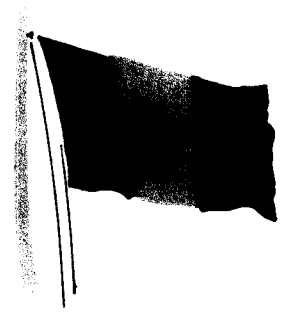




*Permanent Mission
of Barbados to
the United Nations*



STATEMENT BY

**MR. JOHN HOLLINGSWORTH
DIRECTOR
BUREAU OF GENDER AFFAIRS, BARBADOS**

AT THE

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

ON

**AGENDA ITEM 3: FOLLOW-UP TO THE FOURTH
WORLD CONFERENCE ON WOMEN AND TO THE SPECIAL
SESSION OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY ENTITLED
“WOMEN 2000: GENDER EQUALITY, DEVELOPMENT AND
PEACE FOR THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY”**

ON

FEBRUARY 28, 2008

Mr. Chairman,

At the outset I would like to congratulate you and the other members of the Bureau on your election. I am confident that you will acquit yourself admirably in guiding the work of the 52nd Session and I assure you that you have the full co-operation of my delegation.

Over the years, Barbados has been able to make significant strides in its quest for equality between men and women. There is universal access to education from primary to tertiary level, full access to health care, the difference in employment between men and women is currently at two percentage points and women's rights are guaranteed under the constitution. Generally speaking, women have a life expectancy of 78.6 years compared to 71.7 for men.

However, despite the achievements that have been realised in the years since independence, there remain challenges particularly in the areas of domestic violence, poverty and HIV/AIDS.

It is in addressing these matters along with other issues of gender inequality that the Government of Barbados has been targeting funds to ameliorate the circumstances. From a relatively small GDP of approximately 2.8 Billion US Dollars, one can appreciate the constraints of government in financing exclusive gender equality programmes. Universal access to health care and education make these sectors significant beneficiaries of government expenditure to the extent that they occupy the first and second positions respectively of greatest expenditure in all sectors. This has contributed significantly to decreasing the gender disparity among the population and has positioned Barbados to a number 30 ranking of 93 countries on the Gender Empowerment Measure. These efforts have also placed it 61st of the 156 countries that have a Gender Development Index, and overall to number 31 on the Human Development Index.

Barbados' commendable gender inequality ratio is not from government's finances alone. We must commend the role played by regional and international organizations, both in terms of policy development and in the financing of programmes that promote gender equality. My country has enjoyed excellent working relationships with United Nations organisations, international financial institutions and other development agencies. I cannot help but single out the role played by the Inter-American Development Bank for their support to the institutional strengthening of the Bureau of Gender Affairs in 2004; the World Bank for HIV/AIDS programming; UNIFEM for their training assistance to women in politics and in financing the development of a data collection protocol on domestic violence; CIDA¹ for a similar role in preparing women for politics and the work of local NGOs, who with limited finances have been able to advocate for change to improve the circumstances of women.

¹ Canadian International Development Agency

Mr. Chairman,

The experiences of Barbados that I have just highlighted indicate that small countries are very dependent on multilateral assistance if they are to attain the objectives that have been outlined in the various conventions and plans of action. With limited financial and technical resources to overcome constraints in legislative drafting, increase awareness of the population to internationally acclaimed best practices in gender relations and implement the relevant programmes and services, we must be both creative and collaborative if we are to reach our ideals. We do not expect, nor do we intend that international organisations will meet all our requests. We have therefore started to explore ways and means to continue financing for gender equality and the empowerment of women from our own resources.

Apart from expenditure on education and health, the Barbados Government has developed a comprehensive network of social programmes and safety nets to ease the burden on unfortunate victims of poverty. It is noted that the face of poverty in Barbados is a young, female, unemployed mother who is the head of the household and that the last IADB Poverty Study indicated that 59% of households living in poverty are headed by females less than 44 years old. Some of the services available include unemployment insurance which is accessible to persons who have completed a year in continuous employment and they benefit from 50% of their previous salary for six months. There is a range of welfare services that include monetary assistance particularly to unemployed mothers whose children's fathers offer no assistance; educational assistance to equip children for school; payment of utility rates and house rent as well as repairs or replacement to owner occupied homes. Empowerment initiatives are also available through the payment of fees for enrollment in educational and employment training programmes, financing of micro-business ventures and training in entrepreneurial development. The impact of these initiatives will be assessed in a new poverty survey that will be conducted this year.

Mr. Chairman,

The Government of Barbados also provides annual stipends to fourteen non-governmental women's organisations to carry out their work and totally finances the Business and Professional Women's Club operation of a shelter for battered women. In addition, in relation to its commitments to regional and international organisations, Barbados has already pledged to host the Ninth Women's Affairs Minister's Meeting in 2010 and expects to play a prominent role in advancing the process towards gender equality through these deliberations.

Through its institutional arm, the Bureau of Gender Affairs, Government has facilitated the formation of a low income women's organisation that has been mandated to bring the concerns of their members and peers to the attention of government and to recommend strategies for their alleviation. This too is in

keeping with the process of empowering women as this group will be able to ventilate the concerns of their members and agitate for redress apart from attracting support from other entities to improve their circumstances.

In closing, Barbados' advice to this 52nd Commission on the Status of Women is that though multilateral assistance from both the financial and technical aspects are critical inputs in the pursuit of gender equality and the empowerment of women, countries should not be totally or significantly dependent on these provisions. This forum presents an excellent opportunity to learn from the experiences of others and therefore, where they are applicable, strategies employed by other countries are encouraged to be adopted to assist the process. However, in keeping with the principle of self determination, women have the right to inform of what they consider as most suitable to their development and that privilege must be honoured.

I must emphasise that Barbados remains committed to the ideals as outlined in the CEDAW Convention, the Beijing Platform for Action, the Commonwealth Plan of Action for Gender Equality and all the other instruments that seek to protect women's human rights and promote the advancement of women. We hold the tenets of these instruments dearly as we aspire to be a fully developed country in the very near future.