

COOPERATIVE REPUBLIC OF GUYANA



STATEMENT

BY

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INTRODUCING GUYANA'S 7TH AND 8TH REPORTS

TO THE

FIFTY-SECOND SESSION OF THE
COMMITTEE ON THE ELIMINATION OF
DISCRIMINATION AGAINST WOMEN

NEW YORK

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Madame Chair, Distinguished Members of the Committee
Excellencies, Ladies and gentlemen

Guyana is honoured to participate in the 52nd Session of the CEDAW, particularly with respect to the review of Guyana's 7th and 8th Reports covering the period 2004- 2010. This occasion offers an opportunity for us to share our country's experiences, successes, progress and challenges, both new and old. I am pleased to provide an introductory statement.

First of all, let me introduce the members of the delegation representing Guyana today. I am Jennifer Webster-Minister of Human Services and Social Security. My colleague, the Honourable Mrs. Priya Manickchand, is currently the Minister of Education and previously served as Minister of Human Services and Social Security. There are also several Officers from the Permanent Mission of Guyana to the United Nations: Mr. Troy Torrington - Charge d' Affaires a.i.; Ms. Bibi Ally; and, Mr. Shiraz Mohamed.

Since we last appeared before this body, Guyana has been reviewed by the UNHRC UPR process in 2010 and in keeping with commitments made there has acceded to the two Optional Protocols on the Convention on the Rights of the Child and ratified the Convention on the Rights of Migrant Workers and their Families.

In the interim, Guyana signed the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, endorsed and is implementing the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action. Guyana also brought its periodic report to the Convention of the Rights of the Child up to date in 2010. Further, Guyana appeared before the Committees on CERD and CAT in 2006 and has made good faith efforts to respond to many questionnaires and

requests for information from the OHCHR, Special Rapporteurs, other UN bodies and the Inter-American Human Rights Commission.

Guyana re-affirms its commitment to the implementation of the CEDAW and the advancement of women's rights and the attainment of true equality for women in our country. In keeping with the recommendations made at the UNHRC UPR 2010, Guyana is considering acceding to the Optional Protocol on the CEDAW.

The commitments made by Guyana at the UNHRC UPR to hold consultations with regard to the abolition of corporal punishment, the abolition of the death penalty and the decriminalizing of consensual adult same-sex relations are on-going. The Minister of Education, here today, has been holding consultations across the country on the issue of the abolition of corporal punishment. The Cabinet has decided to take these three issues to the National Assembly before it goes into recess and to send them to a Parliamentary Special Select Committee which will invite and hear the views of the public.

In sum, since Guyana was last reviewed much has taken place and much progress has been made whilst some old challenges persist and new challenges have emerged. The 7th and 8th Reports before the Committee today seek to provide a good and full account of the status of the implementation of this Convention in Guyana.

Let me first give an overview of some unique features of our country against which our national development agenda is being realized.

Guyana presents a unique mosaic of people and geography residing within its 83,000 square miles. Due to its location on the continent of South America, it is geo-politically considered "the English-speaking doorway to South America". The geography varies from coastal plains

that are on average 6 feet below sea level in the north, to mountain ranges in the hinterland areas and the savannahs in the south.

Our history has bequeathed to us a diverse ethnic and cultural landscape of six ethnicities, Indo- and Afro- Guyanese, a growing Amerindian (indigenous) and mixed heritage population, with a small percentage of Chinese and Portuguese Guyanese. The three major religions are Christianity, Hinduism and Islam with smaller faiths such as Bahai's, Rastafarians, Kali Mai, and ancient spiritual practices amongst the Amerindian and African populations.

The 2002 Census and more recent demographic projections, place women and men in almost equal proportions. However more women are located in the urban areas than men, while the reverse is true in rural areas. Guyana is currently engaged in national census activities and anticipates that the results will be available in the latter half of 2013.

This combined diversity of geography, ethnicity and religion coupled with its strategic location on the continent between the Caribbean and South America offers many opportunities and positives, some negatives and many challenges. Guyana's geography provides much potential with rich natural resources and rich agricultural land but it presents great challenges and threats to actual survival as a result of climate change.

