



S T A T E M E N T

ON BEHALF OF THE CARIBBEAN COMMUNITY (CARICOM)

**Items 102 and 103: Advancement of Women and Implementation
Of the Outcome of the Fourth World Conference on Women and of
the Special Session of the General Assembly Entitled "Women 2000:
Gender Equality, Development and Peace for the Twenty-First
Century"**

by

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Today Mr. Chairman, I take the floor to speak to agenda items 102 and 103 on behalf of the fourteen member States of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) which are members of the United Nations namely Antigua and Barbuda, Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, the Commonwealth of Dominica, Grenada, Haiti, Jamaica, St Kitts and Nevis, St Lucia, St Vincent and the Grenadines, Suriname, Trinidad and Tobago and my country Guyana. Allow me first of all however, to express sincere congratulations to you and other members of the bureau on your election. You may be assured of the region's full support in the fulfilment of your mandate. Our appreciation is similarly extended to the Secretary General and the relevant UN agencies for the informative reports before us, which will undoubtedly enhance the level of debate on the critical issues of 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".

Mr. Chairman,

The Secretary General's report on follow up and progress made in the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the outcome of the twenty third Special Session has provided an important overview of the extent to which a gender perspective has permeated the work of this organisation. Such a development is even more striking when one considers the relatively short history of the global movement to promote gender equality and the rights of women as well as how modest is the current body of women's rights jurisprudence. Undoubtedly, the adoption of the CEDAW Convention and the comprehensive policy reforms and strong affirmative actions arising from the Beijing Platform for Action and the twenty third Special Session have become significant tools for the removal of the legal, economic, social, political and cultural barriers that inhibit the full exercise of equal rights by both men and women. These processes have been particularly successful in addressing perceptions of what was natural or inevitable as social constructs and thus contingent, open to change. For example, international law has historically placed little emphasis on women's issues and

excluded from its scope the private or domestic sphere where women generally tend to operate. Likewise, there has been the traditional characterisation of the public sphere of the market economy as productive unlike the private sphere of reproductive labour such as child care, household chores and subsistence agriculture, which was largely perceived as unproductive. CEDAW for its part, has provided for the regulation of private as well as public actions and more importantly deals with unintentional as well as intentional discrimination, calling upon States to modify or abolish customs and practices that constitute discrimination against women. For those most vulnerable to human rights abuse, including women, often lack the protection of the State as well as the power within their communities to protect and further their basic needs and interests. Indeed, in less than a quarter of a century, it is universally recognised that positive changes in women's circumstances and possibilities augur well for wider social, economic and political life. Moreover, such changes aimed at realising the goal of gender equality, require not only a reallocation of resources but also the altering of power relations and fundamentally changing the structure of social relations.

CARICOM member States remain fully committed to the goals of gender equality and are cognisant of the fundamental changes required for its full realisation. Our States form part of the 170 countries that are party to the CEDAW convention and this year another four of them - Barbados, St Kitts and Nevis, Suriname and Trinidad and Tobago - fulfilled their reporting obligations assumed under the convention. CARICOM welcomes this dialogue with the CEDAW committee which provides an opportunity to not only discuss national measures to confront women's disempowerment, exploitation or subordination but also address the complex range of cultural, religious, economic and social concerns which have an impact on the status of women. It is our hope that in the near future, CARICOM'S participation in the CEDAW Committee at the expert level could be improved since it can only redound to the benefit of this important body, which has to continually confront the inevitable tension between universal theories and local experience, that its membership reflects broad geographical representation.

Since the twenty-third special session on women in 2000, CARICOM States have assiduously sought to address persistent and emerging challenges that threaten equality, development and peace for women in our region. In addition to mainstreaming gender into key programme areas of the region, efforts to enhance women's empowerment have led to the identification of five priority areas for greater attention namely health, education, poverty, violence and political participation. In the field of health, the overwhelming focus has been on HIV/AIDS with messages specifically targeted at young people. As the international community is aware, the HIV/AIDS pandemic disproportionately affects women worldwide. The rapid spread of the HIV virus in the Caribbean has resulted in the region having not only the second highest rate of incidence of the disease globally but also the second highest rate of female infection - approximately 35 per cent. A holistic approach that looks at prevention, treatment and care is actively being pursued in the region.

