

**STATEMENT BY**

**THE HON. HAMILTON LASHLEY  
MINISTER OF SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION  
OF BARBADOS**

**AT THE**

**HIGH-LEVEL PLENARY**

**OF THE**

**49<sup>th</sup> SESSION OF THE COMMISSION ON THE  
STATUS OF WOMEN**

## **Madam Chairperson**

It is an honour and privilege to address the forty-ninth session of the Commission on the status of women. I wish to congratulate you and members of the Bureau on your election and assure you of my delegation's full support. My delegation also wishes to associate itself with the statement made yesterday by Jamaica, on behalf of the Group of 77 and China

## **Madam Chairperson:**

The Beijing Declaration and Platform of Action and the outcome of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly in 2000 underlined the resolve of the international community towards gender equality and the advancement of women. In light of this, the Government of Barbados has committed itself to these principles in all spheres of life, through a reliance on democracy, good governance, gender equality and equity and the promotion and protection of human rights.

In respect of innovation in institutional arrangements for promoting gender equality at national level, the Government of Barbados in 2000, re-designated the Bureau of Women's Affairs to the Bureau of Gender Affairs. The restructured Bureau was mandated amongst other things, to facilitate a programme of gender mainstreaming of national development policies and programmes, to promote the achievement of gender, equality and equity.

Several initiatives aimed at creating an awareness of gender and national development have been undertaken. These initiatives include Gender Sensitization training workshops with gender focal points in the understanding of gender as an analytical development tool, and to assist in the identification of strategies for the incorporation of gender into national sectoral policies, plans and projects.

The Government of Barbados through its ratification of the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), and as a signatory to the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action is totally committed to the elimination or condemnation of any policies or legislation which seeks to nullify the exercise and enjoyment by women of their fundamental rights and freedoms.

In order to promote the advancement of women, five of the twelve critical areas of concern outlined in the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, were identified by the Government of Barbados as priority issues necessary to achieve Gender equality and Social Justice. These are as follows:

1. The persistent and increasing burden of poverty on women;
2. Violence against Women
3. Inequalities and inadequacies in and unequal access to health care and related services;

4. Inequality between men and women in the sharing of power and decision making at all levels; and
5. Insufficient mechanisms at all levels to promote the advancement of women.

Gender mainstreaming has become an integral component of the process for achieving gender equality and sustainable development. The ever-emerging development challenges necessitate that programmes and policies be constantly reviewed in response to these changes.

The Bureau in an effort to meet its mandate of mainstreaming gender across all Government's plans, programmes, and policies; as well as in keeping with its commitment to the establishment of an inter-ministerial Committee on gender, identified a number of persons across the public sector who would be its focal points in the various departments. Currently the Bureau has a total of sixty-eight (68) focal points representing forty-one (41) Ministries and Departments.

The fight against poverty is viewed as the key to the social and economic transformation of women's lives. In Barbados, more women than men live below the poverty line, and many of these women are **heads of households**. In fact some 44.5% of women are heads of **households** in Barbados. Government has implemented a number of programmes to assist in the alleviation and eradication of poverty, and the empowerment of women through the provision of educational and vocational training and access to micro-credit.

The Government of Barbados has taken necessary measures to eradicate all forms of violence against women. Through the national machinery for the promotion of Gender Equality, support is provided for the implementation of public education programmes to raise awareness about the causes and consequences of gender-based violence to national development. Financial support is also provided to an NGO – the Business and Professional Women's Club of Barbados to provide 24 hour counselling and hot line support to victims of violence and to manage a shelter for abused women and children.

The Government of Barbados adopts a rights-based approach to health, particularly in respect of reproductive health, and regards the availability of adequate health care as a fundamental human right, without which none of the other rights guarantee under the Constitution can be attained or enjoyed. To this end therefore health care services are provided free of cost at the point of contact between the individual and the health care provider in all health care institutions.

In recognition of the fact that gender inequality is a critical factor in the increasing incidence of HIV/AIDS in Barbados, the National HIV/AIDS Commission, located in the Office of the Prime Minister, together with the Bureau of Gender Affairs partnered to implement a National Level Programme to integrate gender in HIV/AIDS action programmes at the community level. The programme is conducted with a variety of groups and agencies. One innovative programme worthy of mention is the Speak-Sister Campaign which focused attention on the vulnerability of women to HIV/AIDS. This Campaign was delivered primarily through the use of television, radio and print media, and represented a significant and critical response to the

growing challenges relative to the rapidly increasing number of women infected and impacted by this epidemic.

**Madam Chairperson:**

The Government of Barbados also undertook, at the national level a ten-year assessment of the implementation of the International Conference on Population Development Programme of Action. In formulating its policy on population and development, emphasis was placed on improving the quality of life of its population, through the implementation of programmes to alleviate poverty, provide adequate health care services, adequate activities and improvements in the status of women.

**Madam Chairperson:**

It is evident that while progress has been achieved in the ten years since Beijing, much more needs to be done. Poverty, conflict, instability, pandemics such as HIV/AIDS, environmental degradation and natural disasters threaten and hinder the development of many countries. In addition the process of globalization and trade liberalisation has posed severe challenges for the economies of developing countries. The effects of this are most often felt by one of the most vulnerable sectors of the population: women.

Furthermore the Millennium Project Report has underscored the limited strides made in reaching the gender equality targets outlined in the Millennium Development Goals and which are inextricably linked with the Beijing commitments. While Barbados recognises that national implementation is important, it is essential that there be greater international co-operation to ensure that the :Goals related to the advancement of women are met. In this respect, Barbados urges developed countries to take positive steps towards meeting the target of 0.7% of GNP as ODA to developing countries.

**Madam Chairperson:**

In conclusion, I wish to assure you of my government's commitments to the stricter implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action to continue the process of change and improvement in the lives of Barbadian Women, recognizing that there is still need for significant changes to be brought about to improve the Status of Women.

**Thank you.**