



PERMANENT MISSION OF
JAMAICA TO THE UNITED NATIONS

STATEMENT BY

MRS. FAITH WEBSTER
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, BUREAU OF WOMEN'S AFFAIRS

ON THE

**PRIORITY THEME: 'EQUAL SHARING OF
RESPONSIBILITIES BETWEEN WOMEN AND MEN
INCLUDING CARE-GIVING IN THE CONTEXT OF HIV/AIDS'**

AT THE

**53RD SESSION OF THE COMMISSION
ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN
NEW YORK**

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Please check against delivery

Mr. Chairman,

Distinguished Delegates,

My delegation associates itself with the statements made by Sudan on behalf of the G77 and China, Cuba on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement, and Mexico on behalf of the Rio Group. Following these interventions, my statement will focus on Jamaica's efforts to address the issue expounded in the priority theme for this session.

Background

The Government of Jamaica is committed to strengthening measures and programmes at the international, regional and domestic levels, aimed at the empowerment of women, and in particular, the equal sharing of responsibilities between women and men, including care-giving in the context of HIV/AIDS. We recall the commitments made on the issue in various fora, including:

- the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) in 1994
- the Fourth World Conference on Women (1995)
- the World Summit for Social Development (1995)
- the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly (2000)
- Previous sessions of the Commission on the Status of Women.

As a demonstration of our commitment, Jamaica took an early decision to become Party to the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), as well as a number of other relevant international instruments, including the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Article 16 of CEDAW deals explicitly with "Equality in Marriage and Family Law" and states that the Government is required to ensure that women and men benefit from ***"...the same rights and responsibilities as parents, irrespective of their marital status, in matters relating to their children; in all cases the interests of the children shall be paramount."*** In this regard, parents of children, both women and men, must share equal responsibility, including care and financial support, in relation to their children.

Affirmative actions taken by the Government

In order to meet our regional and international obligations, Jamaica has taken several steps towards ensuring that women and men share equally in care-giving responsibilities. Despite these efforts however, women and girls continued to bear the major responsibility for domestic and care-giving responsibilities. Domestic and care-giving roles are still most often ascribed to women and girls, rather than distributed equally among family members, a factor consistent with hierarchies within families thus giving more power and rights to men than women. In many cases, the unequal

sharing of responsibilities between women and men has persisted because of cultural and social norms, traditional beliefs, and stereotypes.

Differential impact of HIV/AIDS

The HIV/AIDS pandemic has compounded the care responsibilities of women and girls and created unequal sharing of responsibilities between women and men. In this regard, it limits the participation of women in the labour market, and creates increased responsibilities for women when they are employed. Girls and young women are expected to manage both educational/professional and domestic responsibilities, which in the case of school-age females, sometimes results in poor scholastic performance and early drop-out from the educational system. The element of early and unplanned pregnancy also contributes to this latter effect. Research indicates that male roles which call for men and boys to be tough, aggressive, sexually-dominant and risk-taking are often associated with behaviours which increase the risk of contracting HIV. Such behaviours include having multiple sex partners, the use of drugs or alcohol and refusing to seek medical care for sexually transmitted infections including HIV/AIDS.

Awareness-raising measures to address stereotypical patterns of behaviour for women and men in the context of HIV/AIDS

Several initiatives have been advanced to address stereotypical patterns of behaviour. These include collaboration with a number of agencies on HIV/AIDS, and in particular, the National HIV/STI Programme. The Bureau of Women's Affairs, has been involved in extensive public education and sensitization training in schools, communities, faith-based and other organisations/institutions which work directly with gender-related issues. Several workshops have been conducted in schools, communities and among members of civil society to address traditional gender roles and stereotypes which often narrowly define the division of labour between women and men, as well as girls and boys in both the domestic and public spheres.

The Bureau of Women's Affairs has partnered with several government and non-governmental agencies to conduct training of community members - youth and adults - in respect of:

- violence on women and girls;
- sexual and reproductive health and HIV/AIDS;
- issues relating to risk reduction and behaviour change interventions;
- the development of self-esteem;
- the challenging of cultural norms and sex stereotyping; and
- other gender related issues.

Efforts continue to achieve gender socialization through ongoing training, public education and sensitization in schools, civil society and among public sector workers. The objective of these training/sensitization activities is to address stereotypical

attitudes regarding gender roles and also to allow for the valuing of unpaid work in the home.

Legislative measures to promote equal partnership between women and men at the household level and in the public sphere

It is anticipated that the National Gender Policy presently being finalized will facilitate the drive towards the full and effective implementation of the gender mainstreaming process to accelerate the process of equal sharing between men and women in the context of HIV/AIDS.

The Property (Rights of Spouses) Act introduced in 2004 continues to facilitate the equitable distribution of property upon the breakdown of marriage and Common Law relationships (after five years duration in the case of the latter). This Act will recognize the unpaid work of women and men in the home. The companion Maintenance Act will also allow for equal rights and obligations for parents including care-giving responsibilities with respect to the support of each other and their children.

Measures to support and strengthen the involvement of men in care-giving

The Bureau of Women Affairs has partnered with local NGO's and social agencies, including "*Fathers Incorporated*," to support and strengthen the involvement of men in care-giving. Through collaborative efforts, training and sensitization have been provided to correct the socio-cultural stereotypes of men as irresponsible parents and generally more harmful than beneficial to their families. A series of activities have taken place to upgrade the image of men as fathers and caregivers, through the use of drama-in education initiatives concerning the roles and responsibilities of fathers.

Other initiatives (such as the "Batterers" programme in collaboration with FAMPLAN) have been introduced to address the psychological and emotional needs of men, as well as to assist single fathers and mothers to deal with issues relating to parental responsibilities.

The Government is involved in ongoing efforts to involve men and boys in care-giving to include policies and laws (such as maternity and paternity leave policies) to facilitate a balance between work and family responsibilities. In addition, efforts have been made to integrate with development plans and programmes, strategies for involving men and boys in care-giving and also to expand the definition of care-giving to include men's willingness to take responsibility for protection against HIV transmission.

The Government has been increasing involvement of men in national programmes and campaigns to prevent the spread of HIV/AIDS and other STI's to their partners and has helped to educate the public on the benefits of shared responsibilities. Public fora have also been organized by the Ministry of Health & Environment in partnership with

several non-governmental organizations, churches and service clubs on men's roles and responsibilities in society. Other intervention programmes are in train to encourage the dissemination of information, experiences and best practices on equal sharing of responsibilities between women and men.

Mr Chairman,

As we focus our minds on ensuring optimal use of dwindling financial resources in the face of the present world recession, the Government of Jamaica pledges to continue to strategize, to increase networking and to find innovative and creative means to promote the equal sharing of responsibilities between women and men, including care-giving in the context of HIV/AIDS.

Jamaica re-affirms its commitment to the principles agreed on in the signing and ratifying of the various regional and international conventions and treaties and towards the promotion of gender equality.

It has been said that it takes a village to raise a child; but before that essential process of child-rearing is broadened to the "extended family" level, it must have its beginning and foundation at the more "nuclear" level, the level of the biological parent, of which there are two. Both these parents, female *and* male, need to share equally in all respects as practical, the burden of responsibility for care-giving in the context of HIV/AIDS

I thank you.