

**PERMANENT MISSION OF JAMAICA
TO THE UNITED NATIONS**



INTRODUCTORY REMARKS BY

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Advancing Women's Health and Well-Being Across the Life Course: Focus on Non-Communicable Diseases (NCDs) and Universal Health Coverage

THE COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN

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Distinguished delegates,
Ladies and gentlemen,
Good morning,

I am pleased to welcome you to this side event on *‘Advancing Women’s Health and Well-being across the Lifecourse: Focus on Non-Communicable Diseases and Universal Health Coverage*.

NCDs have been recognized as one of the greatest development challenges of the 21st Century. They constitute a serious public health threat that represents the leading cause of mortality worldwide. Global recognition of this problem was spearheaded by the Caribbean in 2007, when the CARICOM Heads of Government convened in Port of Spain to consider the region’s response to the worsening impact on its health status. This historic event became the catalyst for the first UN High-level Meeting on NCDs in 2011, which raised critical political awareness about NCDs, mobilized civil society, and led to the establishment of new policies and programmes to prevent and control NCDs.

During the 3rd UN High-level Meeting on the Prevention and Control of NCDs held in September 2018, it was noted that global progress has been much too slow and that many countries will likely not achieve the ambitious goal of reducing NCD premature deaths by 30% by 2030. Developing countries are faced with disproportionately higher rates of reported cases of NCDs. As a Small Island Developing State, Jamaica has been especially hard hit, with cardiovascular disease, cancer, diabetes and chronic respiratory disease, which constitute significant public health threats to our development.

In September 2018, the Ministry of Health published the 3rd Jamaica Health and Lifestyle Survey, which revealed that one in three Jamaicans, that is 684,000 people, are hypertensive. Of that number, 40 per cent of those persons are unaware that they are hypertensive. There are approximately 236,000 persons, or one in eight of our citizens, who are diabetic. Many are unaware of their medical status; and one in two Jamaicans are overweight or obese.

It is therefore imperative that efforts be accelerated to strengthen the NCD response, particularly when we consider its tremendous economic impact. For Jamaica, the study projected that that NCDs will lead to an annual loss equivalent to 4% of GDP, which can be attributed to losses in income, productivity, rising health care costs, as well as increased household expenses related to treatment and care.

In this respect, our efforts must be supported by changes in legislation and policies so they prevent exposure to the main risk factors – tobacco, alcohol, unhealthy diet and physical inactivity. We must also work towards universal health coverage that provides equitable access and quality care for persons with an NCD.

Ladies and gentlemen,

At this 63rd Session of the Commission on the Status of Women, it is essential that we remember that addressing women's health across the life-course remains critical, since NCDs are among the leading cause of death and disability among women.

The Small Island Developing States of the Caribbean are further challenged by limitations in health infrastructure, and specialized health resources; this has implications for women's access to timely diagnosis and treatment for NCDs. These diseases are often detected at a late stage, increasing the likelihood of largely preventable, premature death. Access to reliable and credible information and education on the critical importance of health screening and the need to seek preventive services, are essential to addressing women's health. This is of particular importance as women and girls are often not aware of the signs and symptoms of disease.

I am happy to report that Jamaica has set national targets for NCD response and undertaken research to underpin policy formulation and programmatic design. We also developed a National Strategic and Action Plan for the Prevention and Control of NCDs in Jamaica 2013 – 2018. This included the continued passage and implementation of critical legislation including: The Public Health Act (Tobacco Control Regulations 2013) and the Comprehensive Tobacco Control Bill. In addition, the National Food-based Dietary Guidelines, Physical Activity Guide and Toolkit for Workplace Guidelines and Physical Activity Guide for Healthcare Workers have been introduced. We also launched the Jamaica Moves Initiative and the associated Jamaica Moves in Schools campaign. These programmes promote physical activity, healthy eating and age-appropriate health checks in schools and among the wider population. Here at the UN, Jamaica launched the Caribbean Moves Initiative at the 73rd Session of the United General Assembly (UNGA) in New York City, United States in September 2018.

Significant gains have therefore been made. These can be bolstered by continued efforts at improving data collection systems, and increased public-private partnerships, as well as further regional and international collaboration.

It is anticipated that the discussions today, will facilitate increased awareness through the exchanges of information, including best practices from specific country examples on integrating NCDs into established women's health programmes. I am sure that you will be motivated to create equitable, and gender sensitive services for the prevention and control of NCDs, as part of universal health coverage.

Thank you.