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NATIONAL REPORT: TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO

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REPUBLIC OF TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO

REPORT
to the
Inter-American Commission of Women

*Ministry of Planning, Economic and Social Restructuring
and Gender Affairs
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I. GENERAL ASPECTS OF THE REPORT

Trinidad and Tobago has pursued sustained efforts to address issues of gender in development and has been advancing follow-up implementation on the Inter-American Program on the Promotion of Women's Human Rights and Gender Equity and Equality as well as the Strategic Plan of Action of the Inter-American Commission of Women. In this context, this Report highlights initiatives of education and training which target poverty eradication and elimination of violence. It makes reference to the relevant policy and legislative and institutional framework as well as participation of women in power and decision making structures.

The status of women in Trinidad and Tobago compares favourably with many middle income developing nations. This is facilitated through the provisions of the 1976 Republican Constitution, under which the rights of men and women are guaranteed. Furthermore, the Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago remains committed to the implementation of concrete measures aimed at promoting gender equity and equality. In respect of policy prescriptions, the current overarching National Policy Framework which is anchored by Seven Interconnected Pillars for Sustainable Development makes specific reference to Gender equality as being integral to the process, as it seeks to accomplish sustainable development for Trinidad and Tobago.

Accordingly, in terms of institutional arrangements, the Government has recently strategically repositioned the Gender Affairs Division from the Ministry of Community Development, Culture and Gender Affairs to the Ministry with oversight for Government's national development planning - the Ministry of Planning, Economic and Social Restructuring and Gender Affairs. The aim is to create the environment for effectively mainstreaming gender into all of Government's policies, programmes and projects. The Gender Affairs Division (GAD) of the Ministry of Planning, Economic and Social Restructuring and Gender Affairs serves as the national focal point for gender and development. In the context of implementing its portfolio, the Division works collaboratively with state agencies, academia and civil society to promote an active and visible policy to mainstream gender perspectives in policies, programmes, and projects.

In terms of advancing the national agenda, gender and development is also guided by several national and international mandates including the Convention for the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the CIM Plan of Action, the Belém do Para Convention, the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, the Commonwealth Plan of Action, and the United Nations Millennium Development Goals.

II. FOLLOW-UP ON IMPLEMENTATION OF THE INTER-AMERICAN PROGRAMME ON THE PROMOTION OF WOMEN'S HUMAN RIGHTS AND GENDER EQUITY AND EQUALITY AND THE STRATEGIC PLAN OF ACTION OF THE CIM

(a) Legal, Political and Socio-Economic Situation

In Trinidad and Tobago, legal, political and socio-economic factors, in part, contribute positively to the status of women. The country has a comprehensive package of legislation to protect the social and economic rights and wellbeing of women and girls. In this regard, there are criminal, civil and administrative provisions in the laws of Trinidad and Tobago for the prevention, punishment and eradication of violence against women. They include:

- The **Matrimonial Proceedings and Property Act (Chap. 45:51) (as amended); The Married Persons Act (Chap 45:50);**
- The **Domestic Violence Act (No. 27 of 1999);**
- The **Legal Aid and Advice (Amendment) Act, (No. 18 of 1999);**
- The **Maternity Protection Act (No. 4 of 1998);**
- The **Cohabital Relationships Act (No. 30 of 1998);**
- The **Family Law (Guardianship of Minors, Domicile and Maintenance) Act (Chap. 46:08); and**
- The **Sexual Offences (Amendment) Act (No. 31 of 2000).**

Trinidad and Tobago is a multi-cultural, multi-ethnic and multi-religious society, and in the political sphere, women have access to participation in decision making processes regardless of race or religion or socio-economic background. The Government of Trinidad and Tobago is committed to establishing mechanisms to accelerate the achievement of gender equality in political participation and representation at all levels of the electoral process and women's full participation on the basis of equality with men in all areas of public life including: governmental bodies; the judiciary; trade unions; the private sector; political parties; employers' organizations; research and academic institutions; and national corporations.

(b) Outline of Public Policies and progress made with respect Legislation

The country has designed and implemented programmes and activities designed specifically to bring about integration of a gender perspective in public policies, seminar agendas, meetings or sectoral activities, especially any training for the implementation of the Inter-American Programme on the Promotion of Women's Human Rights and Gender Equity and Equality by Government Institutions and Civil society. These are as follows:

Gender Policy

In an effort to provide a framework for addressing gender in development, a Draft National Policy was developed by the Gender Affairs Division of the former Ministry of Community Development, Culture

and Gender Affairs, after wide stakeholder consultation. The policy seeks to broaden the protection of women by mainstreaming gender in both the public and private sectors.

