

PRIME MINISTER'S OFFICE



FEATURE ADDRESS

NINTH COMMONWEALTH WOMEN'S AFFAIRS MINISTERS MEETING
(9WAMM)

Hon. Freundel Stuart, M.P
Prime Minister (Ag.)

Delivered at the Opening Ceremony of the
Ninth Commonwealth Women's Affairs Ministers Meeting on
Monday, June 7, 2010 at 6.00 pm at the Lloyd Erskine Sandiford Centre

FEATURE ADDRESS TO BE DELIVERED BY
THE HON. FREUNDEL STUART, M.P. PRIME MINISTER (Ag.)
AT THE OPENING CEREMONY OF THE
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ON MONDAY, JUNE 7, 2010
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Mr. Chairman, Your Excellency, the Governor General of Barbados; Your Excellency, Kamalesh Sharma, Commonwealth Secretary General; Host Minister, Hon. Stephen Lashley; other Commonwealth Ministers; members of the Cabinet of Barbados; other parliamentarians; members of the Diplomatic Corp; Delegates; members of the local and international media; distinguished ladies and gentlemen.

It is my extreme pleasure to not only affirm the welcome offered by the Hon. Minister of Youth, Family and Sports of Barbados and His Excellency, the Secretary General of the Commonwealth Secretariat but to reiterate Barbados' delight in hosting this Ninth Commonwealth Women's Affairs Ministers Meeting. This is a very important occasion for us as we view this exercise as one of significant importance to the pursuit and ultimate attainment of gender equity and equality in our region. We commend the work of the Commonwealth Secretariat in leading the mapping of strategies for member countries to achieve the ideal of gender justice as we too recognise that without the full involvement of all the

members in any given society the road to development would be retarded and vulnerable groups will be further disadvantaged.

This meeting asserts this position by its theme, ***Gender Issues in Economic Crisis, Recovery and Beyond: Women as Agents of Transformation***. The focus on issues of governance, finance and the Millennium Development Goals and the participation of Ministers and other technocrats in the discipline of economics offer an assurance that the topics that would lead the discourse over the next few days would receive the input of the players who have the wherewithal to identify strategies for the benefit of women and by extension, the social and economic development of our countries. It is an ideal opportunity for small and large states, developed and developing nations to identify common goals, share their experiences, deliberate on the challenges and learn from the experiences of others while empathising with the peculiar contexts that have shaped the lives of our respective citizens. As a group that shares a common history we are in a better position to appreciate our individual circumstances and to chart a path that is amenable to our developmental objectives.

Distinguished delegates, I am particularly pleased that the context of this Ninth WAMM is directly related to the theme of the 54th Commission on the Status of

Women which was a continuation of the follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the 23rd Special Session of the General Assembly entitled “*Women 2000: Gender Equality, Development and Peace for the 21st Century.*” With its attention on the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action and the outcome documents of the Twenty-Third Special Session of the General Assembly and its emphasis on the sharing of experiences and good practices with a view to overcoming remaining obstacles and new challenges, including those related to the Millennium Development Goals, you will recognise that this meeting is not operating in isolation but seeking to conform to the international agenda. This approach reaffirms our unified approach to tackling issues related to gender equality and the empowerment of women.

There have been varied successes in the implementation of Millennium Development Goal Number Three, which is to Promote Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women. In this Caribbean region we have had commendable success and we are eager to share our strategic approach to this objective with fellow member states of the Commonwealth. However, our challenges in attaining full gender equality are not dissimilar to that which occurs in the wider world. There is still some additional work to be done for women in this and other parts of the world to address particular issues they face.

In this regard, as representatives of women's affairs in your respective countries, the Barbados Government implores you to accede to the requirements of the Commonwealth Plan of Action for Gender Equality 2005 – 2015. It is only through active consideration of the identified critical areas for action that we can hope that the women of our states will be freed of the remaining shackles that commit them to a life which confines them to a status of second class citizen. By limiting women's involvement in the governance of issues that affects their lives, violating their human rights through their unequal subjection to gender based violence, exploiting the disparate power relations by exposing them to life threatening health hazards and sustaining their unequal share of the impoverished by denying them the facilities to economic empowerment, we are denying our communities opportunities to fully engage our human capital in our quest for economic and social development.

