

*Address by the Hon. Dr. Lillian F. Boyce,
Minister of Health and Human Services of the Turks and Caicos Islands,
at the 10th Regional Conference on Women in Latin America and the
Caribbean, in Quito, Ecuador, on August 7, 2007.*

On behalf of the government and people of the Turks and Caicos Islands, I wish to express our most profound appreciation for being invited to this conference.

My country is indeed quite pleased that the organizers have seen it fit to address, in such a distinguished and dynamic forum as this conference, some of the rather pressing issues that are affecting women in Latin America and the Caribbean region.

The Turks and Caicos Islands, which has earned the distinction of being the most rapidly developing country in the Caribbean, has been working diligently to ensure that the women of our country are more empowered and that they take their rightful place in the decision making process at all levels and in all sectors of the country.

Since the last reporting cycle in 2003 the Turks and Caicos Islands saw the enactment of a new Constitution on 9th August 2006 with a focus on enlarging the fundamental rights and freedoms of the individual and placing those provisions in Part One of the new Constitution.

In summary, under these provisions, women are protected from all forms of discrimination. We have also participated in a project with the Organization of Eastern Caribbean states to reform laws relating to Domestic Violence and the Family. Six bills have been drafted as a result of wide spread consultation.

These bills cover the Family Court, Domestic Violence, Protection of Children, Custody of Children, Adoption and Juvenile Justice.

In the Caribbean region, women are seen as the focal point of the family and are often in the weakest position financially and physically. In light of this, the Turks and Caicos Islands see these reforms as mechanisms to, among other things, strengthen the position of women by providing, through the law, structures by which women and their children can be better protected.

In May 2006, the Human Rights Committee was re-established with the Government nominated Chairperson, who is also a woman, and five other members. Following extensive research and consultation it was ultimately decided that a Human Rights Commission will be established and will serve as the National Institution vested with the competence for the promotion and protection of the fundamental rights and freedoms that are embedded in our new Constitution. Legislation for the protection of women is currently under revision.

The Gender Affairs Unit continues to work in collaboration with the Police advocating against domestic violence and abuse in any form or fashion. Our Domestic Violence Foundation is still in effect. The Women's Crisis Centre is moving forward with assistance from Government, NGOs, the public and other well-wishers.

I am also pleased to say that the Domestic Violence Foundation is working vigorously for more women-friendly legislation especially concerning the length of sentences and the rehabilitation of offenders returning to society.

With respect to political and public life, women in the Turks and Caicos Islands continue to make their mark in the most senior Government and public service positions.

While I am presently the only female Cabinet Minister, we have for the first time in our country's history, a female Deputy Governor, a female Deputy Speaker, and a female Cabinet Secretary who is also Clerk of Parliament and currently the Regional Secretary of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association. Of the 15 elected seats in the House of Assembly, three are held by females.

Women are indeed contributing tremendously towards the empowerment of young people and the most vulnerable members of society in TCI and they are showing determination and a greater interest in the country's political life.

In the last general election held in February 2007 there was a noticeable increase of women who were aggressively campaigning and/or placing themselves as candidates.

As Minister of Health and Human Services, I recently launched a Poverty Alleviation Citizens Empowerment programme, which is known as PACE, to assist all women in achieving their goals and to strive for deeper input into the economic growth and development in all aspects of the country.

Through this PACE programme, females of all ages are encouraged to seek empowerment skills in positive decision-making. It has been well received by the women and the wider cross-section of the Turks and Caicos Community.

Under this PACE initiative, I also introduced a Sister to Sister program where successful women volunteer to assist and mentor women who are less privileged. With regard to the economic empowerment of our women, the Small Business Enterprise programme which is managed by TCI Investment Agency has provided loans to 159 businesswomen or 61 % of total applications.

Small business management advice and other support has also been provided to a further 239 women or 53% of the total assisted, to ensure that their business would be successful and sustainable.

Other programmes provide assistance to single women for low-cost housing, loans for continuing education and Entrepreneurship. In addition, women now have access to land and other resources to improve their financial status and upward mobility.

Our government has a 100 percent scholarship programme which allows women to pursue their educational studies and their chosen careers at the highest level, while business loans give them the opportunities to realize their dreams of becoming successful business owners.

