



PERMANENT MISSION OF
JAMAICA TO THE UNITED NATIONS

STATEMENT

BY

DR. GLENDA SIMMS
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF THE BUREAU OF WOMEN'S AFFAIRS,
JAMAICA

INTRODUCING JAMAICA'S 2ND, 3RD, AND 4TH REPORTS

TO THE
24TH SESSION OF THE
CONVENTION ON THE ELIMINATION OF
ALL FORMS OF DISCRIMINATION AGAINST WOMEN (CEDAW)

**NEW YORK
JANUARY 26, 2001**

Madam Chair,

Assistant Secretary General with Responsibility for Women's Affairs,
Madam Director of the Division on the Advancement of the Women,
Distinguished representatives of CEDAW,
Ladies and gentlemen,

It is a privilege to represent the government and people of Jamaica at this 24th session of CEDAW, at which we have the opportunity to examine Jamaica's second, third and fourth reports on the implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women, and to present the social, economic and political initiatives and directives that have impacted on the lives of Jamaican women.

I would like to recognize the support and encouragement which we have received from the Division on the Advancement of Women and, in particular, from Ms. Angela King, Assistant Secretary General with responsibility for Women's Affairs.

From the outset, I would like to emphasize that the reports before you do not capture all the developments that we have achieved and do not reflect all the contemporary realities that we now face. Of course, there are still many areas in which we continue to face significant challenges. In these remarks I propose to highlight in this introduction to the reports developments in the following areas:

- Legislative review;
- Women in power and decision –making;
- Economic issues
- Social issues including health and education; and

This presentation is couched against a legal framework in which the concept of discrimination against women is embodied in the Constitution of Jamaica.

Legislative Review

Madam Chair,

We recognize the importance of a national body of legislation in protecting the rights of women. Jamaica has an impressive body of such laws. However, in order to lift this legal framework from the statute books, and to ensure that the systemic barriers inherent in patriarchal systems are identified and removed, we have commissioned a legislative review, the objectives of which are:

- To redress certain imbalances and inequalities in the laws that affect the status of women;

- To bring these laws in line with contemporary thinking and in line with our new sense of awareness of the role of women in the society;
- To harmonize local laws which speak directly to the promotion and protection of women's rights with the norms and standards established by international conventions, such as the CEDAW, the Convention on the Rights of The Child, And The Universal Declaration Of Human Rights.

We also recognize that all laws must be tested against contemporary realities and new thinking about definitions of equity, equality, justice and fairness. So in a real sense, our country has moved significantly in some areas beyond those on which we reported in these periodic reports.

Participation in Politics and Decision-Making

One of the great contradictions of our society is that while women are achieving at higher rates in academia, there are still too few women in positions of real power and influence in the formal structures of the political process.

While we recognize that some significant milestones have been achieved, we still have reasons for concern. Some of the important positions which women hold today in the political directorate are President of the Senate and Speaker of the House. However, after thirty-nine years of

independence, we have only two female members in a Cabinet of 17, and eight women in the sixty-member House of Parliament. These numbers clearly demonstrate that equitable representation of women in politics continues to be a challenge and point to the fact that there are systemic barriers which cannot be adequately addressed without reform of political parties and a change in the political culture which has evolved since independence.

In addressing these concerns, the Government needs the full support of civil society. We are therefore encouraged that an NGO, the Jamaica Women's Political Caucus, has been making positive efforts in encouraging the active participation of more women in the political process.

We also note, as a positive development, that the face of the public sector is changing, and that more women are holding positions of responsible authority. Some 30% of the senior positions in Government are held by women. This situation offers an excellent example for the private sector to emulate, in light of the fact that women hold no more than 10% of senior management positions in that sector.

Economic Issues

Poverty is an issue that continues to disproportionately affect all aspects of women's lives. The Government recognizes poverty eradication as a national priority, and has initiated a number of programmes to address this process. In order to ensure that women benefit equitably from all

government initiatives, the Bureau of Women's Affairs has concentrated its efforts on rural and inner-city women and domestic workers, who are generally the most marginalized in the economy.

A sector which has been identified as one offering much potential for integrating a large proportion of women into the productive economy, is tourism. The strategy for wider integration of women in the tourism sector enjoys the support and the vision of the Minister of Tourism, herself a woman, who also has responsibility for Women's Affairs. Within this wider vision of economic development in and through tourism, we will also be paying special attention to the challenges which often attend this sector, such as sex tourism, prostitution and sexual exploitation of young girls.

