



*Government of Bermuda*

**Ministry of Youth, Social Development and Seniors**

**MINISTERIAL STATEMENT**

by

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**CARICOM's Draft Gender Strategy  
and  
The Forty-Sixth Meeting of the Council for  
Human and Social Development (COHSOD) on Gender**

*Friday, 15<sup>th</sup> December 2023*

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**Mr. Speaker,**

I rise this morning as Minister responsible for gender affairs to share with this Honourable House and the public the goal that CARICOM is working towards to coordinate and accelerate efforts for achieving gender equality and the empowerment of women in the CARICOM Region, through a first-of-its kind strategy entitled, *Stepping it up: A strategy to achieve gender equality in the Caribbean Community*. This framework takes an inclusive and equitable approach post Covid-19 to achieve regional and international commitments, which aligns with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 5 – Gender Equality.

**Mr. Speaker,**

In 1995, the Fourth World Conference on Women held in Beijing, China marked a significant pivotal shift for the global agenda for gender equality. The four world conferences on women united the international community behind a set of common objectives, with an effective plan of action for the advancement of women everywhere. At this time the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, that provided an agenda for women's empowerment was introduced. The Beijing

Declaration and Platform for Action set strategic objectives and actions for the advancement of women and the achievement of gender equality in 12 critical areas of concern:

- Women and poverty
- Education and training of women
- Women in health
- Violence against women
- Women and armed conflict
- Women and the economy
- Women in power and decision-making
- Institutional mechanism for the advancement of women
- Human rights of women
- Women and the media
- Women and the environment
- The girl-child

This document has been adopted unanimously by 189 countries, and is now considered the key global policy document on gender equality.

**Mr. Speaker,**

The UN Division for Women, in its review of the four World Conferences, stated, “The fundamental transformation that took place in Beijing was the recognition of the need to shift the focus from women to the concept of gender, recognizing that the entire structure of the need to shift the focus from women to the concept of gender, recognizing that the entire structure of society, and all relations between men and women within it, had to be re-evaluated. Only such a fundamental restructuring of society and its institutions could women be fully empowered to take their rightful place as equal partners with men in all aspects of life. This change represent a strong reaffirmation that women’s rights were human rights and that gender equality was an issue of universal concern, benefiting all.”

**Mr. Speaker,**

The draft version of this strategy is a mainstream document that is guided by the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, and provides a regional coordinated approach. The draft Gender Strategy sets out the actions that must be taken to reduce

existing social and economic inefficiencies that adversely impact the lives of men and women.

**Mr. Speaker,**

Equality is the foundation of an inclusive thriving society. However, no nation in the world has achieved gender equality. The draft Strategy shows CARICOM's collective commitment to be a beacon of hope not just in the Region, but for the world to follow in achieving equality for all. To ensure the CARICOM region continues its journey to achieve gender equality the draft Strategy focuses on actions to reduce social and economic inequalities that adversely affect the lives of women and men across the Caribbean.

**Mr. Speaker,**

The Strategy's mission is to strengthen the promotion and practice of gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls to enhance regional integration and sustainable development to benefit all people. The goal is to accelerate the effective implementation of priority actions through a regional coordinated approach to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls. And, **Mr. Speaker**, the guiding principles of the Strategy are human rights foundation; good governance; harmonization; transformative partnership of women and men; and systematic mainstreaming.

**Mr. Speaker,**

During the past year, I have been participating in a series of virtual meetings held by CARICOM to gather input from CARICOM Members and Associate Member States for strengthening the draft strategy. The draft strategy was also shared with the Chairs of the Gender Affairs Council and Cabinet for feedback. In October, I was invited by the CARICOM Secretariat to participate in its Thirty-First Special Meeting of the Council for Human and Social Development (COHSOD) focusing on Gender which was held virtually. The meeting provided an opportunity to collaboratively review the strategy and discuss its implementation and monitoring framework. The meeting allowed Member States and Associate Members to provide feedback. In attendance were Ministers, Permanent Secretaries and representatives who shared or reiterated the gender position of their respective countries during the meeting as aligned with their domestic legislation or policies.

**Mr. Speaker,**

Just last month, CARICOM hosted its Forty-Sixth Meeting of COHSOD focusing on Gender in Bridgetown, Barbados. CARICOM invited Ministers and technical officers to attend the meeting and funded all associated travel costs. The meeting was held on November 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup>. Countries physically represented at the meeting were Bahamas, Barbados, Guyana, Montserrat, St Kitts and Nevis, Suriname and Trinidad and Tobago. Those Ministers responsible for gender affairs in attendance included Barbados, Guyana, St Kitts and Nevis, and Trinidad and Tobago.

**Mr. Speaker,**

During the two-day meeting presentations focused on:

- The Role of the Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability and Learning (MEAL) Plan for the Strategy – to ensure outputs measuring the success of the implementation of the Strategy are measurable. This Framework will assist in the reporting function of the Sustainable Development Goals.
- Regional Knowledge Products that included a (KAP) model knowledge assessment tool on social gender norms around Violence Against Women and Girls training guide and its impact on citizen security and education standards;
- Member States' obligation to report on CEDAW and the ratification of the optional protocol.
- And a National Study on Economic Cost of Violence Against Women and Girls in Jamaica.

**Mr. Speaker,**

The draft Gender Strategy is structured around 7 thematic areas that provide actionable pillars:

1. **Gender equality and social inclusion**, by promoting and protecting the human rights of women through the full implementation of CEDAW and other human rights instruments paying close attention to those most vulnerable or marginalized;
2. **Freedom from violence** through increasing measures to prevent and address all forms of gender-based violence and violence against children and youth;

3. **Economic empowerment** by expanding equitable access for women and men to decent work, economic opportunities, productive resources and trade;
4. **Good governance** by strengthening good governance processes in the public and private sectors including women's equal access to and participation in leadership and decision-making at all levels;
5. **Access to health services** by taking steps to reduce risk factors related to maternal mortality, adolescent pregnancy, and HIV/AIDS, particularly through increased access to sexual and reproductive health care services;
6. **Inclusive quality education** by improving the quality of and access to education inclusive of human resource development and gender-responsive learning environments; and
7. **Sustainable natural resource management** responding to gender differentials in access to environmental resources to maximize benefits to and increase the resilience of women, men, girls and boys to the effects and impacts of climate variables.

The draft Gender Strategy is a working document for CARICOM Member States to use as a guideline for addressing gender equality that will need to be ratified.

**Mr. Speaker,**

In closing, the two-day meeting provided an opportunity for the Ministry to contribute to the content of the CARICOM gender strategy, gain insightful information about gender affairs, and network with other Ministers in the CARICOM Region on broader gender-related matters, which in turn will help in the development of a gender affairs structure in Bermuda.

Thank you, **Mr. Speaker.**