The National Insurance Board assists women with maternity grants, widow's grants and benefits. A very important aspect of social security legislation, in keeping with social and cultural norms, is the provision for payment of benefits to women who are not legally married but who are living in common-law relationships. National insurance schemes have therefore enabled all women to improve their financial status.

These are just a few of the many major initiatives which we have implemented in the Turks and Caicos Islands for the benefit and advancement of our women and ultimately our country. A more detailed account of our programmes can be found in our country report.

In closing, I wish to state that the government of the Turks and Caicos Islands recognizes that without supportive social, political, cultural and economic systems working in harmony, it will be impossible to achieve realistic developmental goals.

And so, as a Government which accepts that women have an instrumental role to play in modernizing and transforming our country, we are therefore actively continuing to place women at the centre and at the forefront of our nation-building agenda.

Once again, I thank you for your indulgence and I sincerely hope that this conference will give birth to a new generation of ideas and programmes that will see a significant increase of the women in Latin America and the Caribbean taking their rightful place in their respective countries.

Finally, it is also my hope that as we go forward, we will always remember to celebrate the tremendous achievements which women in the Caribbean have made in recent times, and acknowledge the significant ground that we have covered through hard work and commitment to a common cause.

It must never be forgotten that women in the Caribbean have indeed come a long way.

Let us therefore resolve, from this conference onward, to use our experience and our collective wisdom to encourage other women to continue celebrating our many achievements, and inspire them to join us as true champions of a just cause, as we march forward in unity, strength and determination, towards the fulfillment of our God-given destiny.

I thank you.

1.

**UNITED NATIONS CONVENTION ON THE
ELIMINATION OF ALL FORMS OF DISCRIMINATION
AGAINST WOMEN**

**UNITED KINGDOM'S 6TH PERIODIC REPORT
TURKS & CAICOS ISLANDS**

National census

1. The last official census was done in 2001 and the results are that the household population of the TCI as 21,986, principally on the islands of Providenciales (13,021) and Grand Turk, which is the seat of Government (3,976). This is divided almost equally between belongers (10,335) and non-belongers (9,551). There are 9,990 women in the population (5,358 belongers) in the following age groups:

Under 19 years:	3,609
20-39 years:	3,901
40-59 years:	1,914
60 or over:	566

Women and legislation in TCI

2. The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women was extended to the Turks and Caicos Islands in 1986. The principal TCI legislation is the Sex Disqualification (Removal) Ordinance (Cap.97) of 1950. Fundamental rights and freedoms of the individual and protection from discrimination are expressed in the TCI Constitution of 1988 (Cap. I articles 67 and 78) whatever (the individual's) race, place of origin, political opinions, colour, creed or sex.

Legal and other measures adopted since the previous report

Since the last reporting cycle in 2003 the Turks and Caicos saw the enactment of a new Constitution on 9th August 2006 with a focus on enlarging the fundamental rights and freedoms of the individual provisions and placing those provisions in Part 1 of the new Constitution.

Under these provisions, women are protected from all forms of discrimination. Section 1 provides that "every persons in the islands is entitled to the fundamental rights and freedoms of the individual, that is to say the right, without distinction of any kind, such as race, national or social origin, political or other opinion colour, religion sex, birth or other status, but subject to respect for the rights and freedoms of others and for the public interest, to each and all of the following, namely -

- (a) life, liberty, security of the person and the protection of the law.

- (b) freedom of conscience, of expression and of assembly and association, and
- (c) protection for his or her private and family life, the privacy of his or her home.

Also since the last reporting cycle, the Turks and Caicos Islands have participated in a project with the Organization of Eastern Caribbean states to reform the law relating to Domestic Violence and the Family. Six bills have been drafted as a result of wide spread consultation among stakeholder groups and in various town hall meeting around the islands. These six bills cover the following areas of the law -

- a) The Family Court
- b) Domestic Violence
- c) Protection of Children
- d) Custody of Children
- e) Adoption
- f) Juvenile Justice

In the Caribbean region women are seen as the focal point of the family and are often in the weakest position financially and physically. These reforms are seen as a mechanism to, among others, to strengthen the position of women by providing through the law a structure through which women and their children can be better protected.

