



PERMANENT MISSION OF
JAMAICA TO THE UNITED NATIONS

Statement by

Senator The Honourable Sandra Falconer

**Minister with Responsibility for Information
Office of the Prime Minister**

at the United Nations Women Stakeholders Forum

on

Preventing and Eliminating Violence against Women

during the 67th Session of the UNGA

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Ensuring Leadership, Coordination and Meeting the Resource Challenge for Ending Violence Against Women

The Government of Jamaica (GOJ) is committed to enabling women to achieve their full potential as participants in Jamaica's social, cultural and economic development. With the re-election of the nation's first female Prime Minister, the GOJ has renewed its commitment and doubled its effort to end violence against women.

While delivering her address in September at the United Nations (UN) 67th General Assembly, our Honourable Prime Minister stated that "issues that affect women and children must be central to decision-making process".

Several measures have been undertaken to promote gender balance and prevent discrimination. These are evident in national framework policies like Vision 2030 and the National Policy for Gender Equality (NPGE).

Jamaica has also given firm commitments to our International Partners in areas such as the Commonwealth Plan of Action for Gender Equality. We are also a signatory to treaties, including the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW).

It is our goal to ensure that women are fully integrated in the development process.

Leadership

The national machinery, the Bureau of Women's Affairs (BWA), charged with gender issues is now overseen by the Office of the Prime Minister. The Bureau's mandate is to enable women to be full participants in Jamaica's social, cultural and economic development with equal access to the country's resources.

As it is with many other countries around the world, too many of our women are hindered from achieving economic and social mobility because of violence.

The Hon. Prime Minister has commissioned a high level committee to address violence and sexual crimes against women and children in Jamaica. This committee, which is chaired by me, brings together stakeholders from a wide cross section of the society. Government organizations non-government organizations (NGOs), the Jamaica Constabulary Force, Academia, Civil Society, representatives from the Political Parties, and, the media.

We are finalizing a working document titled '*Recommendations to Address Gender-Based Violence*'. This will form the basis of the implementation of targeted and sustained activities to address issues of violence against women and children. This plan is predicated on four pillars:

- *Public Education* – to launch long-term national campaign to improve values and attitudes. To encourage the reporting of domestic and sexual violence and eliminate negative gender stereotypes;
- *Shelter* – to establish shelters to facilitate victims of domestic and sexual violence as well as victims of trafficking, and greater access to legal and other services;
- *Sustainable Livelihoods* – to achieve sustainable development and a higher quality of life for survivors of violence and their families; and,
- *Institutional Strengthening* – to build capacity and broaden the reach of the institutions that investigate violence against women and children to improve the output of shelters and other places of safety.

Coordination

Strategic partnerships must be brokered with government and civil society to ensure cohesiveness and effective implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes.

From my own experience in Jamaica, there are many initiatives aimed at fighting violence against women. In some instances, the approach is piece meal with each organization, though doing excellent work focusing on different areas or at times duplicating efforts.

The aim of the Prime Minister's committee is to review wide ranging measures and recommendations aimed at reducing violence against women and girls and to assess and streamline them so that with the limited resources the response will be more co-ordinated and effective.

The committee will present its findings to Cabinet which will also make its own recommendations before implementation of the new measures.

- International treaties and national legislation to eliminate violence against women

Jamaica recognizes the existence of international and local human rights treaties which support the elimination of gender based violence. These include the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), the Inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment and Eradication of Violence against Women, the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

In ratifying these conventions and agreements, the Government of Jamaica has signalled its commitment to addressing the problem of gender-based violence. We have enacted legislation to support these international commitments and secure the human rights of citizens as outlined in Jamaica's Constitution. These include:

- The Domestic Violence Act
- The Maintenance Act
- The Child Care and Protection Act
- Property Rights of Spouses Act
- Child Pornography (Prevention) Act

Sexual offences were once treated by law as part of the Offences Against the Person Act. In recognising the seriousness of sexual crimes especially against our women and girls... There is now a standalone Act titled the Sexual Offences Act 2009. The Act reforms and amalgamates various laws relating to rape, incest and other sexual offences, making provision for stiffer penalties.

It has also allowed for the establishment of a Sex Offenders Registry, which will keep a record of sex offenders. The regulations for the Sexual Offenders Registry were recently passed in our two Houses of Parliament. The amendments also covered under this Act include abduction and/or unlawful detention of children for the purpose of engaging in sexual acts.

Amendments have also been made to several other pieces of legislation, to improve the remedies that are available to women and girls who are victims of gender-based and other forms of sexual violence. The new and amended legislation afford women and girls greater legal protection and have increased the penalties for perpetrators of gender-based violence.

In addition, there is also a Trafficking in Persons (Prevention, Suppression and Punishment) Act 2007, as well as a National Task Force Against Trafficking in Persons which guides the Plan of Action to address human trafficking. The activities include initiatives to prevent the offence, protect victims as well as prosecute offenders.

The Child Pornography (Prevention) Act, 2009, criminalizes the sexual exploitation of children. The law aims to criminalize the production, importation, exportation and distribution of child pornography as well as the use of children in such activities. Penalties could be up to 20 years in prison as well as high monetary fines.

The Cybercrimes Act which came into force in 2010 complements legislation on child pornography. The Act imposes legal sanctions on the misuse of data and other computer-related crimes such as unauthorised access in general as well as access with intent to commit or facilitate the commission of an offence.

Amendments to the Evidence Act have been passed by Parliament to allow vulnerable witnesses, to give evidence in court proceedings by way of video link. This will allow women and girls who are victims of certain crimes and are witnesses to crime, to give evidence without being required to appear in court to face the offender.

Meeting the Resource Challenge

With the global economic crisis, funding has been reduced for gender support and other social issues.

During these times of scarce resources it is essential that we partner to share best practices on how we can combat gender based violence. Regional links will afford us the added benefits of being able to identify and monitor trends as well as introduce new dynamics regarding prevalence and estimates of gender based violence.

New partnerships can provide the impetus for a broader and more holistic approach to the global problem. We know that it cuts across lines of income, education, culture and levels of industrial development. As the UN Secretary General Ban Ki - Moon challenges us:

- *"We must unite. Violence against women cannot be tolerated, in any form, in any context, in any circumstance, by any political leader or by any government."*
- "There is one universal truth, applicable to all countries, cultures and communities: violence against women is never acceptable, never excusable, never tolerable."

References

¹ *The Domestic Violence Act, 1995 (Amendment) 2004* provides for enhanced protection for victims of domestic violence and abuse and applies to both spouses and de facto (common law) spouses. The Act also now makes provision for persons in visiting relationships.

¹ *The Maintenance Act, 2005* makes provision for maintenance within the family and confers equal rights and obligations on spouses with respect to the support of each other and their children. The Act is a companion Act to the Property (Rights of Spouses) Act where "spouse" is similarly defined to include a de facto (common law) spouse.

¹ *The Child Care and Protection Act, 2004* has been put in place to address cases of child abuse and makes provision for mandatory reporting and the appointment of a Children's Advocate and the establishment of a Children's Registry.

¹ *The Property Rights of Spouse Act, 2004* provides

¹ *The Child Pornography Act of 2009*

¹ *The Offences Against the Person Act*

¹ Under the Sexual Offences Act of 2009, changes were made to widen the category of offenders in respect of incest to include stepfathers (step relationships) and persons in loco parentis relationships.

¹ *Sexual Offences Act of 2009* –

¹ Office of the Prime Minister- "Cabinet Approves Amendments to Cybercrimes Law"- www.jis.gov.jm , September 10, 2009