Guyana's Low Carbon Development Strategy and its Avoided Deforestation Policy demonstrate Guyana's commitment to a low carbon trajectory. Guyana is presently co-chairing the REDD+ Partnership with Germany. Through its MOU on REDD with the Kingdom of Norway it has earned \$ 70M USD in trading carbon services.

As a low-lying country with rich agricultural land and the largest percentage of the population situated on the most vulnerable stretch of

land, Guyana will continue to advocate at the international level for a reduction in carbon emissions with targets over specified times by all countries in order to save the planet.

Guyana has suffered from the unpredictability of the weather patterns and rising water levels in recent years. More specifically, in 2005 floods affected 300,000 people and destroyed the equivalent of 67% of our GDP.

Our ethnic diversity poses challenges at the political level and thus the constitutional, legislative and parliamentary reforms which evolved during the 1999-2006 period after the broadest consultative process demonstrates a good faith effort by the people, the government, the parliamentary political parties, civil society and communities to create a new model of inclusive governance.

Our religious diversity does not pose serious challenges as Guyana is a tolerant religious society. However, the implementation of some of the UPR recommendations which I mentioned earlier will require time and the involvement of the religious denominations and faith-based organizations in order to find consensus on these matters.

Madame Chair, the on-going uncertain global economic and financial scenario has presented new challenges. At the emergence of the global financial crisis, for instance, the Government had to divert funds in order to introduce specific measures to cushion the impact of the crisis on the poor and vulnerable, most notably women, children, the elderly, Amerindians and the differently-abled, with regard to prohibitive fuel and food prices.

However, notwithstanding the on-going impact of the financial and other crises across the globe and the vagaries in world commodity prices for fuel and many of Guyana's export commodities, the Government of

Guyana has continued to adopt prudent fiscal measures and has taken steps to ensure that core macroeconomic fundamentals are maintained with the aim of ensuring economic stability and resilience.

In this period Guyana has recorded five (5) consecutive years of positive growth averaging 4.4% - the first time since attaining independence and the IMF has stated in this regard that Guyana has made significant progress in prudent financial management and economic stability.

Madame Chair, Guyana today is less indebted as a nation than we were twenty years ago, with our current external debt position being US\$1.2 billion as at December 31st, 2011 (approximately 50 percent lower than the 1991 position of US\$2.1 billion), and our current fiscal deficit is on a declining trend.

The Government has expended substantial efforts to diversify our productive base which has shown increasing signs of resilience and dynamism and is now more diversified than ever before. Historically an economy driven by the production of primary commodities, we have witnessed in the last five years growth in the services sector and a more diversified agriculture sector. The latter in particular has contributed to increased food security - an essential objective in poverty eradication. Emerging new sectors such as construction, tourism, the information-based sector, oil and gas exploration and expansion of the mining sector in gold and manganese, have radically changed the dynamics of the society providing more employment and greater demand for skilled workers.

The Government remains steadfast in its pro-poor pro-growth approach to eradicating poverty, improving equal access to services and expansion on the efficiency and quality of services offered as well as creating an enabling environment for investment and expansion and

diversification of the economic base. The Third Poverty Reduction Strategy Programme for the period 2011-2015 is premised on the recognition that the advancement of the nation cannot be achieved without the eradication of poverty and will continue to build on this platform.

As a matter of policy, the Government of Guyana continues to prioritise strong commitment to investment in the social sector. It is our firm conviction that no investment is more important than that made in our people. Accordingly, large budgetary allocations of over 25% of the annual budget are devoted to the social sector with the aim of ensuring that the critical areas of education, health, housing and water and social security are addressed to alleviate poverty and improve the quality of life of our people.

Every investment in improving access to safe water for households, we believe, is an investment not only in improving the health and well-being of all of our people, but especially women and children who in the past had to fetch water for long distances. Such investments also allow women to spend more of their time and energy on self-improvement and for improved attendance and retention by children in school.