5. In the mid 2003 Executive Council agreed to the setting up of a Turks and Caicos Islands Human Rights Committee. Due to varying circumstances, the Committee ceased to function with no precise terms of reference.
6. In May 2006, the Human Rights Committee was re-established with the Government nominated Chairperson and five other members. The Committee met to determine its terms of reference drawing on the practice in other Overseas Territories, and advice as necessary from elsewhere. Following extensive research and consultation it was ultimately decided that a Human Rights Commission will be established and will serve as the National Institution vested with the competence for the promotion and protection of the fundamental rights and freedom as was enshrined in the Amended Constitution Order 2006.
7. The Terms of Reference was adopted and subsequently received Cabinet approval in October 2006. The Human Rights Commission recognizes that it is new body providing an alternative avenue of redress for persons who feels that their rights and freedoms have been infringed upon. To this end, the Commission has drafted applicable legislation and is actively working on formulating its operational and

investigative procedures and remains a work in progress. Training has been offered and a working visit is already planned for the Chairman, who will attend a week of training in consultation with the FCO in the UK.

8. In June 2007, plans are underway for a public education awareness campaign, with a view of increasing the public awareness and their understanding of what their human rights entail and about the role of the Human Rights Commission itself; how it can be assessed; and what assistance it is able to provide.

Actual progress to promote and eliminate discrimination against women

9. Since the inception of the Gender Affairs Unit in 1999 great strides have been made. The Unit now boasts of six offices functioning on the two main inhabited islands namely Grand Turk (the capital) and Providenciales. The Unit is manned by a Director, an Assistant Director, an Administrative Officer and a Clerical Officer in Grand Turk and a Deputy Director and a Clerical Officer in Providenciales. Plans to expand this Department and to set up offices in other islands are being discussed since the need for such a Unit is becoming increasingly visible. The Gender Affairs Unit is currently being run through the Ministry of Health and Human Services.
10. One of its responsibilities is the monitoring of the status of women in the TCI and to ensure gender equity and equality. The Gender Affairs Unit is supported by the NGO, Women in Development, which has branches in all the main islands. Representatives have established a combined Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and CEDAW whose objectives are to raise awareness about the Conventions and ensure compliance.
11. The Gender Affairs Unit organizes seminars, workshops and talk shows to increase the awareness of both women and men on issues related to the equality of women with men. The print and voice media is also regularly utilized for the development of awareness.

Information relevant to articles of the Convention and Beijing Declaration

12. **Development and advancement**
13. **Family education and maternity**
The rights of married women in respect of tubal ligation are at times hampered by the requirement for the husband's consent to the procedure. Although there is no law to back this up, yet from the ethical point of view the Doctors would like the husbands input and consent prior to performing this procedure.
14. As is noted throughout the Commonwealth abortion is prohibited and the Unit works along with the Department of Social Development to assist in anyway possible when such cases arises. Young ladies are encouraged to empower

themselves at all times regardless of the situation.

Trafficking in women - violence against women and girls

15. Legislation for the protection of women is currently under revision. The Unit continues to work in collaboration with the Police advocating against domestic violence and abuse in any form or fashion. Training workshops for Police Officers, Teachers and Social Workers, funded by CAFRA and the Caribbean Development Bank are still being an effective tool of education and awareness. The Domestic Violence Foundation is still in effect. The Women's Crisis Centre in Providenciales is slowly moving forward with assistance from Government, NGOs, the public and other well-wishers, namely UNFPA who will be funding Trainer of Trainers course to run simultaneously with the construction of the Crisis Center which will commenced in few months time.
16. The Domestic Violence Foundation is working vigorously for more women-friendly legislation especially concerning the length of sentences and the rehabilitation of offenders returning to society. The establishment of the Crisis Center is an important priority for DVF, as for the first time; it will provide women with an essential, viable alternative to staying in a violent relationship.
17. The main challenge facing the Foundation is women who would come forward and speak out about the abuse while still maintaining their decorum within society and not having any prejudices levy at them.
18. The Gender Affairs Unit is constantly raising the level of awareness on domestic violence and sexual abuse on minors by speaking to students, especially primary school students, distributing posters and hand-outs throughout the community, appearing on talk shows, publishing articles in the print media, and community out reaches with targeted focus groups. These public awareness strategies are proving to be very beneficial as we are observing a marked increase in the number of complaints filed and more cases brought before the courts. Nevertheless it is believed that a significant number of offences against women go unreported and there are instances where women have withdrawn complaints, even at a late stage, in proceedings brought by the Crown.
19. Police statistics for offences against females are:

