



GOVERNMENT OF ANTIGUA AND BARBUDA

Statement

by

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I am honoured to address this august gathering on the occasion of the 54th Session of the Commission on the Status of Women, and the 15th Anniversary of the Beijing Conference on Women, and the outcomes of the 23rd Special Session of the General Assembly.

I wish to take this opportunity to express our condolences to the government and people of Chile, as well as our CARICOM sister nation of Haiti. We stand in solidarity with you in this difficult time, and you are in our thoughts and prayers.

Mr. Chairperson,

Permit me to take this opportunity on behalf of my delegation, to extend to you the congratulations of my Government, and to the other members of the bureau.

I am pleased to present this statement today, as we collectively commemorate 15 years since the Beijing Declaration, and Antigua & Barbuda marks 30 years since the establishment of the national machinery responsible for promoting gender equality and women's empowerment.

Mr. Chairperson,

The financial crisis has particularly affected women, and exacerbated the existing challenges related to feminized poverty. In Antigua and Barbuda women constitute a high proportion of workers in the tourism sector and are the backbone of service industries, where jobs have taken the greatest hit. The impact goes far beyond the loss of formal jobs, but has come to impact social support networks and institutions.

The Government of Antigua and Barbuda remains committed to the goals of the BPfA, the Millennium Development Goals, the ICPD, Convention for the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women and its Optional protocol, and other agreements that provide a solid blueprint to promote gender equality and women's empowerment, despite the economic and social challenges facing our nation and the world at large. Moreover, the Government of Antigua & Barbuda recognises that continued investment in the realisation of these goals serves as a catalyst to national development.

The Government conducted a Poverty Assessment in 2007, and continues to take steps to mainstream gender in our national poverty reduction strategies, developing a series of initiatives to promote women's economic autonomy.

Recognising the importance of women's health and rights to economic stabilization and growth, with the assistance of the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) and Caribbean HIV AIDS Alliance (CHAA), Antigua and Barbuda has strengthened access to sexual and reproductive health services, including prevention, testing, care, treatment and support for HIV. All citizens and residents of Antigua and Barbuda have access to voluntary HIV counselling and testing, and all HIV positive women have free access to medication, treatment and support.

Although acts of Violence Against Women continue to be one of our nation's biggest challenges, a number of strides have been made to address this persisting and prevailing form of gender inequality. Antigua & Barbuda has pledged its commitment to the Secretary General's campaign, Unite to End Violence Against Women, and has partnered with UNIFEM and UNFPA to strengthen state accountability and community action to end gender-based violence, particularly rape and sexual violence. Antigua & Barbuda has adopted an integrated, multi-agency approach to addressing gender-based violence, by linking the judicial, health and social services sectors.

Additionally, Antigua & Barbuda has developed a strong relationship with IOM to raise public awareness and training for the prevention and elimination of trafficking of women and girls.

In Antigua and Barbuda, women hold less than fifteen percent of our nation's political positions from the local level, to party executives, to the parliament, despite the tremendous participation of women in the electoral process and high levels of educational achievement among women and girls. Achieving gender parity in leadership remains a critical area of concern for strengthening good governance and democracy in our nation. Antigua & Barbuda is working to achieve the balance of equal participation of women and men in decision making, and contributes to the Caribbean Institute for Women in Leadership (CIWiL) in its efforts to train women for transformational leadership and strengthen the network of support among female leaders across the Caribbean. CIWiL wishes to acknowledge the support of UNIFEM, UNFPA, UNDEF, Commonwealth Secretariat and the OAS towards advancing good governance and democracy in the region.

Mr. Chairperson,

Antigua & Barbuda looks forward to the strengthening of support and assistance for gender equality and women's empowerment at the country and regional levels. On behalf of my delegation, I wish to express support for the establishment of the new UN

Gender Entity, as reflected in Resolution 63/311, and we hope that, with its establishment and subsequent operationalization, top priority will be given to ensure adequate levels of funding available for programming at the field level in all countries where there is a need and demand, including the small-island developing states like Antigua and Barbuda.

In closing, Antigua & Barbuda considers the full and effective implementation of BPfA a priority for achieving equality between women and men. As a result, we recognise that continued work needs to be done to meet this agenda. I cannot close without acknowledging the civil society organisations and partners who support us in our tireless labour to ensure that gender equality and women's empowerment are rights enjoyed by all women in Antigua & Barbuda and indeed all over the world. We could not have achieved the progress we have thus far without your support, and we look forward to your full engagement as we press on towards meeting the challenges ahead.

I thank you.