Every houselot allocated to a low-income family and / or a single parent enables a woman - and we must point out that there have been thousands of houselots distributed since the commencement of the government's housing programme in 1995 - to take better care of her family and to have security of tenure and greater pride and self-esteem. Every boy and girl who accesses education and health care means a healthier and better informed child who can grow into a more productive individual who is able to contribute more meaningfully and responsibly to the good of the society at large.

Guyana is proud of this approach and remains committed to maintaining these areas as top priorities for our Government. We recognize that although much has been accomplished much remains to be achieved. Poverty remains a serious challenge despite the fact that the last study in 2006 showed that poverty had declined to 35 per cent. However, it should be noted that Guyana is ranked as one of the countries in Latin America and the Caribbean with a very low level of inequality.

Our 7th and 8th State Party periodic reports before this Committee and our report to the UNHRC UPR process provided more detailed information on these efforts.

Late last year, our Government issued the Millennium Development Goals Progress Report 2011 which documented the considerable progress made towards achieving some MDGs as well as the challenges which remain to maintain these goals and to achieve others. Notable among these were achievements made in the areas of poverty reduction, gender equality and education, infant and child mortality, while key challenges remain in the area of maternal health.

In 2011 we documented the challenge of being faced with over 15,000 births per year across the challenging topography of our country with only 6 obstetricians in a concept note request made to the EU MDG Initiative. Development partner support was not forthcoming in this case. Recognizing this deficiency Guyana has taken steps to recruit obstetricians from overseas to improve gynecological and obstetric capacity and to place recently Cuba-trained Guyanese doctors in outlying regions of the country.

In 2012, we intend to begin crafting a National MDG Acceleration Plan with the support of the UNDP. The global commitment made by development partners will be sought in order to support these national

efforts to address key issues critical to achieving the Goals in 2015 and beyond. Without this support it is likely that some goals may not be achieved.

Madame Chair, Guyana wishes to emphasize that despite global pledges that were made, commitments have not been forthcoming in equal measure and given the current global environment donor resources seem poised to decline. Thus, Guyana is concerned about maintaining programmes that have been started with the support of the Global Fund and PEPFAR which address critical communicable diseases that affect women and children in particular. With a lack of funding internationally, there must be a responsible transition or else history may find that more harm has been done than good.

We are proud as a developing country of the efforts and investment made in offering free Anti-Retroviral Treatment and the Prevention of Mother to Child Transmission Programmes to our people. Our 7th and 8th Reports document the impact both have had on the reduction of mortality and improvement in the quality of lives of persons infected with HIV/AIDS. We do not want to see these compromised due to a lack of resources.

Despite progressive achievement in the 8th (2001-2006) and 9th (2008-2011) Parliaments with the introduction of a unique governance model and the extensive legislative agenda which saw 140 laws enacted in the 9th Parliament to bring Guyana more in line with its international human rights treaty obligations and to provide a more modern regulatory framework for expansion of the economy and business, the 10th Parliament following the 2011 general and regional elections poses many profound concerns for the future, and poses risks to Guyana's nascent democracy and political and economic stability.

This new Parliament is a first in the history of independent Guyana as Government has thirty-two seats, and one Opposition party has twenty-seven seats and the other six seats.

Of profound concern during the debate on the 2012 Budget in April this year the opposition parties in the National Assembly reduced the budgets of several key agencies by G\$20.9 billion (USD \$ 100 M). These cuts directly affect funding for Amerindian (indigenous) and hinterland community projects such as the solar electrification programme, and the community transformative economic development projects in more than 66 Amerindian villages. These were programmed to integrate these communities into mainstream Guyana and generate employment and entrepreneurship for men and women, thus creating viable families and communities. Major projects relating to our low carbon economy and investments to provide alternative energy to fossil fuels are also in jeopardy.