		Jan- Dec 2004	Jan- Dec 2005	Jan- Dec 2006	Jan- Mar 2007
1.	INCEST	0	0	1	0
2.	RAPE	1	0	11	2
3.	ATTEMPTED RAPE	2	2	0	0
4.	UNLAWFUL CARNAL KNOWLEDGE	4	7	4	2
5.	BUGGERY	0	0	1	0
6.	ATT BUGGERY	1	0	0	1
7.	INDECENT ASSAULT	3	42	11	1

8.	INFLICTING GRIEVOUS BODILY HARM	0	3	3	0
9	A. O. A. B. H.	8	21	47	8
10.	WOUNDING	5	8	21	0
11.	COMMON ASSAULT	16	11	6	5
12.	ASSAULT ON FEMALE	5	7	9	1

Political and Public Life

20. Women continue to make their mark in the most senior Government and public service positions. There are currently four female Permanent Secretaries (previously there were none) and there are six females at the next level of Under Secretary (previously there were three). Also, many Departments are led by women including the Budget and the Treasury to name a few.
21. There are currently six women local attorneys (up by one), who have been appointed Crown Counsel (43% of the total) in the Attorney General's Chambers. Before 2000, there were no women Crown Counsels. There are seven women local attorneys in private practice, up by three.
22. 80% of public sector employees are women. Many qualified women are recruited to the TCI public service from the Caribbean region. Senior public service positions held by women include Clerk to the Legislative Council (who is also Regional Secretary of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association). Some other appointed women are: Chief Nursing Officer, the Coordinator of the HIV/ ALDS Programme, Head of the Drug Unit, Director of the National Trust, Managing Director of the Financial Services Commission and Finance Director of the National Insurance Board. Many represent the TCI at international and regional meetings.
23. Senior positions in education held by women include Director of Education and The Principal of the Community College, which is the principal tertiary education establishment in TCI. Eleven out of the fourteen principals in Government primary and secondary schools are female, and 18 out of 21 at private schools. Of 273 teachers, 200 or 84% are women. Women are therefore contributing tremendously towards the empowerment of young people and the most vulnerable members of society in TCI.
24. Women are again showing stamina and a greater increase in the country's political life. Recently a Deputy Governor's position was made due to the new Constitution and a woman was appointed to that position. Out of a total of 18 elected, appointed and ex-officio members of the Legislative Council, only three of those elected, and four in all, are women. There is only one female minister, although in previous Governments, there have been two female ministers. The Deputy Speaker of the House is currently a female and so is the Clerk to the House of Assembly.

25. The last general election held in February 2007 saw a noticeable increase of women who were actively aggressive in campaigning and placing themselves as candidates to serve in the newly named House of Assembly.

Marriage, nationality and equal rights for children to nationality

26. A child born in or outside the TCI, or if legally adopted or otherwise dependent, has Belonger status if at least one of his/her parents has Belonger status or was born in the Islands. Belonger status shall also be granted to the spouse of a Belonger, provided that the applicant has lived with his/her spouse for not less than five years or would have done so but for the death of the spouse, and that on the date of application was not formally separated or, where the spouse has died, has not remarried.
27. All Belongers and Naturalized / Registered persons are now consider British Citizens and may apply for and obtain a British passport.
28. Currently an immigration reform policy is being prepared for submission to the Government.

Education and employment; economic benefits

29. All children are entitled to compulsory education from ages 4-16. The TCI Government offers a number of scholarships to students at the secondary and tertiary levels. The Continuous Education Program for teenage mothers and other needy persons are still continuing and the results are very encouraging.
30. There arc 388 female students at the TCI Community College, 69 % of the total. Typical areas of study by female students arc associate degrees in hospitality, business administration, computers, general science; and certificate courses in hospitality studies, business studies, school administration management, early chi Id development, human resource management and clinical nursing. There are pre-college courses including O & A levels and CXC upgrading, also adult and continuing education courses, conversational Spanish and computer literacy courses. There are six full time members or the female faculty, and sixteen adjunct or part time members.

