



The
Bahamas

**58th SESSION OF THE UNITED NATIONS
GENERAL ASSEMBLY**

THIRD COMMITTEE

AGENDA ITEM 110 – ADVANCEMENT OF WOMEN

**AGENDA ITEM 111 – IMPLEMENTATION OF THE OUTCOME OF THE
FOURTH WORLD CONFERENCE ON WOMEN AND OF THE TWENTY-
THIRD SPECIAL SESSION OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY, ENTITLED
'WOMEN 2000: GENDER EQUALITY, DEVELOPMENT AND PEACE'
FOR THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY'**

**STATEMENT BY H.E. PAULETTE BETHEL
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF
THE COMMONWEALTH OF THE BAHAMAS
TO THE UNITED NATIONS**

16 OCTOBER, 2003

Please check against delivery

Mr. Chairman,

As this is the first time that my delegation has taken the floor in this Committee at this session, allow me to congratulate you and the other members of your Bureau, on your election to guide the work of this most challenging and important committee. My delegation is confident that you will guide our work to a successful conclusion, and pledges its full support and cooperation to this end.

My delegation wishes to express its appreciation to the Special Adviser on Gender Issues and the Advancement of Women, the Director of the Division for the Advancement of Women, the Executive Director of UNIFEM and the Chairperson of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women for their introduction of the reports presented to the Committee, and for the sterling work they continue to undertake in pursuit of women's empowerment and gender equality.

My delegation fully aligns itself with the statements delivered by the distinguished representatives of Morocco, speaking on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, and Guyana, speaking on behalf of the Caribbean Community; however, I wish to highlight a few issues of critical national importance.

Mr. Chairman

A review of the comprehensive reports presented under these agenda items demonstrates that while the international community has recognised the indispensable role of gender equality and women's empowerment to achieving the goals of social and economic development, as well as peace and security, much remains to be done in reaching the targets we have set for ourselves. In recent times, this principle has been reaffirmed in the Millennium Declaration, and the outcomes of the International Conference on Financing for Development and the World Summit for Sustainable Development.

A key theme running through all of these documents is the importance of women's equal access to, and participation in, decision-making processes at all levels, to ensure the mainstreaming of a gender perspective in social and economic development programmes, to combat poverty and hunger, to stimulate sustainable development, and to ensure that women and girls are not made vulnerable by neglect or exclusion.

It is a source of pride to my delegation that The Bahamas has been able to build up, in its relatively short history as an independent nation, a strong record of political participation and access for women to decision-making processes. Since the advent of universal suffrage in The Bahamas in 1962, prior to Independence, and up to the present day, Bahamian women have consistently outnumbered their male counterparts in exercising their right to vote. Most recently, in the last General Elections held in May 2002, women accounted for 52% of those casting ballots.

Women in The Bahamas have also carried this enthusiasm for exercising their political rights into elective office. The Bahamas is making steady, incremental progress towards reaching targets set for participation in decision-making processes,

as 20% of the members of the House of Assembly, 43% of the Senate, and 25% of the Cabinet are women. Included in this number are The Bahamas' first Governor General and first female Deputy Prime Minister, who also has responsibility for National Security. Women also account for the overwhelming majority of top executive positions in Government agencies.

For my part, I am deeply honoured to serve as the first female Permanent Representative of The Bahamas to the United Nations. As we are all aware, I am one of a very small minority at the United Nations, and my delegation looks forward to the day when this minority grows, as we truly commit ourselves to gender equality at all levels.

Mr. Chairman,

It is clear that these levels of participation would not be possible without meeting internationally agreed commitments in other areas affecting women's empowerment. With respect to the goal of universal primary and secondary education, The Bahamas is committed to providing education to all Bahamians at the primary and secondary levels, on a non-discriminatory basis. Our female students consistently perform as well as, or in some cases better than, our male students. Our commitment to an educated populace is also matched by our commitment to a healthy populace. As has been stated in many fora, the Caribbean region continues to be devastated by the effects of the HIV/AIDS pandemic, with disproportionate effects on women and girls. In an effort to educate and protect our entire population, including women and girls, The Bahamas has embarked on an intensive and widespread awareness-raising campaign, as well as concentrated prevention, care and treatment programmes. With respect to the latter, The Bahamas Government has sought to expand access to anti-retroviral drugs, particularly for pregnant HIV-positive women, in an effort to reduce the effects of the pandemic on our small nation.

Mr. Chairman,

While the international community has identified specific areas for action in the fields of access to decision-making processes, education, health, access to resources etc., it has also been recognised that a multi-sectoral and cross-cutting approach is needed regarding women's development and participation in society. In recognition of this, and in an effort to bring disparate approaches together, The Bahamas established a Women's Desk in 1981, which was later expanded and renamed the Bureau of Women's Affairs. The Bureau, in partnership with local women's organisations, has a mandate to work towards the full participation of women in all sectors of the community, and has promoted and provided an enabling environment for women to exercise their role in contributing to the development of the country.

Mr. Chairman,

While we are proud of what we have been able to achieve in a limited space of time, and with relatively limited resources, The Bahamas also recognises that much

remains to be done. Accordingly, the Government has embarked on a process of consultation with all sectors of Bahamian society, in order to determine ways in which full gender equality can be achieved. A Constitutional Commission has been appointed to review the remaining vestiges of inequality in the Constitution, and to propose remedies. At the end of the process, it is expected that amendments to the Constitution would be presented to the Bahamian people in a referendum. I look forward to being able to report on the results of this process to future sessions of this Committee.

Mr. Chairman,

It is an inescapable fact that the world's development and prosperity depends on the development and empowerment of fully one half of humanity. We call on all states to reaffirm their commitment to the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action and the outcome of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly, as well as the outcomes of the other major UN Conferences and Summits, and to meet the targets we have set ourselves with respect to women's empowerment and gender equality, to the benefit of us all.

Thank you Mr. Chairman