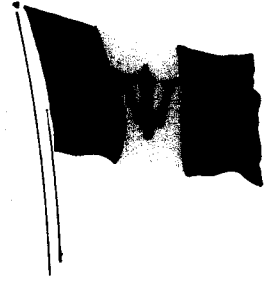




*Permanent Mission
of Barbados to
the United Nations*



STATEMENT BY

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

AT THE

**FIFTH-THIRD SESSION OF THE COMMISSION ON THE
STATUS OF WOMEN**

ON

MARCH 2, 2009

Mr. Chairman,

It my pleasure to address this assembly and share my country's perspective on the priority theme: The equal sharing of responsibilities between women and men, including caregiving in the context of HIV/AIDS. At the outset, my delegation wishes to align itself with the statement made earlier by Sudan on behalf of the Group of 77 and China.

Barbados can proudly claim a tradition of respect for the rights of women and men. In spite of the absence of anti-discrimination legislation on the basis of gender, successive governments have adopted policies that seek to promote harmonious relationships between the sexes and have developed programmes for the equal benefit of women and men. We have made significant progress in attaining Millennium Development Goals Numbers Two, Four and Five and these have placed our population in the forefront of realising Goal Number Three which is Promoting Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women.

Our employment figures indicate a closing of the gap between male and female employment where females account for 48.6% of the labour force. In the area of education, 68% of the enrollment at the University of the West Indies is female and there is near equal enrollment at the primary and secondary school levels. Women also hold significant positions in the judiciary and in some professional fields and are over-represented in clerical and care-giving occupations in conformity with international patterns.

Mr. Chairman,

What all this indicates is that women in Barbados have assumed increasing responsibilities in the labour market, although they have not been absolved of their roles as caregivers in either the private and public realms. This is extremely burdensome on lower income women who lack the resources to pay for assistance. They risk losing their jobs, and the state offers them minimal support.

As in most patriarchal societies, Barbadian men do not generally share responsibility for providing care to children or relatives. In recent years however there has been a steady increase in men who are performing caregiving roles particularly as they relate to their children. More men are taking their children to school, to the doctor and lending support in

recreational and sporting events. The absence of time-use surveys prevents us having the empirical evidence to indicate among which groups of men this practice is more prevalent

Mr. Chairman,

In the context of HIV/AIDS, men's involvement in care is difficult to ascertain in the absence of appropriate studies. However, government in association with international and regional organisations as well as local NGOs have embarked on a series of programmes to modify the concept of masculinity to reduce men's risk of contracting HIV. The altered ideological perceptions would promote greater involvement in non-traditional roles. A series of workshops have been held with adolescent males focusing on gender and HIV/AIDS; there have been developmental programmes targeting

'men at risk'; programmes have been taken to the churches to alter ideologies of gender roles; and a series of seminars and workshops have been conducted with public sector employees as part of the process of gender awareness and sensitivity training in order to promote gender mainstreaming.

At the practical level, men have been encouraged to join the staff of Home Care workers who provide home based services to the elderly, chronically ill and disabled clients. There are sixteen HIV/AIDS Community Committees that all have a complement of men among their ranks and they seek to encourage community personnel to participate in providing services to PLWAs on a voluntary basis. This is in an effort to increase the numbers of males who provide care services at both the community and institutional levels. Success has been greater in the volunteer sector, but limited in the paid sector as wages are low when compared to traditional male occupations.

Mr. Chairman,

Barbados stands committed to the process of increasing male participation in caregiving activities and continues to explore means to encourage more men to be involved. Towards this end a public education and promotion exercise will be undertaken in the new financial year starting in April 2009. We will

work with social institutions to promote this initiative. Government will also ensure that the benefits accrued are fully appreciated by all concerned.

With an already identifiable trend of increasing male involvement in care activities, and the complementing work on reducing stigma and discrimination associated with HIV/AIDS, we are confident that in Barbados we will be able to positively influence male participation in care activities in the home, community and institutional contexts.