Public education and training

In its thrust to mainstream gender and create awareness among relevant policy makers, the Gender Affairs Division in collaboration with relevant agencies including the United Nations System in Trinidad and Tobago conducted a series of interventions to promote gender mainstreaming in the policies, programmes and projects of various Governmental Agencies. Initiatives included partnering with:

- The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) to produce a **Distinguished Lecture/Workshop Series**. This Series featured lectures by expert and renowned personalities to promote public education and sensitization on gender issues. Within the past two years, lectures focused on the areas of Financing for Gender Equity, gender and health, including HIV/AIDS; Governance and leadership; Masculinity and manhood issues; and Gender-based violence.
- The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) to provide training to stakeholders on the topic **“Gender and Sexual and Reproductive Health”**. A major segment of the training focused on the issues of gender-based violence as well as its relations with HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted infections.
- The Pan-American Health Organisation (PAHO) to provide the gender training in **“Gender Mainstreaming in the Health Sector”** for health professionals in North and South Trinidad and in Tobago. Over one hundred policy-makers in the areas of local government and health participated in this exercise.
- Government Agencies to conduct targeted gender sensitization and gender mainstreaming workshops.

Given its responsibility for the implementation of programmes and projects to advance gender equity, the Gender Affairs Division facilitates a myriad of gender related, training and institutional strengthening programmes for various NGOs, community interest groups, and members of the general public. These have, in the past, included Courses in Parenting, Leadership, Team Building, and Training for Community Lay Counsellors, Business Development Programmes, and the Non-Traditional Training Programme for men, which was re-launched in 2008 with a Course in Food Preparation, Fine Dining and Home Management.

(c) Outline of Public Policies and progress in legislation together with development programs aimed at implementing the Strategic Plan being mindful of the four priorities of: eradication of poverty; elimination of violence; education; the participation of women in power and decision-making structure; situation of women in respect of work, health

The Government of Trinidad and Tobago, over the period continued its efforts at poverty eradication and elimination of domestic violence mainly through education and training and enforcement of the relevant legislation. The trend of women’s participation in the decision making structure continued.

Eradication of Poverty/Elimination of domestic violence / education and training

The Government instituted a number of training programmes which target unemployed women with the aim of reducing their level of poverty. These programmes including the Women in Harmony and the Women in Non-Traditional Skills Training Programmes and the Unemployment Relief Women's Programme to equip unemployed women with skills that give them earning potential. This is in direct response to the issue that financial dependence on ones spouse/partner contributes to the vulnerability of women and their offspring to exploitation and gender-based violence.

Another avenue for reducing women's level of poverty and rendering them and their offspring less vulnerable to gender-based violence and exploitation is through the Women in Non-Traditional Skills Training Programme. This Programme equips women for occupations in traditionally male dominated fields such as the construction industry, and auto and computer repairs

Additionally, women entrepreneurs are given support by the Government. Through this medium, women who are desirous of engaging in or expanding their business activities can access financial support as well as capacity building initiatives. This is effected through the Community Development Fund, the National Entrepreneurship and Development Company (NEDCO), and the Tobago House of Assembly's Enterprise Assistance Fund. Women involved in Agriculture and Agro Processing business activities may seek assistance from the Agricultural Development Bank.

Participation of women in power and decision making structures:

There have been increases in women's overall participation in national leadership and decision-making, in this country. As if to reiterate this point, earlier this year, Trinidad and Tobago elected its first woman Prime Minister. Prior to this, women had acted as Prime Minister and President of the Republic on several occasions and a woman has actually held the position of President of the Senate.

At the level of national governance, women currently constitute twenty-nine percent (29%) of the House of Representatives, nineteen percent (19%) of Cabinet Ministers and twenty-three percent (23%) of the House of Senate. At the level of Local Government, women constitute 33% of elected councilors, 20% of Mayors and Deputy Mayors, 22% of Chairpersons of Regional Corporations and 14% of Vice Chairpersons of Regional Corporations. Thirty-nine percent (39%) of Judges in Trinidad and Tobago are women.

In both private and public institutions in Trinidad and Tobago, women participate at all levels of decision-making. They have held and continue to hold leadership positions in financial institutions, Chambers of Commerce and other financial associations and have established organizations, such as the Scotiabank Women's Network.

Participation at the Community Level

Women's participation in the decision-making process is not limited to the political and commercial spheres. At the community level, women continue to be engaged in critical areas of national development including the development of the Draft National Policy on Gender and Development of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago. In April and May of 2010, the Gender Affairs Division in collaboration with The Network of NGOs for the Advancement of Women, engaged women in five (5)

communities throughout Trinidad and Tobago, giving women voice in the preparatory process for the Commonwealth's 9th Women Affairs Ministers' Meeting (9WAMM) hosted in Barbados in June 2010.

Civil society plays an integral role in the effort to give voice to women. The Women's Institute for Alternative Development (WINAD) has done extensive work in the area of gun violence. WINAD's Women's Conversation Project gave voice to women in geographically diverse communities which are affected by gun violence as well as women from various social backgrounds. This project created a forum for various groups of women throughout Trinidad and Tobago to voice their perceptions of the impact of gun violence on their lives and offer recommendations for treating with the issue of gun violence.

