



PERMANENT MISSION OF  
JAMAICA TO THE UNITED NATIONS

STATEMENT BY

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52<sup>ND</sup> SESSION OF THE  
COMMITTEE ON THE ELIMINATION OF DISCRIMINATION AGAINST  
WOMEN (CEDAW)

DURING THE  
66<sup>TH</sup> SESSION OF THE UNGA

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*Please check against delivery*

Madam Chair, distinguished members of the Committee, distinguished delegates, I bring you greetings on behalf of the Government and people of Jamaica.

It is indeed a privilege to be here and to have the opportunity to present Jamaica's Sixth and Seventh Report on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women during this our 50th year of independence.

Madam Chair, at the outset, let me introduce the members of the Jamaican delegation.

I am Sandra Falconer, Minister with responsibility for Information in the Office of the Prime Minister.

With me are the following persons:

- HE Raymond Wolfe, Ambassador of Jamaica to the United Nations
- Mrs Colette Roberts-Risden, Chief Technical Director, in the Office of the Prime Minister
  
- Mrs Faith Webster, Executive Director, Bureau of Women's Affairs
- Mr O'Neil Francis, Attorney General's Chambers
- Ms Andrea LM Wilson, Counsellor, Mission of Jamaica
- Dr Glenda Simms, Consultant-Gender Expert

Madam Chair, we have made significant progress since we last made our presentation in 2006.

We can report that during the 2002-2009 period, there has been considerable advancement in women's rights and the promotion of gender equality. However, globalization as well as the global economic and financial crises have added new challenges.

Our Government assumed office on January 6, 2012 and has renewed its commitment to the continued implementation of laws, policies and programmes which promote the goals of gender equality and the empowerment of women, consistent with our relevant obligations under various international Conventions,

Agreements and Protocols, including CEDAW, as well as our national development policies and goals.

Madam Chair, our distinguished Prime Minister, the Most Honourable Portia Simpson Miller, and, indeed the entire Government, are deeply committed to the advancement of the rights of women. The Prime Minister, in her inaugural speech, emphasized that she will be putting Jamaica on a path “from welfare to well-being and from well-being to wealth creation”.

Madam Chair, despite the many challenges, the Government of Jamaica is very proud of the advances made by women, consistent with the goals of CEDAW.

Among our most notable achievements is the elevation of a woman to the position of Prime Minister in 2006, and her subsequent election in a landslide victory in December 2011. This has broken the ‘glass ceiling’ at the highest level of political leadership and provides an opportunity to significantly improve gender equality in political leadership.

In the public sector, the positions of Chief Justice, Auditor General, Director of Public Prosecutions, 56% of Permanent Secretaries, as well as several other senior positions are held by women.

Madam Chair, another notable achievement in the advancement of women’s rights is the country’s tabling of a National Policy for Gender Equality (NPGE) in 2011 to support the implementation of CEDAW. The National Policy for Gender Equality stipulates that at least thirty per cent (30%) of the membership of public boards, commissions and the Senate should be women. The Government is committed to promoting greater gender equality at the highest levels of decision-making and to surpassing this target over the next five years. Today, 25% of persons in the Senate are women, and 36.9% of the members of Public Sector Boards are women.

The Government will be establishing a Gender Advisory Council to oversee the implementation and monitoring of the NPGE and provide further policy advice.

Madam Chair, while only 12.7% of the seats in the lower House of our Parliament are occupied by women, the general elections of December 2011 saw for the first

time women contesting seats in more than 35% of all constituencies. Additionally, 28.6% of Mayors across the country are women. We will encourage political parties to support more female candidates.

The Government, through the Bureau of Women's Affairs and in partnerships with NGO groups and civil society will seek to promote a political culture that will continue to encourage more women to enter representational politics.

The Government of Jamaica remains committed to ratifying the CEDAW Optional Protocol and is therefore in the process of assessing the required legislative framework.

### **Socio-Economic Situation**

The Jamaican economy is small, open and heavily dependent on trade. The country has one of the highest per capita debts, in the world equivalent to 129% of GDP. High levels of debt servicing, equivalent to 54% of the national budget severely limit resources available for national development and negatively impact our ability to fulfil commitments to CEDAW. As a Small Island Developing State (SIDS), Jamaica remains highly vulnerable to external economic shocks, as well as climate change and natural hazards such as hurricanes, floods, droughts and rising sea-levels. The magnitude and scale of the socio-economic impact of these disasters have significantly undermined the achievement of national development plans and programmes. There is also a disproportionate impact on the poor, women and children.

