

**REPORT OF ANTIGUA AND BARBUDA
By**

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**AT
THE TENTH SESSION OF THE REGIONAL CONFERENCE ON WOMEN
IN LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN**

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Madam Chairperson,

Permit me to take this opportunity on behalf of my delegation to extend to you, the congratulations of my Government and to the other members of the Secretariat.

This report is a summary of Antigua and Barbuda's activities presented to the delegates of the tenth session of the regional conference on women in Latin America and the Caribbean following the implementation of the Mexico City Consensus between 2004 to 2007.

The Government of Antigua and Barbuda made a commitment to carry out its obligations to promote gender equality and has made great progress in implementing the recommendations from the Mexico Consensus. Our participation at this regional level is critical for guiding the work on gender equality and for strengthening the links between the regional and national policy making levels where implementation of the regional plan of action and the outcome documents has to take place.

My delegation welcomes the report of the ECLAC Secretariat on the two themes: Political Participation and Gender Parity in Decision Making and the Contribution of Women to the Economy and Social Protection in relation to unpaid work. We thank you for the comprehensive and concise report. We believe that it will serve as a useful guide in our national programmes.

As part of our efforts in promoting gender equality in our twin island state, a number of programmes have been implemented by the national machinery responsible for promoting the advancement of women. The capacity of the institutional mechanism was strengthened to effectively carry out its mandate. Two professional staff have been appointed, increasing the number of staff to six.

The organization has evolved since its establishment. It provides expertise on issues affecting women and gender equality and plays a pivotal role in fostering partnership between departments of government as well as other stakeholders, civil society organizations and NGOs. It has taken particular leadership in facilitating partnerships in the development of policies and programmes to address the issues of women in politics and decision-making, violence against women, poverty eradication, sexual and reproductive health and rights including HIV/AIDS and women's human rights.

The Directorate has also prioritized and re-focused areas of concern and attention, to keep in line with regional and international commitments and obligations in respect to gender equality.

Specifically for Antigua and Barbuda, several steps have been taken on its road to addressing the Mexico Consensus. Our approach to follow up on the commitments has been through integrated and coordinated implementation in consultation with civil society organizations. Despite the many challenges that still exist, Antigua and Barbuda has indeed made significant strides towards the attainment and implementation of women's empowerment and gender equality.

Progress has also been made in recognizing the cross-cutting nature of gender issues and their relevance to development effectiveness. There is now the shared understanding within the development community that development policies and actions that fail to take gender inequality into account and address disparities between males and females will have limited effectiveness and serious cost implications.

Recognizing that equality in decision-making is essential to the empowerment of women, the government of Antigua and Barbuda believes that the full and active participation of women in all spheres of public life is best achieved through educative approaches in partnership with civil society.

The evidence of the unwavering commitment of the government of Antigua and Barbuda can be traced to demonstrated actions since the 9th Regional Meeting of Women in Latin America and the Caribbean when more women have been appointed to government positions at the national level. Since March 2003, an unprecedented number of women have been appointed to ministerial posts. The appointment of two females in Cabinet, one Senator and a MP. The appointment of two females as Speaker of the House and the President of the Senate, a female Commissioner of Police, two female Ambassadors and most recently in July of this year, the appointment of a female Governor General a first time occurrence in the history of Antigua and Barbuda demonstrating the government's assurance of creating a gender sensitive administration and leadership in senior public life and politics. All of these women are influencing agendas and helping to change the culture in public life. This will in turn help to make a career in senior public life, including politics much more attractive.

Another innovation sprouting from coordinated efforts of Antigua and Barbuda is the formation of a center for women in politics and leadership. The women in the Caribbean Region are working together to establish common and individual strategies to increase the participation of women in politics in the region. Establishing a talent pool is crucial in expanding women's political participation. Thus far, with the support and

collaboration of national, regional and international agencies such as UNIFEM Caribbean Area Office and UNFPA, the Commonwealth Secretariat, CDPC, CAFRA, Network of NGOs, and the women's bureaux in the Caribbean we have established a regional network and build solidarity with other women at all levels to achieve unity and promote women in leadership and decision-making. We have organized at the national and inter-regional levels and established a virtual institute of women in politics known as the Caribbean Institute of Women in Leadership.

The Caribbean Institute for Women in Leadership (CIWIL) aims to promote and increase women's participation in politics, public life and management through education, skills development and empowerment. The Institute will train and educate Caribbean women to function effectively as policy and decision makers in Caribbean countries.

Violence against women is one of the challenges that the government faces. The multifaceted and complex nature of this problem makes it necessary for us to put in place a comprehensive programme of action. With the support of agencies such as UNIFEM, I am pleased to say that the close collaboration of the key actors in this area – government and civil society organizations, has begun to show progress, but there can be no let up in our efforts to eradicate this scourge from our society.

Evidently, a gender equality perspective is both effective and efficient as a development approach and a fundamental tool necessary for the attainment of the MDGs and other global summit goals and outcomes. As a result, the government espouses a rights-based approach to health, particularly with respect to reproductive health. In the fight against HIV/AIDs, Antigua and Barbuda has adopted a multi-faceted approach which includes education, health information, services and treatment. In recognition of the importance of the MDGs for the advancement of gender equality, a national taskforce has been established

Madam Chairperson

The government of Antigua and Barbuda is committed to advancing the cause of women. As a State Party to CEDAW, the government ratified the Optional Protocol to CEDAW in April 2006.

At this juncture, I would like to express the deepest gratitude and appreciation of the government of Antigua and Barbuda to the United Nations agencies particularly UNECLAC, Caribbean Sub regional Office, UNIFEM and UNFPA whose assistance have contributed to the technical capacity of the national machinery in carrying out its mandate of

spearheading and giving strategic direction on women's issues in Antigua and Barbuda. In this endeavor, we shall continue to count on the support of the international community.

Before closing, as was reiterated to the Coherence Panel on UN Reform, UN technical support is very important for middle income countries, which despite that classification are vulnerable small island developing countries. We look forward to strengthened UN system support to gender equality programming at both the regional and country levels.

Madam Chairperson

In closing, let me once again reaffirm the government's commitment to the goals of the Mexico Consensus and remind us all that it is our duty here at the 10th Regional Conference to voice, reiterate and secure those interests and basic human rights and freedoms. Let this be a session of truly decisive action, full participation and resolve to mark a period of visible change for women all over Latin America and the Caribbean.