

**BELIZE'S REPORT  
ON  
VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN**

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GOVERNMENT OF BELIZE  
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## **Introduction:**

It is to be noted that Belize does not differentiate in terms of dealing with violence against women migrant workers verses dealing with violence in relation to Belizean women. All cases involving violence against women are responded to in the same manner.

The following report highlights those areas that have been addressed in relation to all forms of violence against women. Some major achievements as well as challenges faced in Belize are discussed.

It is to be noted that Belize's participation in the Fourth World Conference, the development of a Strategic Plan, the **Women's Agenda** (a policy document of the party which became government in 1998), and The National Gender Policy, based on a situational analysis of gender in Belize, as well as on other pertinent documents such as the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women, the Beijing Platform for Action, the Outcomes Document, the Commonwealth Plan of Action and the CARICOM Regional Plan of Action continue to be the motivating factors for the implementation of many initiatives with regards to policy development and legislative changes that Belize has undertaken over the last decade in relation to addressing the issue of violence against women in Belize.

## **PART ONE: OVERVIEW OF ACHIEVEMENTS**

One of the main priority areas for Belize continues to be violence against women.

To address the area of violence a multi-sectoral committee was established to develop of a plan of action and to assist with monitoring its implementation. To date the following have been accomplished: Family Violence Units have been set up at major Police Stations country wide, police officers, social workers and community leaders have been trained in the dynamics of family violence and basic intervention techniques, the Ministry of Health, through its health information system manages data on family violence collected by relevant agencies using the registration form, The Ministry of Health has developed a protocol for the management of family violence cases at hospitals and health centers, and the Women's Department has also developed its own protocol to respond to cases more effectively.

Several publications on family violence including a basic counseling manual have been produced and many public awareness campaigns have been developed and implemented particularly on International Day to End Violence Against Women. A Domestic Violence Training Manual is in its final stages of completion to be published in the latter part of 2005.

Belize has also ratified the Inter-American Convention, Belem do Para, which it takes into account in the development of efforts in this area.

Over the last few years, particular pieces of legislation were amended or passed in seeking women's empowerment. These initiatives include the amendment of the Criminal Code to provide for the offence of marital rape, to rationalize the penalties for the offence of carnal knowledge of a female child, provides for a mandatory sentence of life imprisonment for habitual sex offenders and makes provisions for the treatment and reporting of sex offenders. Furthermore, the law now recognizes common law unions as couples living together for five years or more and not married to anyone else for the purpose of inheritance and property rights. The law has also placed economic value on home care/child care in instances of divorce or separation and custody of children no longer depends on mother's private life.

Other legislation which have promoted equality and women's empowerment are the Sexual Harassment Act, the Equal Pay Act and most recently the law on Trafficking in Persons. Activities in the area of policy development include the approved National Gender Policy which again focuses on the five critical areas, the Breastfeeding Policy and the Sexual and Reproductive Health Policy.

The Government of Belize ratified the Convention on the Elimination on all forms of Discrimination Against Women in May 1990. Since then it has submitted its initial and second periodic report and is presently completing its third and fourth periodic report combined. The Government has acceded to the Optional Protocol and has taken seriously the recommendations of the committee and to this end has changed legislation and developed the National Gender Policy which takes into account those recommendations.

Presently, the Domestic Violence Act is under review by the Women's Department and recommendations will be made for the Act to be amended.

## **PART TWO: PROGRESS IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE CRITICAL AREA OF CONCERN OF THE BEIJING PLATFORM FOR ACTION - VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN**

National efforts in this area have focused on family violence but due to an increase in reported cases of rape and other sexual offences against women recently, work has been expanded to encompass other forms of violence against women.

Since the passing of the Domestic Violence Act in 1993 and the national consultations, several initiatives have been undertaken. In an effort to address the area of family violence a multi-sectoral committee was established to assist with the development of a plan of action and to assist with monitoring its implementation. The plan has as its goal the promotion of healthy relationships and non-violent home environments. Activities undertaken focused on prevention, early detection, attention and public awareness. To date, Family Violence Units have been established at major Police Stations countrywide. These units are equipped with trained officers who respond to reports, carry out investigations and do follow up. Police officers, social workers and community leaders have been trained in the dynamics of family violence and basic intervention techniques. This has enabled the formation of local committees in each district who facilitate the implementation of local plans.

The Ministry of Health, through its health information system manages the data collected on family violence by relevant agencies using the registration form. Annual reports are produced and disseminated contributing to new policy and program areas. The Ministry of Health and the Women's Department have both developed and now implement a protocol for the management of family violence cases in their respective units and Departments including hospitals and health centers. Presently the Police Department has embarked in a similar process and they now have a draft protocol being circulated for comments. Several publications on domestic violence including a basic counseling manual have also been produced.

Ongoing public awareness and education programs have resulted in a number of public service announcements via radio, television, newspapers, brochures and pamphlets. Posters, magnets, pens, pencils, ribbons and post it note pads have all been distributed, and rallies and candlelight vigils have been held with the aim of creating awareness and putting an end to violence against women.

The recent passing of the Trafficking in Persons Act has resulted in the setting up of a Taskforce to implement and create public awareness in an effort to convict those persons who are involved in human trafficking. Women and young girls who are involved will now be seen as victims and afforded protection under the law. In the past, these women and girls were arrested and charged and the perpetrators were not.

