

**Statement by
Mrs. Faith Webster, Executive Director,
Bureau of Women's Affairs, at the 52nd Session
of the Commission on the Status of Women
Thursday, February 28, 2008**

Mr. Chairman,

My delegation fully aligns itself with the statement made by the distinguished representative of Antigua and Barbuda, speaking on behalf of the Group of 77 and China. Our brief intervention is therefore to add our own national perspective to this critical debate on financing for gender equality and the empowerment of women.

The Government of Jamaica's formal commitment to the empowerment of women goes back as far as 1974 with the establishment of a Women's Desk which, in the following year, was upgraded to a Bureau of Women's Affairs. From that time the Government, therefore, recognized that financial and human resources would be needed to implement policies and programmes to improve the status of women.

In 1987 a National Policy Statement on Women was developed to give expression to Government's mandate for women. This commitment has subsequently been expressed through our ratification of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and other related international treaties, endorsement of the Beijing Platform for Action, the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and the Monterrey Consensus, which have had the effect of catalysing the identification of additional strategies to finance and promote gender equality and women's empowerment.

Challenges

Currently, however, global economic conditions are presenting serious challenges to the Jamaican economy and consequently our ability to meet our gender equality targets. Rising oil prices have exerted marked inflationary pressures and adversely impacted the foreign exchange rate. A slowdown in US economic activity also has possible adverse implications for the Jamaican economy, including the tourist industry which is Jamaica's single largest foreign exchange earner. Global trade policies, which have seen the removal of preferential treatment on agricultural commodities, including sugar and bananas, have the potential to create considerable unemployment and further erode hard currency earnings.

At the domestic level, adverse weather conditions have occasioned much loss of private and public infrastructure and fallout in agricultural production, including that for export. The national debt continues to be onerous with close to sixty cents of every revenue dollar having to be committed to debt servicing.

Ongoing Efforts

Despite these constraints, and the fact that gender budgeting has not yet been introduced, the Government of Jamaica remains committed and consistently allocates budgetary resources to support and promote gender equality goals. Financing for these goals is supplemented through cooperative arrangements with other governments through their bilateral donor agencies and multilateral institutions.

In addition, at the level of domestic policy and strategy, there continues to be a number of specific small and micro-business initiatives that target disadvantaged groups. While not exclusively geared toward women, these arrangements have positive implications for women, who tend to take greater advantage of them.

These productive endeavours that generate employment are an important means of alleviating poverty among women, a significant number of whom are heads of households. It is now estimated that over half of Jamaican households are headed by females and the woman's role as breadwinner is crucial.

Partnerships

In the effort to meet programme and project funding objectives for gender equality, other forms of partnerships are also being forged with women's NGO's, the private sector and faith-based organizations. Women's NGOs continue to identify creative means to bankroll their activities. Fund raising events are an important means of financing to support initiatives such as activities of the Jamaica Women's Political Caucus, programmes which assists pregnant teenaged girls to further their education and funding to establish shelters for battered women across the island.

Gender Mainstreaming

Gender Mainstreaming continues to be pursued by Government as a strategy to ensure that gender is integrated into all policies, programmes and plans. A National Gender Policy which is now being finalized will guide the process towards the achievement of gender equality in all spheres of national life. The Policy takes a multi-sectoral approach and will dictate that funds be allocated to line ministries and their related agencies to address the differential needs of women and men.

In closing, let me re-emphasize that the Government of Jamaica is firmly committed to furthering the cause of identifying and acquiring funds for women's empowerment and gender equality.

Thank You.