Guyana would like to highlight some of the achievements with regard to women and children, especially the poor and vulnerable, in this period:-

Legislative Reform

- six modern and progressive laws were enacted in the 2009-2011 period that addressed the issues of children's rights and protection.
 - a new and progressive Sexual Offences Act 2010 was enacted.
 - the Persons with Disabilities Act was enacted.
 - the enactment of other statutes which will impact upon women and children as victims with regard to audio—visual link-ups in the court, paper committals, as well as amendments to the social security law and the age of recruitment into the Army bring Guyana more in line with its treaty obligations to the CEDAW and the CRC.
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- **Access to land by Amerindian communities** has been further extended with communities holding “absolute and forever” communal land titles for some 14% of Guyana’s land mass. Representing 10% of the population, the Amerindian communities are the second largest land owners in Guyana after the state.

- **Equal access to education** –whilst Guyana can proudly say that it has virtually achieved universal primary education, the most significant advancement has been equal access to primary and secondary education by Amerindian children. In 1992 there was only one high school in the interior of Guyana where the majority of the Amerindian population lives. Today there are 13 with dormitories with over 5000 students. This is the first time that Amerindian children have equal rights as all other Guyanese children to secondary education. This has opened up opportunities to access post-secondary and tertiary education and it is being seized upon by our young Amerindians in the nursing, teaching, medical and other professions.

- the universal uniform allowance programme has had a major impact on children from poor and vulnerable households being able to attend school from nursery to secondary levels.

It is against this background that our Government strives to ensure that progress continues to be made on the elimination of discrimination against women. I now wish to address key issues in this regard.

First I would like to highlight the progress made in the area of gender equality as documented in our recent MDG Progress Report 2011 (which is posted on the Ministry of Finance website)

Guyana has made considerable progress towards achieving the Millennium Development Goals, in particular Goal 3 on “promoting gender equality and the empowerment of women”. We have met the

target of eliminating gender disparity in primary and secondary education, and will continue to strive towards parity at the tertiary level. In fact, enrolment of females is higher than that of males at both secondary and tertiary levels. We have also recognized that in order to address gender equality and domestic and sexual violence in the Guyana context, we must pay much greater attention to the social phenomenon of male absenteeism and underperformance by boys and young men.

Guyana's revised 2003 Constitution enshrined as a fundamental Right –“equal rights and status with men in all spheres of political, economic and social life” – as embodied in the CEDAW Convention.

More employment opportunities and greater involvement of women in the economy are particular aspects targeted for improvement and Government intends to work towards providing women with multiple opportunities to become active participants in society. More than ever before in Guyana's history, as a result of the Government's aggressive housing drive which is being implemented throughout the country, more women, particularly single mothers, now own their own property. Initiatives to increase access to low income housing loans at low interest rates have opened the door to many families including those headed by single parents to own land and build their own homes. This security of tenure has had multiplier effects, including providing the collateral to permit borrowing from the banks to acquire items for businesses, farms or homes.

Through the Single Parent Assistance Programme and the Women of Worth (WOW) micro credit initiative, both of which were elaborated on in our report to the UNHRC UPR process in 2010 and in subsequent follow up responses to questionnaires. In the case of the latter we are targeting women by providing opportunities for them to access low interest loans and micro-credit facilities to undertake small business projects in various fields.

Guyana has put in place legislative and administrative measures to ensure that women are not discriminated against in the workplace and that they have equal opportunity to professional and economic benefits associated with work. The share of women in wage employment in the non-agricultural sector has increased from 29 percent in 1991 to 33 percent in 2006. This positive trend suggests that the labour markets are becoming more open to women in industry and the service sectors, and that more women are in a better position to have greater economic security and well being. We now see many more women employed in the services, entertainment, media and mining sectors, and, women hold higher positions in the private sector more than ever before.

There is no collective agreement entered into between employer and union that discriminates in wage setting between men and women. In fact, recent orders passed in the National Assembly clearly stipulate the minimum standard rates of pay for certain categories of workers for whom there is no trade union representation. This ensures that both men and women, once they occupy similar jobs, are paid similar wages. In addition, wages for positions are set for men and women alike. Our labour laws, therefore are much weightier than labour conventions and have legal efficacy.

We wish to reiterate that the labour legislation currently in place does offer adequate protection for everyone and ensures that there is no discrimination between men and women.

