

**PERMANENT MISSION OF THE
FEDERATION OF ST. KITTS AND NEVIS
TO THE UNITED NATIONS**

STATEMENT

BY

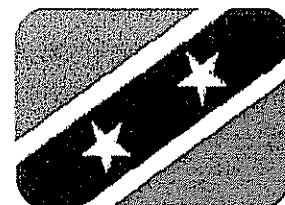
CELIA CHRISTOPHER

AG. DIRECTOR DEPARTMENT OF GENDER AFFAIRS

AT

THE 54TH SESSION OF CSW MARCH 1ST - 10TH 2010

Celia Christopher
Acting Director, Gender Affairs
Victoria Road, Basseterre, St. Kitts



St. Kitts and Nevis, one of the smallest member States of the United Nations, is pleased to be associated with the historic review of the Beijing Platform for Action on this, its 15th anniversary. Indeed much has been achieved over the past fifteen years; but the gaps that exist are sobering realizations of the challenges that must be surmounted in an effort to realize gender equality and the empowerment of women.

The issue of poverty has been of prime importance to the Government of St. Kitts and Nevis and its National Human Development Agenda in response to the Country Poverty Assessment Survey 2001; which included Social Safety Net Programmes, income generating skills training, the establishment of a National Entrepreneurship Development Division, and greater involvement of community residents in improving their lives has resulted in the lowering of poverty in St. Kitts and Nevis by eight percent (8%).

Citizens of St. Kitts and Nevis have enjoyed universal access to Secondary education for over forty (40) years and benefit from an outstanding early childhood education product. The Early Childhood Development unit ensures that both state owned and operated and privately owned and operated early childhood centers are monitored and licensed to ensure that the nation's children are receiving education that is of an extremely high quality. In addition the Early Childhood Development Unit provides support to parents who are educating their children at home, away from the formal early childhood programme setting.

Since 1997, the State has supported the participation of teenage mothers in secondary education, and over one hundred girls have graduated from high school, many of whom have gone on to tertiary education.

Women outnumber men in the tertiary level of education within the country and only in the technical Division of the local College is the enrollment of males greater than that of females.

St. Kitts and Nevis boasts a fairly efficient primary health care service, which has community clinics delivering health care services without cost to the community. These services include cervical cancer screening, family planning services, and OBGYN care for at risk, low income pregnant women. Secondary health care services are low cost, and are free to children and the elderly. Work place health screening programmes are being implemented, thus making important health information available to the population.

The criminalization of Domestic Violence in 2000 and the further amendment of the said legislation in 2005; and the passage of the Sexual Harassment legislation in 2008, are indications that the State understands the serious nature of violence against women, and is committed to lowering the incidence. Currently St. Kitts and Nevis is involved with the United Nations Development Fund for Women's multi Country Project, Strengthening State

Accountability and Community Action to End Gender Based Violence, in an effort to address this persistent social issue, which significantly affects women's lives, worldwide.

Madam chair; perhaps the most significant challenge faced by the women of St. Kitts and Nevis is ensuring that they are represented in decision-making at every level of national endeavour. Progress has been made in public sector management, and private sector management; but the area of political decision making still has not seen a significant number of women participating. In fact, St. Kitts and Nevis is yet to realize the thirty percent (30%) participation to which member states committed themselves in 1995.

Since 2002 the State Department of Gender Affairs in Collaboration with the National Council of Women, and with the support of The Organization of American States, The Australia Direct Aid Programme, and more recently the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) has been implementing training activities in Democracy and Governance for women. Progress has been slow, but in the recently concluded elections, the two female candidates who contested the elections were both graduates of the Democratic Institute programmes. One of those candidates won her seat and is now the Minister with responsibility for Gender Affairs.

St. Kitts and Nevis has maintained a Department of State to address gender equality issues and the empowerment of women since 1985. The Department has been placed in various ministerial clusters, however, more recently it has been strategically placed in the Social development ministerial cluster, thus affording it the support necessary to effectively carry out its mandate.

Madam Chair, St. Kitts and Nevis ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against women, and further demonstrated its serious commitment to facilitating the advancement of women, through its signing of the Optional Protocol to CEDAW in January of 2006. The State party is also a signatory to the Inter American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment and Eradication of Violence Against Women (Belem Do Para), and has developed local legislation to support the claims of the Convention.

Perhaps the protection of the rights of the girl child lies at the heart of the Beijing Platform for Action, since safe happy girlhood is a pre-requisite for self actualized womanhood. Legislation to protect girls from sexual abuse has been strengthened, and life skills programmes in schools as well as parent education programmes are designed to help protect girls from predatory males. In addition teen mothers have been supported by the State since 1997 to complete their secondary education, and many have been sponsored by the private sector in their pursuit of tertiary level education. I place on record the profound gratitude of the government and people of St. Kitts and Nevis to the United Nations Children Fund for its support of the teen mother programme since 1997.

The road since Beijing has been fraught with challenges, but it has presented glorious opportunities for advancing the gender equality agenda. Many of these opportunities have been seized, but some have been missed. In patriarchal, yet matrifocal societies such as exist in St. Kitts and Nevis, cultural norms mutilate against the claims for an egalitarian society; but as the state continues to provide leadership in this area, both through policy and practice, the next fifteen years should find us much further along.

Madam Chair, I thank you.