In terms of education, although enrolment levels of girls exceed those of boys in the Caribbean, greater attention is being paid to the quality of education, the gender bias of educational material and whether the educational system sufficiently prepares girls with the relevant skills required for the job market. A three year work plan has been developed by the region which includes the training of teacher educators to incorporate gender issues in education modules; research on gender differentials in participation and performance in education and the development of parenting education programmes based on research findings.

With respect to violence against women, the continuous acts of domestic and other forms of violence remain a source of great concern. The region takes note that each of the six bodies established pursuant to the UN human rights treaties have addressed this social ill committed against women in their dialogue with States parties. In the Caribbean, emphasis is being placed not only on the consequences on violence but also the causes of such violence. The Centre for Gender and Development Studies at the University of the West Indies is embarking on research to determine the root cause of the violence and UNECLAC has prepared a protocol to assist in data collection in this area.

Model legislation also exists at the CARICOM Secretariat on domestic violence to help civil society and intergovernmental agencies in their research and advocacy role.

Mr. Chairman,

Both the CARICOM Post Beijing regional plan of action and the Caribbean Sub regional review and appraisal report on the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action highlighted the serious and multi-faceted nature of the problem of poverty and its effect on women in the region. It was recognised that poverty was linked to access to resources, gender biases in the labour market, lack of social support for child and family care, as well as the exclusion of women in economic, social and political institutions. Poverty was therefore particularly high among female single heads of household, teenage mothers, rural and indigenous women, elderly women and women with disabilities. At the same time, in efforts to reconcile family responsibilities with obligations in the work place, women tend to be too exhausted to participate in self development programmes which could improve their income earning capacity.

In response, Caricom countries have engaged in poverty alleviation programmes which include inter alia an increased number of pre-school and day care centres, legal reforms, establishment of human resource development centres for skills training and strengthened public assistance support mechanisms. An innovative project has been undertaken by the Inter American Development Bank to provide non traditional skills training for women in the region. Women in four Caricom countries participated in the project - Belize, Guyana, Jamaica and Trinidad and Tobago - and the courses offered included auto mechanic, welding, electrical installation, carpentry and masonry. The project included links to relevant business organisations and some of the graduates have since secured employment.

Mr. Chairman, Caricom countries welcome efforts to include a gender perspectives in the international conferences held earlier this year on Financing for Development, Older Persons, Children and Sustainable Development. These meetings

had generated enormous international attention on the potential and shortcomings of current development trends, including the effects of globalisation on the most vulnerable. While recognising that economic development does not automatically promote the advancement of women, these meetings have established that with appropriate and targeted policies, women can realize their full potential as equal partners in the development process.

Before I conclude Mr Chairmen, I must say a few words on the state of INSTRAW which is located in our sister Caribbean state of the Dominican Republic. Over the past three years, CARICOM countries have demonstrated an active interest in confronting the dire financial constraints facing the Institute which has over the years made a significant contribution to research and training for the advancement of women - and in fact remains the only body in the UN devoted to this task. The region is heartened by the excellent work done by the working group on the future operations of the Institute and applauds the group's efforts in support of the Institute. Caricom notes and supports the group's conclusion that "INSTRAW could make a valuable and substantive contribution to the advancement of women within the UN system, if reformed and revitalised properly and if provided with the necessary financial and human resources to fulfil its mandate". To this end, Caricom member States fully support the recommendations of the working group.

Mr. Chairman, with political will, genuine partnerships and mobilisation of sufficient resources, the remaining challenges to women's full empowerment and gender equality could be overcome. CARICOM States are doing their best to achieve that goal and in so doing we extend our hands to the international community so that we can all move forward together. Gender equality is not just the business of women, it involves the efforts of all.

I thank you.