Female representation in Parliament increased from 18.5 percent in 1992 to 32 percent in 2012. Government's role was instrumental in achieving this result through its 2001 legislation requiring political parties to include a third of women on their lists of candidates as an eligibility criteria in order to contest national and regional elections. The consequential sharp rise in female representation in the National

Assembly has resulted in Guyana being ranked 25th out of 189 countries for the highest proportion of women in Parliament (Inter-Parliamentary Union May 2012).

Women are well represented in public life generally, although there is room for increased representation on management boards, service commissions, as well as in the labour movement and the business sector. The public service is comprised of a much higher percentage of women than men with women visibly holding senior technical and administrative positions. Guyana pointed out in our 7th and 8th Reports, and to the UNHRC UPR process 2010 and in subsequent reports, that today women hold 1/3 of the places in the Cabinet, as well as women occupy the positions of the Director of Budget, the Registrars of the Land and Deeds Registries, the Director of Public Prosecutions, the Permanent Secretaries of the Ministries of Education, Labour, Human Services and Social Security, Foreign Affairs, and Home Affairs and the Judiciary.

The Constitution provides for 4 constitutional rights bodies- the Women and Gender Equality Commission, the Rights of the Child Commission, the Indigenous Peoples Commission and the Ethnic Relations Commission- which are appointed following an agreed upon consensual parliamentary mechanism. The first 3 were appointed for the first time in 2009 and 2010. Of note is that there is only one man each on the Women and Gender Equality Commission and the Rights of the Child Commission whilst women hold 1/3 of the seats in the Indigenous Peoples Commission. The Ethnic Relations Commission was the first to be appointed in 2003 but failed in the 9th Parliament to gain the required 2/3 majority to be re-appointed. The Human Rights Commission which is the umbrella body for the 4 rights commissions is awaiting the submission of 6 names from the Leader of the Opposition from which the President will name the Chairperson.

The Woman and Gender Equality Commission has been fully constituted and is functioning. The Government provides annual budgetary allocations for its office and staffing. Some donor agencies have provided support to specific programmes, which the Commission has taken up, such as sexual harassment. This Commission is mandated to monitor and to protect the human rights of women and to vigilantly guard against discrimination. Its mandate allows for it to receive and investigate complaints and to call for redress. Sensitization of the public and specifically women's organizations to gender issues and to the mandate of the Commission has been its focus in its first 2 years of existence. As all other Commissions, it reports directly to the National Assembly and in September 2011 tabled its first annual report.

Madame Chair the second issue that I would like to highlight is the area of domestic violence and sexual offences which has in the last few years received heightened focus within Government and the larger society. In addition to several initiatives we are actively engaging all stakeholders in our quest to ensure that this social phenomenon is tackled by the broadest involvement of forces in the society.

Guyana has recognized that the endemic culture of violence generally and widespread gender-based violence in particular, demands intensive and extensive strategic action and multi-layered interventions by all in our society. Hence, the Government has made this a national priority.

In 2008, a national campaign was conducted, which sought to sensitize communities across all ten Administrative Regions about gender-based violence, with special emphasis being placed on sexual violence and its increasing prevalence among women and children. The "Stamp It Out Campaign" paved the way for the enactment of the Sexual Offences Act 2010. This Act strengthens the existing legislative

framework for dealing with sexual violence by introducing new offences, severe penalties for offences, making provisions for the rules and procedures in the court, introducing mandatory counselling for victims and perpetrators, and instituting an integrated, multi-stakeholder approach. Additionally, the establishment of white zones or safe zones where victims of abuse could go to seek help and protection began and still continues. The Sexual Offences Act 2010 will be amended shortly to deal with certain lacunas that have arisen during its implementation in the Court system.

Government annually funds the Guyana Legal Aid Clinic which has as a result been able to expand its services to four (4) of the ten (10) Administrative Regions. It is anticipated that these services will be incrementally extended each year.

In partnership with the faith-based organizations of Guyanese in the Diaspora and within Guyana, President Jagdeo in 2010, initiated a massive sensitization and training programme on domestic and sexual violence where 600 religious leaders and activists from 5 Administrative Regions with high rates of violence attended.

