



*Permanent Mission
of Barbados to
the United Nations*



STATEMENT BY

**DR. THE HON. ESTHER BYER-SUCKOO, M.P
MINISTER OF YOUTH, FAMILY AND SPORTS**

AT THE

**FIFTY-FOURTH SESSION OF THE
COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN**

ON

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Mr. Chair, distinguished Ministers and delegates,

Barbados reaffirms its commitment to the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, the CEDAW Convention, the Commonwealth Plan of Action for Gender Equality 2005 – 2015, and other instruments aimed at ensuring the human rights of women. Barbados also aligns itself to those resolutions adopted by the Economic and Social Council and the General Assembly which emphasise the issues of women's empowerment and equality. Barbados appreciates the Secretary General's report in which he comprehensively captured the successes and challenges in the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action.

Recognizing Barbados' limited resources and capacity, as well as its success in achieving access to education and health care, the absence of armed conflict and the general progress in reducing inequality of economic structures, we have centred our focus on four critical areas of the Platform for Action: namely **women and poverty; gender and HIV/AIDS; violence against women, in particular domestic violence; and women in power and decision making.**

As it relates to **women and poverty**, available data is aged and there has been poor monitoring of programmes and evaluation of the social safety nets. My government has therefore recently launched a Country Assessment of Living Conditions, to provide empirical information on poverty in Barbados. The information will facilitate the formulation of policies and services that would effectively address poverty and will provide a baseline in measuring the effectiveness of programmes.

Mr. Chairman,

Tremendous progress has been realised in our efforts to control the **HIV/AIDS** pandemic. Through an aggressive care, protection, prevention and control strategy, we have recorded declines in the number of AIDS deaths and have eliminated mother-to-child transmission by the universal provision of anti-retroviral treatments. One remaining concern however is the concentration of new infections in the cohort aged 16 – 24, particularly among girls. Our focus has now been adapted for this group, incorporating a behaviour change approach and increasing awareness of the gender dimensions of HIV.

The Government of Barbados has resolved to end the practice of **violence against women**. We have just completed a survey on the prevalence and demographic characteristics of domestic violence in order to create a national policy to eliminate the practice. We work with NGOs and FBOs and have facilitated the establishment and support of a Non-governmental organisation of victims of domestic violence.

There is a shelter for victims of domestic violence and through collaboration with the National Advisory Council on Gender and UNIFEM we are improving strategies for perpetrators which will include rehabilitation to prevent recurrence. Our challenge, Mr. Chairman, lies in our ability to change the cultural norm that accepts domestic violence as a private affair. We have begun a media campaign, along with other public actions, which we must sustain, though these will demand tremendous resources.

The Government of Barbados is also committed to the goal of equal participation of men and **women in decision making** as we recognise that this will not only strengthen democracy but will optimize the human resource capacity of our nation and aid development. Within recent years women have attained positions in critical areas of decision making in all spheres. Although the last General Elections saw a reduced number of women elected to Parliament, my government has added women to the Cabinet, Senate and Statutory Boards and Companies, including as

Chairs. My party which forms the current Government of the country, has pledged that by 2016, 50% of its slate of candidates will be women. We will continue to observe the articles of the CEDAW Convention and ensure that women are not discriminated against in this process.

Mr. Chairman,

As we address these critical areas at the national level, we appreciate the intersection between these issues: the correlation between poverty and economic dependence that makes women more vulnerable to violence and HIV infection; and the imbalance in key decision arenas that has restricted their ability to place these issues on the political agenda.

Finally, allow me to express Barbados' appreciation for the guidance and support of the Commission and the other entities of the UN system in mapping the approach to women's human rights. Barbados is currently reviewing the proposed gender entity here at the United Nations. We commend this effort but would want to be assured that the outcome does not make it more cumbersome for member states to receive the forms of support to which they have grown accustomed.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.