The global economic downturn has resulted in increased cost of oil, food, grains, fertilizers and other basic commodities, which has led to weak consumer demand, a decline in government revenues, and increased unemployment and poverty. Yet notwithstanding reductions in government revenues, a number of critical social interventions that directly impact the lives of women have been implemented. These include the expansion of, and increase in, benefits from our social safety net programmes, the provision of universal health care and the removal of tuition fees in schools up to the secondary level. Madam Chair, to echo the words of our Prime Minister: "while we balance the books, we must balance people's lives".

## **Educational Gains**

Madam Chair, Jamaican women continue to make significant strides at the tertiary level in our formal educational system. Statistics reveal that at the tertiary level, more females are graduating from all fields of study, excepting Engineering and Agriculture. Our girls also continue to outperform boys at the secondary level. Recognizing the extent to which our women have outpaced the men, the Government, in keeping with its gender mainstreaming strategy, has established a male desk within the women's machinery. This is to enable the implementation of policies and programmes to address potential gaps.

The Government of Jamaica will redouble its efforts to advance gender equality in the labour market so that the increased education levels for women will be fully translated into equality in pay, promotion and participation in leadership and decision-making.

## **Legal Reforms to promote Gender Equality**

Madam Chair, the Government of Jamaica will continue its programme of legislative reforms to implement commitments to CEDAW. We remain concerned about the levels of violence against women and girls, and are committed to effecting further reforms.

Madam Chair, during the reporting period, several Government departments and agencies, as well as NGO's implemented a number of interventions to address the overwhelming impact of violence on women and girls.

These interventions seek to build on the legal reforms implemented during the period under review to eliminate violence against women and girls and to promote gender justice and equality.

The legal reforms pursued to date have included the adoption of the Charter of Fundamental Rights, enactment of the Sexual Offences Act (2009), the Trafficking in Persons (Prevention, Suppression and Punishment) Act (2007), the Cybercrimes Act (2010), and the Child Pornography Act (2010). In addition, the proposed

Amendments to the Evidence Act (1995) is now before the Cabinet Legislative Committee.

Madam Chair, the Government of Jamaica is especially committed to addressing the disturbing problem of Trafficking in Persons, particularly since the majority of cases involve the sexual exploitation of women and girls. A major challenge is that increased levels of poverty heighten the vulnerability of women and girls to human trafficking and sexual exploitation. This in turn increases their risk of HIV infection and violence. Greater emphasis will be placed on providing support to ensure more successful prosecution of the perpetrators, intensifying the delivery of public education programmes and providing protection to victims.

The Government has further established an Inter-Ministerial Committee of the Cabinet to oversee the implementation of measures to reduce the incidences of trafficking in persons. We will also foster closer collaboration with partners from NGO's and civil society that have the expertise to provide shelters and other support systems for the victims of violence against women and girls.

Madam Chair, the issue of sexual harassment in both the workplace and the general society is also of concern to the Government. In this regard, work has started on the Sexual Harassment Policy. Key to the deliberations is ensuring that the legislation provides adequate protection to the victims whilst safeguarding against recrimination by the perpetrators.

Madam Chair, steps have been taken to ensure that adequate arrangements are in place to encourage the reporting and investigation of sexual offences against women and children. In this regard, The Centre for Investigation of Sexual Offences and Child Abuse (CISOCA), which has been in existence since 1989, has been strengthened and expanded.

CISOCA Officers receive special training in dealing with gender-based violence and are also responsible for providing training in the investigation of sexual offences at the Jamaica Police Academy and other designated organizations. CISOCA officers are deployed at all major police stations across the island.

Madam Chair, the Government recognizes that the victims of sexual offences are often women from the lowest economic quintiles. This group has historically had

poor access to justice. The Government is committed to working closely with NGO partners and the Bar Association of Jamaica, among others, to improve access to Legal Aid Services by victims.

## **Vision 2030 Plan**

Consistent with our commitments at the international level, the Government strengthened the national policy framework for development and in 2009 proudly launched Vision 2030 Jamaica: Jamaica National Development Plan.

Vision 2030 presents Jamaica's goals and strategies to become the "the place of choice to live, work, raise families and do business".

The Gender Sector Plan is an important component of 'Vision 2030 Jamaica'. The Government of Jamaica (GOJ) recognizes that it is important that women participate fully at all levels of the society, and is seeking to ensure that gender differentials are taken into account in the design and implementation of policies, developmental strategies and programmes, particularly as they relate to women, children, persons with disabilities, the elderly, and rural households, who are among the most marginalized and vulnerable in society.

