

**STATEMENT
COMMONWEALTH PARTNERS' FORUM
9TH WOMEN'S AFFAIRS MINISTERS MEETING
GENDER ISSUES IN THE ECONOMIC CRISIS RECOVERY AND BEYOND:
WOMEN AS AGENTS OF TRANSFORMATION
BARBADOS, 4-5 JUNE, 2010**

PREAMBLE

We, the representatives of Commonwealth organizations, professional associations and civil society organizations, convened at Bridgetown, Barbados from 4-5 June, 2010 to deliberate on the special theme - *Gender Issues in the Economic Crisis Recovery and Beyond: Women as Agents of Transformation* for the 9th Women's Affairs Minister's Meeting (9WAMM);

Noting that 9WAMM is the second meeting since the unanimous accession to the *Commonwealth Plan of Action for Gender Equality* and that the 10WAMM should report its achievements;

Concerned that while most Member States have National Gender Machineries, their policies, state budgets and national development plans have not delivered on commitments made for women's empowerment;

Recognising that the challenge of promoting gender equality can only be addressed comprehensively by coordinated action, effective partnerships and increased accountability; and emphasising that Women's civil society is a vital resource in this process.

We call upon the Commonwealth Women's Affairs Ministers to:

- Ensure that social care systems are provided, maintained and enhanced to protect the most vulnerable in the process of economic recovery, as they facilitate women's active contribution to economic development.
- Support the UN Gender Entity which will enable governments to implement national gender equality priorities, and act as a single strong international voice on gender equality and women's political, social and economic empowerment.
- Fully implement commitments made in such documents as the Beijing Platform for Action, Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women and the International Conference of Population Development Program of Action and related regional agreements, including making them widely understood amongst policy-makers, legislators, civil servants and the general population.
- Ensure the collection, use and dissemination of standardized age and sex-disaggregated data.
- Create and/or strengthen formal mechanisms that enable women and girls of diverse groups to engage effectively with governments in the development and implementation of national gender-responsive policies and programmes.
- Ensure the voices and realities of women and girls inform the development and implementation of national gender policies.
- Commit to and strengthen partnerships with civil society organizations, especially women's NGOs and the Commonwealth Women's Network, in the implementation of the *Commonwealth Plan of Action for Gender Equality*.

GENDER-RESPONSIVE ECONOMIC REFORMS

The effects of the crisis have had serious impacts on women. This has had far-reaching consequences for children, families and communities, exacerbating their vulnerability to external shocks, and increasing disaster risks.

Women and girls have key roles in creating resilient and prosperous economies. Excluded groups such as persons with disabilities, indigenous/first peoples and those from isolated communities are also an essential part of the economic rebuilding process.

Women have a strong record as entrepreneurs, both in the informal and formal sectors, yet have a low record of accessing venture capital, land tenure and financial services.

Recommendations:

- Ensure that budget allocations meet the needs in social sector funding.
- Support universal and social protection programmes, through gender-responsive budgeting, in order to address the particular realities of women and girls – such as their greater burden of family care work
- Strengthen mechanisms and resources to enable women’s access to venture capital funds and other forms of financing, land tenure, and other means of production

VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS

The increasing incidence of violence against women results in serious costs for them, their communities and national economies.

Recommendations:

- Establish and maintain effective services that prevent violence and help women and girls avoid and get out of violent situations.
- Enact and enforce legislation on human trafficking and violent crime and support vulnerable groups who live with the effects.

HIV & AIDS

In addition to addressing the immediate barriers to access of prevention, treatment and care services, HIV & AIDS strategies should focus on factors such as sexual violence, poverty and inequality that render women and girls vulnerable.

Recommendations:

- Address the known underlying factors that make women and girls disproportionately vulnerable to HIV & AIDS.
- Fund a comprehensive approach to prevention, care, support and treatment which also addresses the role of men and boys.

MATERNAL MORTALITY AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH

Lack of access to healthcare and sexual health services as a result of economic and social status means one woman dies every minute through pregnancy-related complications and many more develop infections or disabling problems.

Maternal mortality is the leading cause of death in 15-19 year olds in developing countries. Between 2002 and 2005, less than 50% of pregnant women fulfilled the WHO recommended standard of four pre-natal visits.

Recommendations

- Guarantee skilled and adequate health workforces at all levels, including training of midwives and addressing problems of skills migration in the health workforce.
- Guarantee full access to culturally-sensitive family planning services, including adequate provision of language services for women living in rural areas and for those who have suffered sexual violence.
- Give support to teenage mothers in continuing their education.

EDUCATION

Education and training for economic empowerment and social participation of girls and women is crucial for achieving the MDGs.

Recommendations:

- Educate women and girls about their strengths and human rights to contribute to their gender equality.
- Implement gender responsive curricula to ensure the promotion of gender equality and shared family responsibilities.
- Support and invest in life skills that promote well-being and increase education and training for human development, work and entrepreneurship.
- Use information and communications technology in the building of effective leadership skills and for women's entering and participating in political and public life.

POLITICAL PARTICIPATION AND LEADERSHIP

Political leadership is a precondition for social and economic empowerment. Equal participation by women in governance and leadership can only be achieved by providing an enabling environment for women's leadership training and opportunities for engagement.

We call on Member States to:

- Honour commitments to existing 30% targets and fast track toward equal representation of women in decision-making at all levels.
- Support capacity-building and provide spaces for public advocacy amongst women leaders, potential women leaders and persons with disabilities, and women and girls in isolated communities and overseas territories.
- Provide opportunities for gender training for Parliamentarians and their advisors.

PEACE AND SECURITY

Women are disproportionately affected by conflict and displacement and are left with the responsibility for care giving, including food security.

Women and girls experience devastating forms of gender based violence including sexual violence during and after conflict situations.

The impact of societal violence continues to disproportionately affect women and girls, even in the absence of large-scale armed conflict. Violence against women remains one of the largest global threats to human security in all societies.

Despite their significant role in peace-making and peace-building, women are marginalized from the post-conflict reconstruction process.

Recommendations

We call on Member States to actively work together to prevent, mitigate and resolve conflicts. To this end, Member States need to:

- Ensure that sustainable peace is achieved through fully engaging women in all levels of post-conflict, demobilization, recovery and development processes.
- Comply with and enforce the provisions of Resolution 1325 and 1820, ensuring that gender is integrated into national action plans.
- Identify the relationships between peace and access to basic needs, including food security, fuel and finance.
- Enable migrants, displaced persons, refugees and asylum-seekers, particularly women and girls, to access their human rights.

ENDS