



**BRIEF ORAL REPORT TO THE 60TH MEETING OF THE PRESIDING OFFICERS OF THE
REGIONAL CONFERENCE ON WOMEN IN LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN**

ST KITTS AND NEVIS

**IMPLEMENTATION OF THE SANTIAGO COMMITMENT IN THE CONTEXT OF THE
COVID-19 PANDEMIC**

Madam Chair, St. Kitts and Nevis is deeply appreciative of the privilege to address the 60th Meeting of the Presiding Officers of the Regional Conference on Women in Latin America and the Caribbean. I particularly welcome the opportunity to offer a few remarks with regard to the implementation of the Santiago Commitment in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic in our national context.

As in other nations globally, the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted every aspect of life in St. Kitts and Nevis. The measures adopted to protect citizens from the Corona virus including lockdowns in 2020, social and physical distancing protocols have had wide-reaching effects in the lives of all citizens, but more so women. For example, the closure of schools and childcare facilities during the lockdown, introduction of shift systems and online learning, the reduction of available spaces at early childhood centres, and adjustments to drop-off and collection times for children at centres to ensure adherence to social distancing protocols has increased the burden of care for families; a task that is mainly the responsibility of women. Confinement and reduced financial resources due to reduced hours of work and/or unemployment has contributed to increased cases of domestic violence reported by women; which mirrors the global pattern. In St. Kitts and Nevis many women are frontline workers; doctors, nurses, home care officers, and social workers which means they have greater exposure to COVID-19.

The tourism sector we would appreciate is especially vulnerable to volatility and subject to world events and natural disasters. In St. Kitts and Nevis over one million tourist visitors during the years 2018 and 2019 has made tourism a large contributor to the economy. The COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in less tourist arrivals and a significant reduction in employment in the sector. This includes the informal work sector, as many persons depended on the tourist industry. Records for the period March to December 2020 show that 64% of women in the tourism industry were unemployed, or had their employment severed.

The Government introduced a package of measures to address the pandemic. The Poverty Alleviation Programme which offers financial support to eligible households earning less than EC\$3,000.00 (three thousand Eastern Caribbean Dollars) monthly was expanded to include households of persons who become unemployed because of the pandemic. In April 2020, over 500 new applications were made to the Programme.

The Social Security COVID-19 Emergency Relief Fund was also created in April 2020, in partnership with the Labour Department and the St. Christopher and Nevis Social Security Board. The fund facilitated the payment of up to EC\$1,000.00 monthly for three months in the first instance to displaced workers whose income was directly affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. A further extension was made for the month of September 2020.

Other Government Stimulus Package measures included moratorium periods for mortgage, loan and electricity payments. In addition, the Government invested \$10 million to boost agricultural production in the Federation; which included assistance with land clearance and free distribution of seeds to farmers, including backyard gardeners.

The National Emergency Operations Centre was mobilized and public awareness programmes utilising all forms of media were conducted. Psychosocial support was offered through the Government run counselling services, the St. Kitts Mental Health Association and other agencies. Online support materials and helplines were also made available.

In line with clause 4 of the Santiago Commitment we recognize that women, and adolescent girls are often subject to multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination and marginalisation throughout their lives. Strategies adopted to address specific needs in response to the COVID-19 pandemic included partnering with the St. Kitts-Nevis Chamber of Industry and Commerce's food relief drive, engaging in outreach to vulnerable women to deliver food hampers and care packages. The pandemic has created a situation where teenage mothers are faced with economic hardship, due to under-employment and unemployment, which has negatively impacted the living standard of single headed households. In light of this, the Department of Gender Affairs revised its Project Viola teen mothers' programme in response to the realities of the pandemic and its economic impact on single parent families. The revised project trained 15 participants (4 teenage mothers, and 11 girls at risk) during an 8-day period in the areas of (a) Social and Life Skills, (b) Quality Child Development; and (c) Managing Stress during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Also, in line with clause 35 of the Commitment, the fundamental role played by non-governmental organisations, particularly women's organisations has been re-affirmed through working relationships and collaboration. Our holistic approach is demonstrated during the observance of the 16 Days of Activism Against Gender Based Violence. Joint activities included the live-streamed debate on the regional model sexual harassment bill led by the St. Kitts National Youth Parliament Association. The department's social conscience and care for community is further evidenced by its sponsorship of a 4-part documentary series called: "The Impact of Covid-19 on Women's Lives". Filmed locally, and produced by Business and Professional Women St. Kitts; the documentary features several local professional women providing relevant information and advice useful for anyone negatively affected by the pandemic. The docu-series will be publicized as part of the month-long calendar of activities in observance of International Women's Day via participation in a panel discussion on the St Kitts and Nevis Government Information Service. This year the International Women's Day Awards Ceremony will also focus on a COVID-19 world and

recognize women in the categories of communication, healthcare, tourism, community outreach; and entrepreneurship and innovation.

The Government launched its COVID-19 immunization programme on 22 February 2021 and aims to vaccinate up to 70% of the population.

Despite the recent challenges, the Government of St. Kitts and Nevis remains committed to the implementation of policies that realise gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls. We align ourselves with progress towards the promotion of gender equality, the empowerment of women, and are guided by the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the Beijing Declaration and Platform of Action; and the Santiago Commitment which seeks to accelerate effective implementation of the aforementioned declaration.