



PERMANENT MISSION OF  
JAMAICA TO THE UNITED NATIONS

**ADDRESS BY**

**HONOURABLE PORTIA SIMPSON-MILLER  
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**AT THE**

**23<sup>RD</sup> SPECIAL SESSION OF THE  
UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY  
"WOMEN 2000: GENDER EQUALITY,  
DEVELOPMENT AND PEACE"**

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Mr. President,  
Distinguished Delegates,

I begin with a line from International Reggae Superstar and Jamaican Folk Hero Bob Marley – "No Woman, Nuh Cry".

This song of reassurance, encouraging women to dry their tears, finds resonance in the hearts of Jamaican women, and women around the globe who feel the effects of inequality and injustice in their daily lives.

To them, gender justice is not an abstract issue for discussion in the international corridors of power; but a practical end that must be achieved. The quality of their lives depends on it.

It has been a long hard road; and this point has been underscored by the difficulties experienced in these negotiations.

The women of the world have been meeting since 1975. Twenty-five years and four World Conferences later we are still discussing much of what we should have already implemented. This is not to deny that significant progress has been achieved by state intervention, and by non-governmental and community based organizations in a number of critical areas. But much remains to be done.

I therefore come before this great body, bearing a strong message of urgency and a feeling of hope from my country that the day will come when gender equality, development and peace are realised in the world.

This urgency is based on the recognition that while the world is changing rapidly, developing countries are neither able to keep pace with the changes, nor to tackle the backlog of economic injustice and social inequalities.

We still have many of the old challenges to face – including poverty among women and girls, and the barriers of prejudice and discrimination, some of which are appearing in more subtle forms. But there are newer and more stubborn challenges.

Over the last decade, the countries of the South have been feeling some of the adverse effects of advancing globalization; financial crises; the spread of

HIV/AIDS; the expansion of the drug culture; the seemingly never-ending armed conflicts, as well as natural disasters.

These are some of the factors that have had a negative impact on the ability of developing countries to pursue economic policies capable of generating resources for sustainable livelihoods for the majority of their people.

This point is important, because gender justice is impossible without economic justice; and on the converse, there can be no real economic justice until gender justice is realized.

Our task now, Mr. President, is to remain focussed on consolidating the gains that women and girls have made. We must continue to be vigilant and become even more conscious of the danger that women's issues can fall off the page altogether, or be placed in a secondary position when the priorities of economic and social development are being determined.

The imperative of ensuring that women have a larger voice in the decision-making process is more urgent than ever.

One area of particular interest which we would like to see emphasised in the outcome of this Special Session is the situation concerning adolescent girls.

In many countries adolescent girls are often the victims of various forms of sexual abuse and exploitation. We have no choice but to pay special attention to reproductive health issues and to the rights of adolescents.

The approach must be holistic, because a whole network of related issues is involved, linking education, poverty eradication and gender-based violence. Our goal must be not only to reduce the unacceptably high levels of teenage pregnancies, but also to make sure that our girls learn to respect themselves; gain financial independence; and take control of their lives in a personal sense.

Another area of challenge is the upsurge in violence against women. Effective interventions that will have lasting impact on the elimination of all forms of violence against women are urgently required. The women of my country have said "enough is enough" to gender-based violence; and there are encouraging signs of an increasingly strong commitment to community action that will support the necessary legislative changes.

Mr. President,

As we contemplate the future, we are constrained to take into account the effects of globalization on our hopes for sustainable human development and on the achievement of gender equity. While acknowledging that globalization does offer opportunities for advancement to those who are equipped to exploit them, we must be ever mindful of the serious threat it is posing to women and other vulnerable groups.

The competition between large-scale and small-scale economies in the global market place is particularly threatening to the women who make their livelihood in the agricultural and service sectors. Within the international community we must therefore address the economic, social and political contradictions in the application of global strategies.

These strategies, if not properly and sensitively planned, will make the poorest and most marginalized women, men and children, poorer and poorer, and even more marginalized.

Governments, multilateral and bilateral programmes of assistance must, therefore, address the eradication of poverty, as well as the plight of women and children.

Distinguished delegates, the women of my country send you an urgent message which says:

"Let us make sure that our work here is effective in removing the remaining systemic barriers and traditional practices that keep significant numbers of women out of decision-making; out of economic growth; out of the health systems; and out of the total development process in our countries".

Mr. President,

I make two appeals to this Assembly:-

First, that when the Heads of State and Government gather here in September for the Millennium Summit, women's issues are placed squarely on their agenda and given priority in their discussions.

Second, that governments move from commitment to action and aggressively implement the recommendations in the Beijing Platform for Action.

Only then will we be able to confidently say with Bob Marley -- "No Woman, Nuh Cry ... everything is gonna be alright".

Women of the world, let us move forward in confidence, because our cause is not only just, it is also politically possible, economically feasible, and morally necessary.

Mr. President, distinguished delegates, I thank you.