Healthcare

31. The TCI government commits the largest share of public expenditure to improving the health and education of the population. It is increasing its investment in diagnostic services in order to reduce the number of medical referrals to hospitals abroad. The main hospital in Grand Turk and smaller clinics in the other islands provide free family life education and family planning services to all women in the country.
32. There are many new clinics in Providenciales with one especially for women and it is owned by a Belonger. It must also be noted that there is an increased in the hiring of female doctors by TCI Government.

33. The Gender Director and the AIDS Coordinator continues to work very closely together in a number of outreach programs to the community. In an effort to curb the increasingly serious spread of HIV and AIDS and to reduce the impact on families, communities, and individuals in general, and women in particular, the TCI Government has implemented several initiatives through the National AIDS program, which will assist in educating the populace further.

Poverty alleviation, economic and social benefits

34. The Department of Economics, Planning and Statistics has established a number of poverty alleviation schemes, providing project support for women's advancement. The TC National Trust promotes sustainable tourism and economic activity by assisting women in the small islands to improve the quality, competitiveness and marketing of their traditional handicrafts such as basket weaving.
35. Recently the Hon. Minister for Social Development in 2006 launched a Program call Poverty Alleviation Citizens Empowerment (PACE) to assist all women in achieving their goals and striving for deeper input into the economic growth and development in all aspects of the community. Through this Program females of all ages are encouraged to seek empowerment skills in positive decision-making. This program was received favourably by the women of the TCI Community under this program the Hon. Minister introduce a Sister to Sister program where women from the upper echelon are assisting their female counterparts
36. In 2006 a new Cruise Ship Center was opened on Grand Turk with Carnival Line being the main user. In this form of investment and empowerment women are noticeably seen in the forefront as entrepreneurs.
37. The Small Business Enterprise program managed by TCI Investment Agency has provided loans to 159 businesswomen (61 % of total applications) and small business management advice and other support to a further 239 (53% of the total assisted) to ensure that their business would be successful and sustainable. Other TC Invest programs provide assistance to single women, for low-cost housing and continuing education loans and Entrepreneurship. Women now have access to land and other resources to improve their financial status.

Student loans have allowed women to pursue their educational studies and pursue their chosen careers at the highest level while our business loans give them the opportunities to realize their dreams of becoming successful business owners.

38. The National Insurance Board assists women with maternity grants, widow's grants and benefits. A very important aspect of social security legislation, in keeping with social and cultural norms, is the provision for payment of benefits to women who are not legally married but who are living in common-law relationships. National insurance schemes have therefore enabled all women to improve their financial status.

Legal capacity

39. A family court has been established in the TCI to deal with family matters. Sitting for one day a week, this allows for more privacy and sensitivity, which should encourage more women to bring family matters before the court.
40. Support for women is delivered increasingly through NGOs. The work of the Domestic Violence Foundation has been described above. Women in Development are working with children left behind by victims of HIV/AIDS. Women In Action is an advocate for women's rights through mentoring and networking. Specific programs currently undertaken by WIA include increasing self-esteem amongst young girls, and developing political leadership potential.

Religion

41. Religion continues to play a vital role within the society with the Christian faith being the leading force. Within this field females can undisputedly seen as taking the leading or the assistant leadership role in over 50% of the organized congregations.

Constraints

42. The Gender Affairs Unit although the staff has been increased still suffers from insufficient funding and lack of training within the field. Also, there is a lack of logistical support such as transportation. NGOs also lack human and financial resources to ensure that programs are successful and sustainable.
43. **The Report on the Turks & Caicos Islands was prepared by the Gender Affairs Unit within the Ministry of Health and Human Services, with input from other relevant government departments and NGOs to which the report relates. The preparation of the report has enabled each organization to become more familiar with the Convention and to consider the measures they have taken to implement its provisions.**

(Draft of April 2007 prepared by the Gender Unit, Grand Turk)