN agencies for the reports before us, which inform of the progress of gender equality globally and provide a solid basis for our discussion of this important issue.

Mr. Chairman,

The UN Report on the Progress of the World's Women 2011 "In Pursuit of Justice" and the World Bank's 2012 World Development Report on Gender Equality and Development underscore the need for continued focus on issues regarding women. Both of these reports stress that progress is being made with regard to gender equality. At the same time, the World Bank Report highlights a number of statistics which attract our attention. In the first place, only 139 states guarantee this objective. 117 countries have equal pay laws. Women represent 40% of the world's labour force but hold just 1% of the world's wealth. And every year, 3.9 million women and girls go "missing" in developing countries. These statistics paint a disturbing picture, which demands greater attention by the international community if gender equality is to become a reality.

Promoting gender equality and the empowerment of women is a central priority for CARICOM States. We believe that women must become equal and full participants in all processes affecting their lives, if a society characterised by justice, peace and development is to be realized. Our Member States therefore continue, individually and collectively, to

undertake various initiatives to enhance the status of the women of the Caribbean, based on instruments such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, the Millennium Development Goals and the Caribbean Specific MDGs and Targets.

Incremental progress has been the result of regional efforts thus far, evidenced by gains in areas such as education, where females outnumber their male counterparts at secondary and tertiary levels. However, cultural and structural factors continue to impede women's access to and control over resources and services, their access to economic opportunities, and their ability to exercise power and political influence. An assessment of the situation of women in the region conducted by the CARICOM Secretariat suggest a linkage between gender inequalities and discrimination on the one hand, and factors such as economic vulnerability of female headed households, the gendered burden of care and the higher levels of unemployment and under-employment among women on the other. Regional officials have further projected that efforts to overcome such inequalities will be setback by the current global economic and financial situation, due to decreasing levels of resources and investment to address the structural inequalities.

Mr. Chairman,

Addressing Gender Based Violence remains a matter of particular urgency and the campaign launched by the Secretary-General "Unite to End Violence Against Women," continues to be a useful vehicle in that regard. Last July, the CARICOM Secretariat in conjunction with UN Women convened a workshop titled "Caribbean Artistes UNITE-ing against gender-based violence," to raise awareness on this phenomenon and to use edutainment (education through entertainment) to promote positive attitudes and behaviours, with a view to creating a more gender responsive community. The CARICOM Secretariat expects to shortly release a groundbreaking report on "Youth, Masculinities and Violence in CARICOM," based on a study on gender-based violence in the region. Clearly, an

effective response to such violence necessitates greater advocacy, the implementation of legislative, administrative and institutional measures, including the provision of specialized services and the allocation of additional resources.

Increasing the participation of women in politics and decision making is another challenge for CARICOM States. In spite of the attainment of high levels of education by women, men continue to dominate positions of power and decision making. The general lack of quota laws on the representation of women in Parliament added to the fact that elections could alter the gender distribution in this important decision-making forum, undermines greater progress in this area. The target of 30 per cent, as the minimum level of women in decision making in the political, public and private sectors nevertheless remains a standard for achievement and efforts are ongoing to increase the quantitative and qualitative participation of women in leadership.

The health status of women, as that of the society as a whole, is a source of perennial concern. The Beijing Platform and Programme of Action clearly articulates women's rights to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health and across the region emphasis is being placed on increasing the access of women to health services. The feminization of HIV/AIDS required the adoption of several measures including gender mainstreaming in national HIV/AIDS programmes, which are yielding positive results. More recently, greater attention has been placed on non-communicable diseases such as cardiovascular diseases, cancers, chronic respiratory diseases and diabetes and their impact on women, both from a health as well as a developmental perspective. CARICOM is heartened by the adoption last September of Declaration of the High Level Meeting of the General Assembly on the prevention and Control of non-Communicable Diseases. A number of strategic plans have been developed to combat the epidemic of NCDs in CARICOM States and we look forward to developing the necessary partnerships to reverse the growth of NCDs in the region.

Mr. Chairman,

The strengthening of international machinery to address women's issues is a shared responsibility of the international community. CARICOM welcomes the operationalization of UN Women, which, we hope, will be instrumental in bringing coherence to and leading efforts in the promotion of gender equality within the UN system. We take note of the UN Women Strategic Plan 2011-2013, and in consideration of the funds required for the effective implementation of that Plan, we encourage States which are in a position to do so to increase their voluntary contributions to the budget of UN Women.

Mr. Chairman,

The situation of rural women must remain a priority given that the overwhelming majority of the world's women and girls live in rural areas. On October 11th this year, the international community will again celebrate International Day for Rural women, a day dedicated to the recognition of "the critical role and contribution of rural women, including indigenous women, in enhancing agricultural and rural development, improving food security and eradicating rural poverty." Rural women make important contributions to community development, 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 areas. In recognition of the importance of agriculture to rural development and employment, CARICOM Heads have 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 reiterate our call for the end to unfair competition and agricultural trade distortions and an inclusive international economic system.

Mr. Chairman,

In closing CARICOM wishes to pay tribute to the life and memory of noted environmentalist and women's activist Dr. Wangari Mathai of Kenya, whose passing has saddened us all. Dr. Wangari's trailblazing activities and contributions to humanity will long be remembered and serve as a source of inspiration, especially to young women and girls who aspire to work in non-traditional areas. Our Community also wishes to pay tribute to the three female joint recipients of that Prize in 2011, Her Excellency Ms Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, President of Liberia, her compatriot, Ms Leymah Gbowee, and Ms tawakkul Karman of Yemen. If our arguments in favour of women possessing the capability of being a potent force for change in society needed any endorsement, there can hardly be any more robust than the awarding of the Prize to these three women, and it is a fortunate coincidence that the award was made on the very eve of our debate on Women. We naturally hope that women everywhere would take courage and inspiration from this development.

Mr. Chairman,

The Beijing Conference has provided the blueprint for the advancement of women. CARICOM calls for the intensification of international action to address the remaining challenges to its full and effective implementation. We believe that the demonstration of political will, the honouring of obligations with regard to overseas development assistance, the development of partnerships nationally, regionally and internationally as well as the involvement of men and boys are critical to the promotion of gender equality and the advancement of women.

I thank you.