



# **STATEMENT**

**PRESENTED BY**

**MR. GEORGE TALBOT, CHARGÉ d' AFFAIRES A.I.  
OF THE REPUBLIC OF GUYANA TO THE UNITED NATIONS**

**AT THE**

**54<sup>TH</sup> SESSION OF THE COMMISSION  
ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN**

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Mr. Chairman,

Fifteen years after the Fourth World Conference on Women, ten years after the Millennium Summit and the thirty years after the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, this Commission is at a propitious junction to evaluate the progress made towards attainment of the strategic objectives and actions of the Beijing Platform and to recommit to addressing the constraints and obstacles to the full empowerment of women everywhere. I take the opportunity to share brief reflexions on Guyana's experience since Beijing.

Mr. Chairman,

Guyana has a firm legislative foundation for the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of women. The Constitution of Guyana, which is the supreme of the Land, provides explicitly that every woman is entitled to equal rights and status with men in all spheres of political, economic and social life. All forms of discrimination against women on the basis of gender or sex are illegal. The Constitution further provides that every woman is entitled to equal access with men to academic, vocational and professional training, equal opportunities in employment, remuneration and promotion and in social, political and cultural activity. And what has perhaps made the Constitution of the Republic of Guyana among the more progressive is the fact that it has boldly incorporated the provisions of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and the Inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment and Eradication of Violence against Women, among other major international human rights treaties, thus making the said provisions justiciable before our High Court. Moreover, Mr. Chairman, our Constitution establishes five (5) Rights Commissions generally aimed at strengthening social justice and the rule of law. Most notable, and relevant in this regard, is the Women and Gender Equality Commission tasked, *inter alia*, with promoting national recognition and acceptance that women's rights are human rights, and with respecting gender equality and the protection, development and attainment of gender equality.

In the fifteen years since the historic Beijing Conference, Guyana has registered successes in addressing several of the critical areas of concern outlined in the Beijing Platform for Action. Notable progress has been made in the achievement of the equal participation of women in public life and decision making. In the latter regard, in 1996 Guyana had its first female head of the judiciary in Justice Desiree Bernard (a former Chairperson of CEDAW), and elected its first female Head of State in 1997 in the person of H.E. Mrs. Janet Jagan. In addition, the Representation of the Peoples Act, Chapter 1:03 of the Laws of Guyana stipulates that women shall comprise at least 33% of candidates on the slates of political parties, a factor that has contributed to re-dressing the under-representation of women in government. Currently approximately 34% of the seats in the National Assembly are held by women and roughly one-third of the Ministers of Government are women, including two indigenous women ministers, one of whom serves as Guyana's first female Foreign Minister. Moreover, in order to strengthen our system of democracy, leadership training and appropriate outreach programmes catered to the needs of women in the hinterland regions of the country are constantly being offered to build a cadre of women leaders capable of equal participation in all spheres of public and private life.

Our country has also witnessed a narrowing of the gap in access to education and training of women and girls. As a prerequisite for socio economic development and a tool in enabling individuals to realize their full potential, national priority has been accorded to education which is compulsory and provided free of cost up to age 15. Increased budgetary investments in this sector combined with incentives to encourage attendance have facilitated Guyana's attainment of

almost universal primary education, though more needs to be done to address this issue particularly as it pertains to children living in the interior regions of the country. Simultaneously, education authorities are pursuing the attainment of universal secondary education under a new Education Strategic Plan.

The recognition of the critical importance of economic empowerment to the enhancement of the status of women in society and to overall poverty eradication has led the Government of Guyana to initiate programmes to assist single parents, in particular women to acquire skills and resources to establish micro-enterprises. Plans are in place for the staging of a women's trade fair later this year aimed primarily at assisting women to better market their products while offering training on business management.

As in many other parts of the world violence against women and high levels of poverty among women continue to be areas of concern. The Domestic Violence Act of 1996 provides various remedies to aid victims of violence and is coupled with practical programmes to provide shelter, support to victims of domestic and sexual violence as well as training in life and income generating skills. However, challenges abound in bringing an end to such acts which violate the human rights of women. Guyana has signed on to the "UNiTE to End Violence" campaign launched in 2008 by U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon. Additionally, at the national level a "Stamp it Out" campaign was launched to end sexual violence and abuse, especially against women and girls. The latter campaign has resulted in the review of law and policy regarding sexual offences. Updated draft legislation is currently being considered by a Special Select Committee of Parliament prior to enactment into law. Initiatives are also afoot to address challenges posed by patriarchal beliefs, socio-cultural biases, gender specific socialization and beliefs regarding male superiority. These realities underscore the task of women's empowerment remains unfinished.

Mr. Chairman,

In conclusion, Guyana's commitment to the achievement of gender equality and the empowerment of women is unquestionable. However, it is evident that national efforts, while critical, are by themselves insufficient for the achievement of the objectives of the Beijing Platform. What is more, issues concerning women cannot be tackled in isolation from a broader development agenda. An enabling international policy and institutional environment, and increased international cooperation and partnerships are therefore no less essential. A combination of comprehensive and targeted international support for nationally owned priorities and strategies will be needed. Guyana is supportive of current efforts to consolidate and strengthen the UN gender architecture. Efforts must also be redoubled to address specific challenges such as the need to reduce maternal mortality and the prevalence of HIV/AIDS among women.

Finally, my delegation wishes to submit that while progress is being achieved globally with regard to the empowerment of women, the agenda remains pressing. We should therefore not lose the momentum but give new impetus to our actions.