



The
Bahamas

**60th SESSION OF THE UNITED NATIONS
GENERAL ASSEMBLY**

THIRD COMMITTEE

AGENDA ITEM 64 – ADVANCEMENT OF WOMEN

**AGENDA ITEM 65 – 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**

13 OCTOBER, 2005

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Mr. Chairman

I have the honour to intervene on agenda items 64 and 65 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 Jamaica, 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 Special Adviser to the Secretary General on Gender Issues, the Director of the Division for the Advancement of Women and the Executive Director of UNIFEM 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

It is an inescapable fact that, while the international community has consistently recognised and reaffirmed the indispensable role of gender equality and women's empowerment in 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. Most recently, at the 2005 World Summit, Heads of State and Government once again reaffirmed that gender equality is essential to advance development and peace and security, and that progress for women is progress for all. We have recognised what needs to be done, now the challenge remains to mobilise the necessary political will to achieve meaningful progress.

In this context, my delegation welcomes the reaffirmation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the outcome of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly, by the Commission on the Status of Women at its 49th session in March of this year. It is clear that the international community has made great strides in creating a framework that encompasses commitments undertaken by all States 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, including reproductive health, prevention of discrimination, increased political participation and involvement in governance. We must ensure now that our focus is on implementing these targets and goals. The tools that we have at our disposal remain valid, but as yet unfulfilled. The Bahamas trusts that the outcomes of the ten-year review of the Beijing Platform for Action, and the 2005 World Summit will provide new impetus to implement fully our obligations to achieve gender equality, to the benefit of us all.

Mr. Chairman,

We have all recognised the importance of women's equal access to, and participation in, decision-making processes at all levels. 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.

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 the targets set for participation in decision-making processes, as 20% of the members of the House of Assembly, 37½% of the Senate, and 25% of the Cabinet are women. Included in this number are The Bahamas' first female 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. While we are proud of what we have achieved thus far, we will not rest on our laurels, but will continue to press towards not only meeting the quotas advocated by the Beijing Platform for Action, but also surpassing them.

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 provides free anti-retroviral therapy for pregnant HIV-positive women, in an effort to reduce the effects of the pandemic on our small nation, and has achieved a reduction of mother-to-child transmission rates to less than 2%.

The Bahamas has also ensured that universal access is provided to a wide range of reproductive health services, free of charge, in the extensive network of government-run clinics.

Mr. Chairman,

As we are all aware, economic empowerment is perhaps the most important strategy for the advancement of women. The Bahamas has, in recent years, reviewed and amended both its labour and inheritance legislation, to ensure women's equal access to and treatment in the workplace, as well as to ensure that women and men

inherit equally. The Government continues to review our Constitution and national legislation with a view to amendment as necessary, in order to remove the final barriers to women's equal participation and treatment in all walks of life. I look forward to reporting on the outcome of this review process at future sessions of this Committee.

The Bahamas recognises that advances in all of these areas – political participation, economic advancement, healthcare and education – are rendered meaningless if we cannot ensure the safety of women from violence. Accordingly, The Bahamas has taken steps to address the issue of violence against women. In 2003 the Government appointed a National Task Force on Domestic Violence. This multi-disciplinary body was mandated to review existing legislation and programs with a view to making recommendations to address this problem. We are delighted to note that draft legislation is now being reviewed. In the interim, the government continues to work closely with civil society partners to address this insidious phenomenon that threatens to undermine all of the progress made in other areas.

Mr. Chairman,

It has been recognised at the highest levels that the world's development and prosperity depends on the development and empowerment of fully one half of humanity. We must take steps, without delay, to enhance our implementation of the commitments we have undertaken, 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