



TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO

PERMANENT MISSION OF TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO TO THE UNITED NATIONS
122 East 42nd Street, 39th Floor • New York, N.Y. 10168 • Tel.: (212) 697-7620 • Fax: (212) 682-3580

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STATEMENT

by

H.E. Mr. Rodney Charles
Ambassador/Permanent Representative
of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago
to the United Nations

on

Agenda Item 28 (a) and (b)

“Advancement of Women” and the
“Follow-up to the Implementation of the
outcome of the Fourth World Conference
on Women and of the twenty-third special
session of the General Assembly”

in the
Third Committee
of the
Sixty-sixth session of the
United Nations General Assembly

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New York
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Mr. Chairman,

I wish to join previous speakers in congratulating you and the other members of the bureau on your election to preside over the deliberations of this committee for the current session. You can be assured that the Trinidad and Tobago delegation will work with you and other delegations in order to bring a successful conclusion to all of our deliberations.

We also wish to align ourselves with the statements delivered by Argentina on behalf of the Group of 77 and China and by Guyana on behalf of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM).

Mr. Chairman,

The Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago remains committed to ensuring that our society is a more gender-sensitive one, with a greater awareness of issues concerning women and girls. Consequently, gender equality and the empowerment of women continue to be a priority on the national agenda.

Trinidad and Tobago also remains committed to implementing fully the provisions of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action as well its obligations under the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women ("CEDAW"), and all other relevant human rights instruments to which Trinidad and Tobago is a State Party. Our obligations under these mechanisms are implemented domestically through different pieces of legislation geared towards the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women. In this regard, our civil, criminal and administrative laws include provisions for the prevention, punishment and eradication of violence against women and other obstacles which inhibit the advancement of women and girls. We have also enacted laws to protect the rights of women relating to matrimony, domestic violence, legal aid and advice, maternity, co-habitational relationships, and occupational safety and health. The underlying objective of these legislative actions is the protection and empowerment of the women in our society.

In recognition of the cross-cutting nature of gender issues and the need to integrate these issues into national policy, as well as the important contribution of women to national development, the Government continues to advance the process of establishing a national policy on Gender and Development. Spearheading this initiative is the recently established, Ministry of Gender, Youth and Child Development.

Mr. Chairman,

Trinidad and Tobago has made tremendous progress in its efforts aimed at ensuring that women and girls achieve their fullest potential and make their contributions to national development. These include access to free education from the pre-school to the tertiary level. Our thrust in education has been successful to the extent that the number of females graduating at both secondary and tertiary levels continues to exceed the number of males. In addition, the

Government also provides training in the technical and vocational fields for vulnerable groups in society, including women, in the areas of unemployment relief, non-traditional skills, multi-sector skills and youth apprenticeship programmes. Our success in the sphere of education has given true meaning to the words of former Secretary-General, Kofi Annan who asserted that, "there is no tool for development more effective than the education of girls".

Women and girls are also able to benefit from many health services which are free to the public, which include a network of hospitals and health care centres. These facilities are complemented with the provision of pharmaceutical and other grants, as well as the Chronic Disease Assistance Programme (CDAP) which provides prescription drugs and other pharmaceutical items free of charge to older persons to combat certain health conditions, in particular, non-communicable diseases, such as diabetes and cardiovascular diseases.

In addition, the Government of Trinidad and Tobago is aware of the increasing burdens being placed on working women which sometimes affect their ability to adequately nurture their children. Consequently, proposals have been formulated to pass laws and regulations which would make the working environment more conducive by providing more flexible working hours for women, as well as facilities such as daycare centres and where lactating mothers can nurse their infants. Consideration is also being given to extending the time granted to mothers as maternity leave.

Mr. Chairman,

True democracy, development and lasting peace can only be achieved if women are provided with equal opportunities to participate in decision-making at all levels in order to contribute to the transformation of their societies. In an attempt to promote this objective, Trinidad and Tobago piloted the first ever resolution on "*women, disarmament, non-proliferation and arms control*", which was adopted by consensus during the 65th session of the United Nations General Assembly.

In addition, the Honourable Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago, as the first woman Chair-in-Office of the Commonwealth, has advanced the Commonwealth Theme for 2011 - "Women as Agents of Change". Her commitment to advancing this agenda resulted in the convening of a Caribbean Regional Colloquium on "Women leaders as agents of change" in Port of Spain in June 2011, which brought together women politicians from North America, Latin America and the Caribbean. This event, co-sponsored by Trinidad and Tobago, the Caribbean Institute for Women in Leadership (CiWiL), the Organization of American States ("OAS") and the Commonwealth culminated in the adoption of the Port of Spain Consensus on *Transformational Leadership in Gender Equality*.

On the global plane, Prime Minister Persad-Bissessar also co-hosted a high-level side event on "Women's Political Participation" at United Nations Headquarters on September 19, 2011 along with the Heads of UN Women, UNDP, and a number of other women world leaders.

At this event, the Honourable Prime Minister announced the appointment in Trinidad and Tobago of special envoys on women and girls and her intention to introduce a gender-responsive budget, as well as enhance gender-responsive national development planning. Further, the Prime Minister announced her intention to establish a National Commission on Gender Equality which would include women from all sectors of society to advise and support the Government in its efforts to advance women's rights in Trinidad and Tobago.

The Government of Trinidad and Tobago, moreover, is undertaking to transform our governance system through schemes which would increase women's participation at all levels of the electoral and political processes. Coupled to this are initiatives aimed at increasing the involvement of women in other areas of public life, as well as in the private sector. The Government intends to support these efforts by providing gender awareness training for recruiting bodies, including political parties, to ensure that women participate equally, and to implement mechanisms to monitor and evaluate progress made in this regard.

Mr. Chairman,

While we have made tremendous strides in promoting the well-being of women and girls, we are aware that national development must be balanced. It is therefore imperative to ensure that boys and men are sensitized and involved in processes aimed at achieving gender equality. Consequently, the mass media and other agencies in Trinidad and Tobago play an important role as a creative means through which gender equality, as well as mutual understanding and respect between both sexes, are promoted.

Mr. Chairman,

In conclusion, I wish to echo the words of Mahatma Ghandi who urged us to "be the change that we wish to see". In this regard, we call on all Member States to heed the words of this champion of human rights and to implement measures to remove all forms of discrimination which prevent women and girls from enjoying their inalienable human rights.

Trinidad and Tobago will continue to work at the national level to create a society where women and girls are treated as equal partners in the development of our country. We also remain fully committed to working with our partners at the regional and global levels to achieve an international order where women and girls are equally provided with opportunities to achieve their fullest potential and to make genuine and valuable contributions to the development of their societies.

I thank you.