Recognising that the culture of violence requires specific focus on boys and men, the Ministry of Human Services and Social Security established a Men's Affairs Bureau in 2011, to provide a forum for boys and men to be heard and to receive help and counselling. The Men's Affairs Bureau advocates against domestic and sexual violence and for responsible male behaviour and parenthood. It also works with male victims of abuse and domestic violence. New NGOs have emerged in the last two years such as the Men's Empowerment Network that focus on reaching males at the community levels trying to influence behaviour and offer counselling in anger management.

In its on-going efforts to ensure that the struggle to end domestic violence is kept on the front burner, the Ministry of Human Services and Social Security recently launched a National Conversation on Domestic Violence on June 27th, 2012 under the theme, “It’s Our Problem, Let’s Solve It!” which includes community-level discussions being held in seventeen targeted communities across Guyana during the period July to November, 2012. The ultimate objective is the formulation of a revised National Action Plan for the eradication and prevention of Domestic Violence. The Plan would be accompanied by a Comprehensive Communication Strategy and a Monitoring and Evaluation Framework for monitoring domestic violence cases and other reported cases of violence in our society in keeping with the new Sexual Offences Act.

Going forward we continue to hold strongly to the view that the campaign to prevent and end domestic violence requires constant, consistent and on-going consultation and partnerships between government, the non-governmental sector and faith-based organizations and adequate resources. Expanding the availability of counsellors across the country, and the need to train and recruit psychologists to provide specialized services have been identified as actions to be pursued.

Extensive government-led campaigns and advocacy work done by non-governmental organisations, has disseminated the relevant messages in schools, the mass media, in communities and at other levels, and has resulted in increased awareness. The establishment of a hotline has been another such initiative. A list of Probation and Social Welfare Officers available for this crucial task has been published. Protocols were developed in 2009-2010 to guide the police, health practitioners, social workers and the Judiciary with regard to domestic and sexual violence cases.

It is recognized that some victims, who do come forward, are deterred by the Judicial process time-frame because of the number of

steps required and the length of time taken for cases to be completed. This is being addressed through the Sexual Offences Act which underscores the importance for hospitals to establish domestic violence response areas in which victims can receive assistance from medical and law enforcement personnel.

A functioning Family Court will also accelerate the case resolution process. It is projected that the Family Court will become operational during the latter part of 2012 and will address matters pertaining to the family, such as adoption, custody, divorce and maintenance issues and domestic and sexual violence. Guyana has responded in the follow up questions to its State Party report with regard to the reasons for the delay in the operationalization of this court.

The third area which I would like to mention is women with disabilities

The enactment of the Persons with Disabilities Act (2010) is the first legislation of its kind that explicitly identifies and protects the rights of persons with disabilities. In doing so, it accords various measures of protection to disabled women and has addressed their freedom from discrimination.

The Government of Guyana is giving priority and focusing its resources towards the implementation of the new Persons with Disabilities Act of 2010 and to effectively bring itself in line with the Convention prior to its ratification of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

In response to a submission by an NGO, Guyana wishes to note that Article 59 of the Guyana Constitution stipulates that every person may vote at election once that person is of the age of eighteen years or upwards. This Article therefore indicates that every Guyanese above the

age of eighteen has a constitutional right to vote at elections regardless of whether that person has a disability or not.

The electoral system in Guyana is one of proportional representation. The electoral laws of Guyana do not restrict any person from contesting an election based on gender, ethnicity, religion, marital status or **disability**. Thus there is no legislative impediment to the participation of persons with disabilities in political and public life.

In terms of voting a person who is disabled can choose to vote at the polling station with the help of a guide from the same district electoral list. The Representation of the People's Act, Chapter 1:03, Section 30 (1) (c) allows those electors who are unable, or likely to be unable, by reason either of blindness or any other physical incapacity, to go in person to the polling place to vote or to vote by proxy at an election.

Measures have also been taken for the protection of senior citizens, the elderly and the infirm through policies and programmes which offer assistance and access to the delivery of services.

