



*The
Bahamas*

**59th SESSION OF THE UNITED NATIONS
GENERAL ASSEMBLY**

THIRD COMMITTEE

AGENDA ITEM 98 – ADVANCEMENT OF WOMEN

**AGENDA ITEM 99 – 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**

14 OCTOBER, 2004

Please check against delivery

Mr. Chairman,

I have the honour to intervene on agenda items 98 and 99 on the 'Advancement of Women', and '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".

My delegation fully aligns itself with the statements delivered by the distinguished representatives of Qatar, 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.

My delegation wishes to express its appreciation to the Director of the Division for the Advancement of Women, the Executive Director of UNIFEM, the Director of INSTRAW 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.

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.

In this context, my delegation looks forward to the high level review of the outcome of the Fourth World Conference on Women and the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly, to be undertaken by the Commission on the Status of Women at its 49th session in March 2005. This session provides the opportunity to review progress made in meeting the commitments undertaken with respect to the advancement of women, including economic empowerment through equal access to resources, markets and trade, protection against all forms of violence, access to education and healthcare, prevention of discrimination, increased political participation and involvement in governance. We must ensure that our outcome will be action-oriented, and will point the way forward to achieve the timely and effective implementation of the commitments undertaken at Beijing and beyond. This should also feed constructively and synergistically into the high-level event planned for September 2005, to review the implementation of commitments in the social and economic fields, and the overarching obligations undertaken in the Millennium Declaration, bearing in mind that the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of women remains one of the time-bound Millennium Development Goals.

Mr. Chairman,

We have all recognised 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, and have reached the highest levels of the judicial system with the appointment of the first female Chief Justice, who subsequently became President of the Court of Appeal and serves as a Privy Councillor.

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,

This year marks the twenty-fifth anniversary of the adoption of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women. The Bahamas is a party to the Convention, and remains committed to its full implementation. In this regard, The Bahamas was pleased to host, in conjunction with the Division for the Advancement of Women, a regional Judicial Colloquium on the Application of International Human Rights Law at the Domestic Level and a regional training workshop on Implementation and Reporting under the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, in May of this year. The judicial colloquium brought together senior judicial officials from the Caribbean Community, who examined legislative and judicial developments in the region as well as trends and common challenges to gender equality, particularly in the areas of nationality, marriage and family relations, and violence against women. The workshop brought together government officials responsible for reporting under CEDAW and for its implementation at the domestic level, in order to allow for free-flowing discussions on general measures of implementation as well as ways and means to enhance the reporting process at the national level. The Bahamas is grateful to the Division for the Advancement of Women for its initiative in organising these events. As a result of the workshop in particular, a number of Caribbean countries, including The Bahamas, have committed themselves to early fulfilment of their pending reporting obligations under the Convention. We look forward to continuing the fruitful dialogue with the Division for the Advancement of Women and with the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women in this regard.

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.