Progress in Legislation:

Provisions in the legislation particularly in respect of domestic violence and the situation of women in health and work which continue to be enforced, are as follows:

- The **Domestic Violence Act (No. 27 of 1999)** which aims to ensure prompt and equitable legal remedy for victims of domestic violence continues to be enforced. It empowers the court to provide financial relief for the benefit of the applicant of any child and makes provision for the enlargement of the ambit of Protection Orders.
- The **Legal Aid and Advice (Amendment) Act, (No. 18 of 1999)** which inter alia made provision for legal aid to be granted in respect of applications made under the Domestic Violence Act (No. 27 of 1999)
- The **Sexual Offences (Amendment) Act (No. 31 of 2000)**, which relates to sexual crimes including rape, grievous sexual assault, sexual intercourse and assault on minors, on mentally sub-normal persons, buggery and bestiality.

In terms of the situation of women in health, the Maternity **Protection Act (No. 4 of 1998)** was **implemented to prevent discrimination against women by employers on the grounds of pregnancy.**

(c) Description of measures taken to prevent, punish and eradicate violence against women; actions taken to implement the Inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment and Eradication of Violence against women, "Convention of Belem do Para."

In Trinidad and Tobago, gender-based violence is recognized and treated as a violation of the rights of women and a form of discrimination. This is confirmed by the State's ratification of the Inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment and Eradication of Violence Against Women (Belem do Para), and the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). Measures have targeted training, institutional support; public education and data collection to support policy formulation.

Training and Public Education

The Gender Affairs Division conducts ongoing training and public education to reduce the incidence of gender-based violence. A large volume of publications are produced each year aimed at public information and sensitization. The Gender Affairs Division has a National Domestic Violence Unit, featuring a 24 hours, seven days a week Hotline. The Hotline provides information, active listening support, and referrals to rapid intervention by the Police, shelters and Counselling Services. Community Drop-in Centres and Resource Facilities are also available within communities to assist in the prevention and treatment of Domestic Violence.

Data collection

In acknowledgement of the importance of the availability of relevant data to inform decision making, there is active pursuit of the development of a systematic format for Domestic Violence Data Collection among the various responsible agencies. Various organisations are involved in the provision of support and services to the victims/survivors of domestic violence, each with its own method of data collection. To address this issue, a Policy Roundtable on data collection was held and this was followed by several rounds of consultation. Out of these discussions, the need for a Central Registry emerged as an area of consensus. A contract was then awarded to the Sir Arthur Lewis Institute of Social and Economic Studies, University of the West Indies, St. Augustine to pilot the project over a one year period and provide the Government with recommendations for the way forward, in this regard. The ultimate goal is the establishment of a Central Registry on domestic violence data.

Institutional Support

In respect of on-going efforts to address gender-based violence, an Ad Hoc Committee was established with the mandate to co-ordinate Trinidad and Tobago's efforts to reduce incidences of gender-based violence. This Committee was instrumental in developing the Procedural Manual for Police Officers. By way of further strengthening the institutional arrangements in this area, Cabinet agreed to the establishment of the Domestic Violence Inter Ministerial Committee in the Office of the Attorney General to support the initial work of the Ad Hoc Committee by implementing the recommendations proposed by the latter.

III. FUTURE ACTIONS TO IMPLEMENT THE INTER-AMERICAN PROGRAMME ON THE PROMOTION OF WOMEN'S HUMAN RIGHTS AND GENDER EQUITY AND EQUALITY AND THE STRATEGIC PLAN OF ACTION OF THE CIM

With a recent change in political administration, the Government has articulated its vision to create a more gender sensitive society with a greater awareness of women's issues and rights. It also signaled its intention to shape public policy and implement practices which are gender-sensitive. It is anticipated that, among other things, the government will champion the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women by promoting Equal Opportunities Legislation, informed by a National Gender Policy. In this regard, there will be a review of the Draft National Policy on Gender and Development which was previously developed by the Gender Affairs Division of the Ministry of Planning, Economic and Social Restructuring and Gender Affairs, after wide stakeholder consultation. The policy seeks to broaden the protection of women by mainstreaming gender in both the public and private sectors.

The Government of Trinidad and Tobago has also signaled its intention to promote a strong legislative agenda to guarantee the human rights of women in Trinidad and Tobago. Future legislative actions will include:

- The National Policy on Gender and Development, once finalized and accepted by the Cabinet, will mandate further advance gender equity in the work of government and the wider society.
- Increased outreach, collaboration and partnership with NGOs, CBOs and other actors will be fostered to advance the CIM Plan of Action and work toward the further promotion of gender equality and the advancement of women in Trinidad and Tobago
- The enforcement of equal opportunity legislation including Equal Remuneration for Equal work legislation
- The review of the language of legislation and public documents to ensure the language there in is gender sensitive
- The enactment of legislation for the provision of facilities for lactating mothers in all public and private spaces.
- The enactment of Sexual Harassment legislation supported by the establishment of a Sexual Harassment Commission in the Ministry of Labour.
- Mandate that women be adequately represented on the Boards of all state-related entities and as commissioners in all statutory authorities.
- Pioneer policy to allow women flexible working hours, this in recognition of women's dual responsibilities.
- Strengthen legislation for the protection of women and children including in the areas of gender-based violence; health and safety; and HIV/AIDS.

The Government also proposes to undertake a number of initiatives to ensure gender equity and equality including the strengthening of support systems in the areas of health including maternal health, labour and services for victims of gender-based violence. The government will also mandate that the boards of all state entities contain an adequate representation of women.