

**PLEASE CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY**

**STATEMENT**

**by**

**Senator the Honourable Joan Yuille-Williams**

**Minister of Community Development,  
Culture and Gender Affairs  
Government of the  
Republic of Trinidad and Tobago**

**at the**

**49<sup>th</sup> Session of the Commission  
on the Status of Women**

Madam Chairperson,

*In order to try to keep within the timeframe allotted I will deliver an abridged version of the text being circulated.*

It is both an honour and a great pleasure for me to address the 49<sup>th</sup> Session of the Commission on the Status of Women on behalf of the Government and people of Trinidad and Tobago.

I could vividly remember ten (10) years ago when we met for a landmark conference in Beijing, China. A conference, which ensured that the positions of women of the world would not be the same again. The house from which we operated in Trinidad and Tobago was known as Beijing House and therefore our journey has taken us from Beijing House to Beijing + 10.

During the last ten years, Gender and Development has been a most complex and at times a supremely challenging platform for grappling with gender equality as a legal right as well as with the inequality and inequity emanating from the social, cultural and historical construct that constitutes gender.

Equality of the sexes is assured in the 1976 Constitution. However, this legal equality, which for many women in many countries remains an elusive goal, requires ongoing assiduous work if it is to become a reality.

For instance, greater female than male representation in the education system has not translated itself into a more equitable income distribution between the sexes. The UNDP Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM) for

between the sexes. The UNDP Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM) for 2003 placed our female population as earning considerably less than our male population. This fact when considered with the feminization of HIV/AIDS, the threat of violence against women and a perceived feminization of poverty, has presented us as policy makers with a complex and diverse challenge.

But this challenge, complex as it is, has provided us with the opportunity to effect an integrated and multi-pronged policy programme and project approach. It is this approach which shapes the work of the Ministry of Community Development, Culture and Gender Affairs, in our national pursuit of gender equity and equality. Allow me to now share with you some of this most challenging at times, but above all, rewarding work, in which we have engaged over the last ten years.

The Beijing Platform for Action and the Areas of concern have determined to a large extent the work that we do at the Ministry. The Areas of Concern which have been prioritized for national attention are the following:

- V Women and Poverty

  - Education and Training of Women

- V Violence Against Women

- V Women and Health

These four priority areas are complimented by our on-going work in the other eight critical areas of concern.

In respect of **Women and Poverty**, Governments are called upon to develop gender-based methodologies to address the feminization of poverty and this has been closely linked with the education and training of women. At the Programme level in Trinidad and Tobago, several skills training initiatives, namely:

- ✓ The Non-Traditional Training of Women
- ✓ Women in Harmony
- ✓ Gender Equity Institute
- ✓ Export Centres Programme

continue to offer opportunities to women as a means of broadening their income earning options.

As regards **Violence Against Women**, a recognized obstacle to the achievement of equality, development and peace, Government's approach has been one where the need of the victim has been addressed through the provision of remedial services and through education - the objective being to reorder those accepted gender norms which continue to facilitate the proliferation of violence against women. The concern for the reduction of violence against women has also afforded us the opportunity to work with our male population to ensure the participation of all actors.

Specific to the elimination of violence against women, our work has involved the following;

- ✓ Establishment of a Domestic Violence Unit within the Gender Affairs Division of the Ministry of Community Development, Culture and Gender Affairs
- ✓ Implementation of a Domestic Violence Hotline
- ✓ Operation of nineteen Drop-In Information Centres

✓  
an alarming rate, taken on a female face.

For Trinidad & Tobago, those females in the age group 15–24 continue to have the highest rate of infection. It would indeed be remiss of us, not to pay attention to this troubling development. We have piloted our activity by working with the rural women of our country in a project which is entitled ***HIV/AIDS Education and Prevention Programme for Women. in Rural Communities.***

Madam Chairperson, we have designed a policy framework which would guide the work to be done in the critical areas of concern for the years to come. Our National Gender Policy and Plan of Action was developed and presented to the Cabinet of Trinidad and Tobago in December 2004. The process used in developing the policy was one of which we are exceptionally proud. To ensure widespread participation, we engaged in numerous

consultations throughout the country at the level of sectors, communities and interest groups. The undeniable benefit of this process is the national ownership of the policy document, which would be of immeasurable benefit when the implementation phase is embarked upon.

To you who are present I would also like to issue an invitation for us to continue our work together. We want to ensure that this work becomes even more strategically positioned, better informed through the development of improved data collection and research mechanisms to afford more precise and better informed policy formulation, and a clearer interface between our population and ourselves. We are prepared to work to aggressively meet the challenges ahead. However, we recognize that as the challenges become more complex and the vulnerabilities more apparent, we must adjust our approaches to effectively meet these new demands.

We are not daunted by what lies ahead of us. In fact, we are energized by the challenges we see ahead, as we strive to continue to build a better future for our women. Let Beijing + 10, be another significant milestone not only to assess where we are but also to point us to the goal of gender equality beyond 2005.

*Cherish our Women*

Thank you Madam Chairperson.