## **Household Workers**

Madam Chair the Government is committed to promoting Decent Work for Domestic Household Workers and ratifying ILO Convention 189 which promotes Decent Work for Domestic Workers. They comprise an estimated 30% of poor working women, many of whom are single heads of households.

Work has been done to review the relevant legislation as well as the implementation of measures to ensure that the Government will be in a position to ratify this new Convention. The Labour Relations and Industrial Disputes Act of 1975, was amended in 2010. This amendment provides an avenue for domestic workers who feel that their rights have been infringed to take cases to the Ministry of Labour for conciliation. These cases can be referred to the Industrial

Disputes Tribunal for final adjudication. Madam Chair, please note that household workers do not need the intervention of a union in seeking redress.

We are pleased that the President of the Jamaica Household Workers Association, Miss Shirley Pryce, who incidentally is here today, formed part of the Government's delegation to ILO Conferences in 2010 and 2011 which adopted Convention No. 189. Miss Pryce has played a pivotal role as a spokesperson and advocate on behalf of household workers globally. It was our current Prime Minister who paved the way for the formation of the Jamaica Household Workers Association several years ago. The JHWA is also a founding member and co-chairs the Caribbean Domestic Workers Network which was launched in Barbados in late 2011.

## **Rural Women**

Madam Chair, Rural Women are important in the agricultural sector and are integral to efforts toward enhancing food security, reducing poverty and achieving the MDGs.

The Government of Jamaica is committed to empowering rural women by promoting equitable access to credit; increased involvement in income-generating activities, access to technology to enhance productivity and skills-training. This is aimed at encouraging greater participation of rural women in the leadership and management of national organizations that promote agriculture and rural development.

Together these strategies are expected to facilitate women and men becoming equal partners in promoting food security and rural development. In addition, the Bureau of Women's Affairs continues to provide public education on gender issues to various rural women's groups.

The Ministry of Agriculture & Fisheries, through the Rural Agricultural Development Authority (RADA), has been upgrading its database to include more sex-disaggregated data. This will assist in improved data collection and a better understanding of the situation of women in rural areas, in order to guide the development of policies and programmes.



participation is lower. Under phase 2 of this programme, greater emphasis will be placed on targeting more women, as well as persons with disabilities.

## **Health Promotion**

Madam Chair, the Government of Jamaica is devoted to increasing our efforts to reduce infant maternal mortality, in keeping with our commitments to the CEDAW, the ICPD and the MDGs.

Reducing maternal mortality will remain a priority of the government. Despite our best efforts the country will not achieve the MDG target of reducing the number of maternal deaths to 25 per 100,000 live births by 2015.

In May 2012, the Government made a commitment to redouble its efforts to reduce maternal mortality to achieve a rate of 36 deaths per 100,000 by 2015.

Approximately 91% of pregnant women in Jamaica receive quality antenatal care at least once during pregnancy and approximately 97% of births are delivered by skilled personnel.

However, notwithstanding these efforts, high levels of maternal mortality have remained. Among the contributing factors are lifestyle diseases such as hypertension, followed by haemorrhage, embolism, and unsafe abortions which account for half of all maternal deaths. Indirect causes such as cardiac diseases, increasing cases of HIV/AIDS, and violence, account for the remainder.

The Government's strategies to achieve this goal include: improved access to health services and benefits, improved surveillance, quality of care, public education, as well as closer monitoring and evaluation of pregnant women. The National Maternal Mortality Review Committee is to be re-established and the findings will contribute to the strengthening of policies aimed at improving maternal health among our women.

In closing Madam Chair, let me hasten to remind this distinguished panel that as we celebrate 50 years of Independence on August 6, 2012, we have much to celebrate as a nation. We have done much! We can be proud of the fact that we

began that mission early in our life as an independent nation to improve the status of our people and, in particular, removing the obstacles and barriers faced by women and promoting their rights.

Over the years we have implemented a wide range of legislation, policies and programmes all aimed at protecting the rights of every Jamaican.

The Government of Jamaica is fully committed to continue the implementation of CEDAW in the years ahead. As we embark on the next 50 years as an independent nation our mission, among other things, will include achieving even greater gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls.

Our motto Madam Chair is "out of many one people"... it is always a stark reminder that although as Jamaicans we may have our differences, whether it be gender, wealth, colour or religion, we believe in equality of treatment and opportunity for all.

I thank you.