

**Statement by Senator Prudence Kidd-Deans
Member of Jamaica's Delegation**

**To the
49th Session of the Commission on the Status of Women**

**On: Review of the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action
and the outcome document of the special session of the
General Assembly; and current challenges and forward looking
strategies for the advancement and empowerment of women and girls**

Madam Chair, Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates

The Government of Jamaica congratulates you, Madame Chair, on your election to preside over the 49th Session of the Commission on the Status of Women and compliments the Bureau for its facilitation of this meeting. Congratulations are also extended to Ms. Rachel Mayanja on her appointment to the position of Special Advisor to the Secretary General on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women. Jamaica looks forward to her leadership of the Division for the Advancement of Women. We also thank the Secretary General for the comprehensive reports prepared for this Conference.

In addition to the Statement made on behalf of G77 and China, Madam Chair, Jamaica wishes to use this opportunity to highlight some issues at the national level, including significant initiatives undertaken to enhance gender equality through the empowerment of women.

Madam Chair, Jamaica is aware that the empowerment of women cannot be achieved without upholding all the principles agreed on in Beijing and Cairo and will therefore continue to vigorously pursue its commitment to achieving these principles. We are also committed to achieving the targets of the Millennium Development Goals and to promoting and protecting women's rights in keeping with the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women and other international instruments that seek to protect the rights of women and children.

A review of 42 pieces of legislation undertaken by the National Machinery, Madam Chair, has resulted in a programme of legislative reform, aimed at eliminating discriminatory practices against women and girls. Notable among these is the passage of the Property (Rights of Spouses) Act which provides for the equitable distribution of property between spouses on dissolution of a union and which also gives recognition to common-law unions and women's work in the home. The **Domestic Violence Act** has also been strengthened to cover a wider range of persons, including those in visiting relationships, to permit applicants to apply for maintenance and allows for relief from a wider range of actions, such as malicious destruction of property.

The development of instruments and checklists to monitor the status of gender equality has facilitated the determination of a national Gender Development Index and a Gender Empowerment Measure. On the one hand the Gender Development Index indicates that the quality of life of Jamaican women has improved in terms of life expectancy, combined gross enrolment ratios and estimated earned income. On the other hand, Madam Chair, the Gender Empowerment Measure indicates that, there still remains a considerable disparity between men and women in the sharing of power at the highest levels of decision making.

Initiatives to improve gender equality and the status of women in Jamaica have been informed by a rich body of research pursued collaboratively by academic institutions, government and non-governmental agencies with support from international development

partners. In this regard Jamaica welcomes support from UN agencies including UNIFEM and the UNFPA and urge that these organisations be strengthened to continue their work to advance the goal of gender equality.

Madam Chair, the Government has also strengthened institutional mechanisms for the advancement of women with the appointment of a Gender Advisory Committee to advise the Government on strategic policy directions for its gender portfolio. The Committee also has a mandate to develop, through a broad-based consultative process, a National Gender Policy.

In Jamaica, as in other countries of the world, challenges to prevailing gender ideology have resulted in some women taking greater control of their sexuality and reproductive health. This is reflected in reduced fertility rates which have increased women's capacity to grasp opportunities for education and employment. Madam Chair, the greater involvement of women in higher education not only in Jamaica, but almost universally, is consistent with the fact that education has been promoted as the vehicle for the social, economic and political empowerment of women.

Madam Chair, these increased opportunities for women, however, have to be viewed against the background of the systemic, structural and resilient nature of patriarchal systems which, in spite of the best efforts to reverse cultural norms and expectations, continue to serve traditional interests. For this reason, Madam Chair, in Jamaica women's higher level of educational attainment does not readily translate into improved social status or economic and political empowerment.

Jamaica is therefore fully committed to vigorously pursuing an agenda for the empowerment of women. This requires, among other things, urgent attention to: issues of poverty, particularly among rural women; the protection of the sexual and reproductive health and rights of women and girls; the prevention and treatment of HIV/AIDS which increasingly is becoming a feminised phenomenon; reducing levels of all forms of violence against women and girls; addressing negative constructions and expressions of what it means to be male and female; and, engaging men and boys more directly in the continuing struggle for more equitable access to and distribution of power and resources in all spheres.

Realisation of these goals will be possible through strengthening of partnerships between the public and private sectors coupled with support from the international community and a commitment on the part of all stakeholders to transform long entrenched cultural norms which act as barriers to improved gender equality.

Madam Chair, in closing let me reaffirm Jamaica's commitment to pursuing the goal of gender equality and women's empowerment and thank you for the opportunity to address this important 49th Session of the Commission on the Status of Women.

Thank you.