The Government offers a universal Old Age Pension programme for all persons 65 years and over. In 2012 it was increased to the equivalent of \$ 50 USD per month. Approximately 40,000 persons benefit, and this year more than 23,672 female pensioners have benefitted from this increase. There is no means test and persons can utilize other pension schemes.

The fourth area which I wish to highlight is trafficking in persons

The Government of Guyana has a National Plan of Action in response to trafficking in persons. This plan covers the prevention and awareness, direct assistance to victims of trafficking and criminal justice

response to combat the issue of trafficking in persons. The National Plan of Action comprises of sixteen (16) specific objectives to provide information about trafficking in persons; to improve cooperation mechanisms among key stakeholders to prevent trafficking; to enhance capacity of hinterland communities; to provide appropriate and comprehensive direct assistance to victims; to enhance capacity of stakeholders to identify victims; and provide direct assistance through training. To strengthen this initiative there is a national referral mechanism and an inter-agency protocol to enhance the capacity of the law enforcement agencies to investigate, prosecute and convict traffickers. One of the successes of this Plan was the formation of a task-oriented group whose primary objective is to standardise training materials and eliminate gaps in geographical coverage of awareness programmes.

Guyana has submitted responses to various questionnaires from the OHCHR on trafficking in persons, especially women and children, which provides information on its efforts. Noteworthy is that the Ministerial Task Force on Trafficking in Persons also annually publishes its report. Guyana has shown some progress in its efforts with persons being prosecuted.

However, Guyana holds strongly to the view that TIPs has to be addressed with a view to the reduction of persons' vulnerabilities either due to poverty or other factors. Programmes such as the Hinterland Scholarship Programme, the universal school uniform programme, economic assistance to single mothers and skills training for youths are all aimed at reducing poverty, creating equality of opportunities and access to the delivery of services to reduce the vulnerabilities of women, children, and Amerindian communities.

The fifth area I wish to refer to is one that is cross-cutting and that is the availability of statistical information and the use of the new media.

A disabling factor to assessing accurately our efforts to advance women's rights has been the issue of timely collection and analysis of statistics. Our Government has been taking steps to improve the collection of accurate data, including the digitization and electronic compilation of relevant data.

In 2010 work on strengthening the national monitoring and evaluation systems within central Government began and resulted in the development of a five year action plan which commenced implementation in 2011. The health and education sectors are the first two pilots to be strengthened in terms of development and performance indicators and establishment of data development plans and work is currently ongoing in this regard. This again reflects Government's recognition of the importance of the social sector, the need for stronger statistical analysis and greater value for money and improved targeting of interventions. It is anticipated that the social services and housing sectors will be in the next round of strengthening as the 5-year plan is implemented.

The use of information and communication technology is rapidly pervading the society both at the private personal level in the use of cell phones and access to the internet and in Government's efforts to accelerate the delivery of services to our people within the confines of affordable means. In grappling with the challenges of the geographical expanse of our country and the cost of physical infrastructure we are investing in fibre optic technology to improve connectivity across our country. Guyana is of the view that connectivity is a critical component to equalizing access to services and providing equal access for all Guyanese whether along the coast or in the interior.

The One Lap Top Per Family Project aims to provide lap tops to 80,000 households over the next 2 years to bring Guyanese into the modern world of information technology.

We have recently utilized modern technology to deliver educational programming on television to children and families including public service health information notices. We are expanding distance education to hinterland teacher trainees.

The Guyana Learning Channel is the first dedicated education television station devoted to teaching primary and secondary subjects to the viewing audience. As this develops greater capacity and outreach, a variety of information on science, technology, the arts and culture will be included as well as skills training for school leavers and housewives.

In closing, Guyana's 7th and 8th Reports have indicated the challenges faced and successes gained by women in our society. Some of the challenges which remain are the prejudices, ingrained cultural barriers and male attitudes in our society which are not easily dislodged.

I wish to reiterate however that the Government of Guyana remains unswerving in its commitment to honour its obligations under the Convention and will expend every effort with available resources, human, financial and technical, to ensure that we continue to make progress for all our people, especially our women and children.

I thank you