Let us as a forward thinking global community redress these shortcomings that are bestowed on our sisters, cousins, nieces, aunts, mothers and grandmothers. Some of us, including women, hold fast to an ideology of a hegemonic masculinity and in keeping with that philosophy we reject the need for change. But we live in a dynamic world and the changes that have occurred over the past century have

transformed human society in a fundamental way. In my view, one of the last remaining bastions of the world that preceded that era is the exclusion of women from critical areas of societal development. We continue to assign socially constructed roles to differentiate between the sexes; we continue to allow discriminatory attitudes to consume us; the majority of us abhor the notion of shared responsibilities for the nurturing and development of families and we reject the lifestyle that prolongs the life of women beyond men in all societies. In this the dawn of the new millennium, we must wake up from our slumber and embrace the best practices that would propel our world beyond our imagination. That is a world that strives for gender justice and in the words of the Beijing Platform for Action, a world that advances the goals of equality, development and peace everywhere in the interests of all humanity.

This is no easy task to accomplish but there is hope through our stated commitments to the conventions, plans of action and other treaties and agreements that we as states have endorsed by signing and/or ratification. This year, 2010, is a landmark year for a number of these instruments. We have just passed the 30th anniversary of the Convention for the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW); the 15th anniversary of the Beijing Platform for Action; the 10th anniversary of the MDGs and the 5th year of the Commonwealth Plan of

Action for Gender Equality. We need to reaffirm our commitments to these international treaties and use this occasion of the 9WAMM to pledge the unreserved assurance of our respective states to honour and pursue the objectives contained therein. Of the twelve strategic objectives¹ and actions of the Beijing Platform for Action, I suggest that you select issues of particular concern to your society for immediate and concerted action to improve the situation of all women. The same applies to the CEDAW, the MDGs and the Commonwealth Plan of Action for Gender Equality as it is recognised that they cut across the boundaries of equality, development and peace and that they are inter linked and mutually reinforcing.

Our countries come from diverse regions and in the Caribbean we are associated with the Organisation of American States who has also developed strategies to address the unequal status of women. The convention on the prevention, punishment and eradication of violence against women speaks to one issue and binds states in this hemisphere to address this phenomenon that impacts on the human rights of women. Likewise, other regions of the Commonwealth, whether it be Asia, Africa or the Pacific have developed their own instruments that focus on

¹ Women and Poverty; education and training of women; women and health; violence against women; women and armed conflict; women and the economy; women in power and decision making; institutional mechanisms for the advancement of women; human rights of women; women and the media; women and the environment; the girl child.

addressing critical concerns of women. Irrespective of where they originate, there is unison in intent, which is to improve the welfare of women. One of the challenges that has been observed in seeking to address the concerns we share as they relate to the issue of gender equality is that states are overwhelmed with requirements to submit information to facilitate the monitoring and evaluating of state responses to international instruments. Gender machineries everywhere are faced with limited resources that impact on their capacities to adequately meet reporting requirements and in these trying economic circumstances, capacity building of state organs has to be strategically managed. What is needed and what I want to urge you to consider in your deliberations, is the identification of mechanisms to address this situation. There is a significant overlap of the gender issues that are called on by these different instruments to be assessed and reported on and I think that we will be doing us all a great service if we could harmonise the reporting process in a way that is satisfactory to the managing institutions.

Distinguished delegates, although the focus of this meeting is on the impact of the economic situation on women, we cannot let our vision be tunneled into solutions that directly impact on women and girls alone. Men and boys are essential partners in the pursuit of gender equality and no one can deny the emerging gaps affecting men. It is therefore necessary for us to chart a path to engage the organisations

representing the issues affecting men and ensure that there is a collaborative approach in seeking resolutions. The women's movement has been able to record some successes and the time is now ripe to integrate and consolidate efforts of gender equality if the ideal of gender justice is to be attained.