An integral part of the Ministry of Human Development's collective effort is to help alleviate the problems generated from trafficking which impact women and children. Belize has passed a Trafficking in Persons (Prohibition) Act to address growing concerns regarding the coerced labor or service imposed on persons as a result of their migration status or being pregnant, disabled, addicted to alcohol or drugs, or being a child. The corresponding protocol for suppressing trafficking in persons focuses explicitly on protecting the rights of women and children.

Belize has also ratified the Inter-American Convention, Belem do Para which it considers in the development of programs as well as in commemorating International Day to End Violence Against Women.

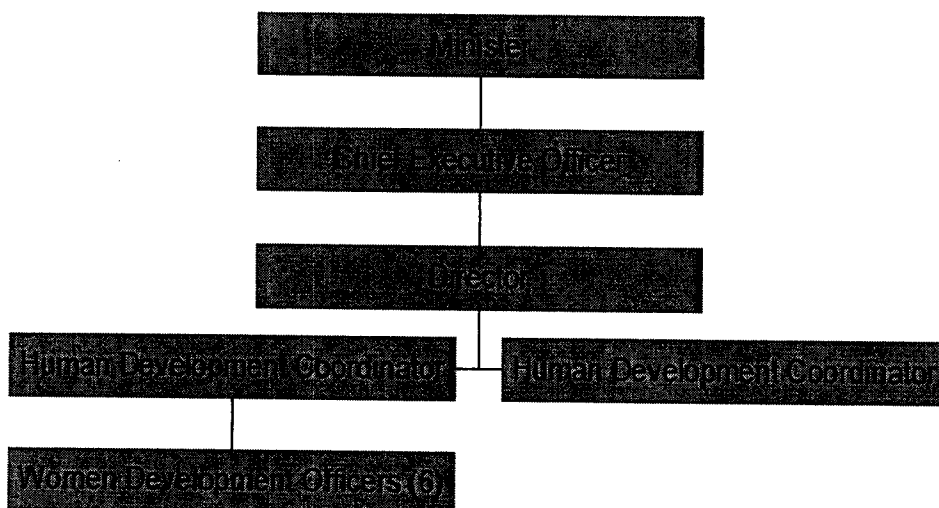
### **PART THREE: INSTITUTIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

In 1979, in response to the 1<sup>st</sup> World Conference on Women, the Government of Belize established a unit in the Ministry of Social Services which was responsible for addressing the needs of women. It focused however, on the implementation of training with the aim of promoting income generation. In doing so, the programs promoted women's traditional role of mothers, wives and caretakers. Focus was placed on facilitating home economic programs and women were taught to sew and cook. In 1986, this unit was upgraded to a Department. Staff increased but these officers were only trained as home economic officers and so the role and functions of the Department remained similar to that of the Unit. During that same year, the National Women's Commission established. The role of the Commission was primarily to advise government on women's issues. The Commission is still functioning today but its role has been expanded to include monitoring and reporting on the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW).

In the early 90's the Department was restructured and new staff was hired. It began focusing on projects that addressed women's strategic and practical needs to some extent and emphasized personal development sessions, began working on issues of violence, promoted income generating activities but also began to facilitate business training and credit opportunities. During this time, work on policy development or legislative changes was limited. The preparations for the Beijing Conference gave a much-needed push to bring the issues of equality to the forefront. Much awareness was created and it enabled the identification of priority areas as well as strengthened or began networking with other Ministries, mainly Education, Health, Home Affairs, Family Court and non-governmental organizations such as the Women's Issues Network of which the Department is a member.

Since 1999 the Department has continued to provide services delivery but now also addresses policy development and legislation. The service delivery focuses on the development, implementation and evaluation of women specific projects while the policy development section assists with the gender -mainstreaming component. This new initiative increased staff by one since we now have two coordinators, one dealing services and the other with policy. The Department is headed by a Director, and this position has the status of a head of department. The budget of the Department has increased in particular for programs. The Department now falls under the Ministry of Human Development and although it has changed Ministers and the Ministry has changed its name over the years, the Department has remained in this Ministry since its inception.

Below is the organogram of the Department.



#### **PART FOUR: CHALLENGES**

As may be noted, this critical area - violence against women - requires future action. The National Gender Policy is an excellent document that will provide the avenue for further developments. However, the development of a plan of action to give effect to the policy commitments requires immediate attention. The National Women's Commission and the Women's Department will require strengthening in order to undertake the development of the plan as well as to be able to monitor its implementation. Limited human and financial resources are a major challenge

The work of the Ministry of Human Development has been guided by the values of social justice, participation, equality and equity. Our mission focuses primarily on collaborating with all relevant partners, facilitating programs and policy development that will enable people to be self-sufficient, autonomous, responsible and productive citizens.

As a Ministry our vision is to lead in the development of people to enable them to realize their full potential and to play a meaningful role in their communities. Within this vision is the urgent need to empower women so that they are not exploited. Equally important is the welfare and the best interest of children so that they do not fall victim to the social ills of our society, especially sexual exploitation. The necessity for economic and social empowerment of women and the protection of child victims as well as providing them with the necessary support and care is a crucial component of the Ministry of Human Development's vision.

The Belize government supports anti-TIP policies and goals especially with regard to sex trafficking and its link to prostitution. Since the United States included Belize in the list of countries (tier number 3) that don't comply with the international legislation on human trafficking, this issue has become increasingly important in the public debate agenda. Due to resource constraints, however, Belize struggles with providing adequate victim protection and raising public awareness throughout the country on the dangers of trafficking in persons.