SOCIAL ISSUES

a. Education

In reversing the traditional stereotyping of men and women to fit socialized gender roles, Jamaica has made some significant inroads especially in the area of the retention of girls in the formal educational sector. For instance, girls outnumber boys at the tertiary level, that is, at universities and colleges. For example, data from the 1997 survey of living conditions revealed that for the 1996/97 academic year there was slightly more than twice as many females (5,967) as males (2,824) at the University of the West Indies (UWI). This trend continues and today women outstrip men in retention rates in the faculties of law and medicine and in the traditional female dominated professions such as teaching and nursing.

For all intent and purposes, the multi-layered efforts that have propelled girls to stay in school and to achieve to the level where they outstrip their male counterparts in these aspects, are the result of the impact of the struggle that women have waged along the way to equity. However, women still face the challenge of finding employment commensurate with qualification.

b. Health

In the area of the status of women's health issues, we believe that our country has made significant strides. Some achievements in this area include:

- Significant reduction in infant, child and maternal mortality rates;
- Promotion of cancer prevention in women and men
- Integrating STD prevention with family planning services; and
- Instituting of a help line in health care, counseling and support services.

However, the urgent question of HIV/AIDS demands special attention and concerted national effort. Recent reports indicate that women are now contracting HIV/AIDS at a faster rate than men. Reports also show that teens are among the age group being affected at the fastest rate by this disease. Indeed, indications are that adolescent females in the age group

10 – 19 years are more likely to be infected than any other group. Some of the factors contributing to the spread of this disease are:

- Women failing to protect themselves;
- The practice of multiple sex partners;
- The result of young girls having sex with older men who are HIV infected;
- Women's failure to control their sexual and reproductive health and their inability to control their economic independence

c. Violence Against Women

In Jamaica, we have made significant strides in addressing the issues of domestic violence and gender-based violence. We continue to be concerned with the high levels of crime and violence in the society. The data indicates that murders fall predominantly in the area of domestic violence. The Government of Jamaica has instituted many measures at the institutional level to address this issue. These include:

- Rape Investigative Units located in major population centres. Female police officers are attached to every unit and trained to deal with domestic violence and all forms of sexual abuse;
- A Victim Support Programme;
- The Dispute Resolution Foundation;
- The Social Conflict and Legal Reform Project.

The Government's efforts are complemented by the work of NGOs who run shelters, crisis centres and offer counselling services. In recognition of the services that NGOs provide, the Government grants financial subventions to some of these groups. Indeed, there are currently four (4) women's NGOs, including the Jamaica Household Workers' Association housed within the Bureau of Women's Affairs (BWA)

The Bureau of Women's Affairs is the executing agency for the inter-agency campaign on violence against women and girls and this effort has been quite successful in terms of public education and awareness. Recently the BWA launched a video on incest as a public educational tool. Incest is an issue which is often hidden because of the myths and beliefs surrounding this aspect of violence against women and girls.

As a means of addressing other aspects of gender-based violence, current review on several pieces of legislation is taking place. These include:

- The Domestic Violence Act;
- The Offences Against the Persons Act;
- The Incest Punishment Act; and
- Consideration of a Sexual Harassment bill.

Other related national milestones that enhance women's ability to make improvement in their lives on the domestic front are the tremendous

developments in rural electrification – access to telephones and other modern technology, and in some areas access to improved water and road systems.

Madam chair,

All these efforts and issues are multi-faceted and multi-layered and all are affected by the overriding issues of:

- Structural adjustment
- Globalization; and
- A Growing debt service burden

These are some of the challenges that our country now face as we move into a new century. We therefore now seek justice and equity in a situation of joblessness, lack of growth and the *'feminization of poverty'*.

We are now at a transitional period where we must renew our efforts to find creative and collaborative means to bring all our resources together in more strategic ways, so that the most oppressed, the most marginalized and the poorest amongst us can participate meaningfully in the process of development and change; a change that will lead to a time when every Jamaican woman feels that she has a measure of autonomy and real choices.

I take this opportunity to acknowledge with appreciation the assistance and support which we have received from various entities within the UN system, in particular UNFPA, UNICEF, UNDP and UNIFEM, as well as from member states within the international community, most notably the continuing assistance we receive from the Government of Canada.

In closing, I wish to place on record the efforts that have been made by the Jamaican Government to live up to its commitment to the **CEDAW** convention and the plans that are now in place to prepare for the ratification of the Optional Protocol.

Prepared by the
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