



PERMANENT MISSION OF JAMAICA
TO THE UNITED NATIONS

REMARKS BY

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TO THE UNITED NATIONS

DELTA DAYS AT THE UNITED NATIONS LUNCHEON

62ND SESSION OF THE COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN

***"Challenges and opportunities for achieving gender equality
and empowerment for rural women and girls"***

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Good afternoon.

It is my great pleasure to bring brief remarks to the Ladies of Delta Sigma Theta and guests during the celebration to Delta Day at the United Nations.

There is nothing quite like March at the UN when the Commission on the Status of Women is in full swing. As I walk through the halls bustling with women from every culture and corner of the globe, I am reminded of the important contribution that women offer to the three main pillars of the United Nations - sustainable development, human rights and peace and security.

The theme for this 62nd session of the Commission on the Status of Women on ***challenges and opportunities for achieving gender equality and empowerment for rural women and girls*** is meant to highlight the vulnerability faced by women as they confront various challenges. However, it also trumpets their resilience through a focus on empowerment, particularly in the context of rural women. As a member of the Group of Champions on Women's Economic Empowerment, Jamaica gets it! We fully appreciate that the empowerment of women, in all spheres and settings, is essential to their personal advancement and to broader national development.

Having an appreciation and understanding of the value of women's empowerment is one thing however. Being able to move the needle to facilitate deep-rooted, society-wide attitudinal change is a challenge of a different magnitude. Regrettably, women continue to face structural and other barriers to achieving gender equality and empowerment. We see this in the continuation of a wide range of inequities, such as in the gender pay gap, persistent discrimination, lack of access to quality education, affordable health-care and access to the financial system.

An overarching and indispensable feature of women's empowerment is undoubtedly the full enjoyment of one's human rights, particularly the right to participate in political and public life and to share in national decision and policy making, which directly affect their lives. Jamaica has had the distinction of having its first female Prime Minister and we now have our first female Foreign Minister. Moreover, the finding of the 2015 International Labour Organisation study showed that Jamaica has the highest proportion of women managers globally.

Notwithstanding these achievements, we are mindful that there is much room for improvement among all countries, at the national and international levels, before we can see full and equal participation of women in corporate boardrooms, parliaments and at the decision-making table.

This point was brought home to me by Nili Gilbert, co-founder of Matarin Capital, an investment management and advisory firm. I recently invited her to address a group of 60 UN ambassadors, which I co-chair with the ambassador of Canada. The group meets regularly to examine ways to mobilize greater participation among private institutional investors in financing the SDGs. In speaking about the under-representation of women and people of colour in the US financial sector, Nili quoted a study that shows that women-owned mutual funds control just 0.9% of Assets Under Management, while minority owned mutual funds control only 0.3% of these assets. Hedge funds also suffer from a lack of diversity in ownership, with 4.3% owned by women and 8% by minorities. As an African-American woman Nili numbers among this very small minority.

With such wide disparities it is clear that increased efforts need to be made to strengthen the collective voice, leadership, ownership and decision-making of all women, including those living in rural areas. We need to do much better in taking their perspectives into account when designing, implementing and evaluating policies and actions that affect their lives and livelihoods, as this is essential to ensuring the empowerment of women. As the saying goes, if you're not at the table, you're on the menu!

The Delta Sigma Theta Sorority Inc. has played an important role in ensuring that women have a seat at the decision-making table. Your leadership and advocacy for social justice represent a well-needed narrative for all women and girls today, particularly those facing social injustice. Amidst the tide of intolerant speech that permeates national and international discourse, this sisterhood stands as a lighthouse to guide current and future leaders.

I look forward to enjoying this moment of fellowship with you and hearing of your most recent activities. It is always an honour to partner with the ladies of Delta Sigma Theta and I wish you every success in your remaining activities for the year.