



Minister of Gender Affairs Dr Jacqui Quinn-Leandro said even mediocre men get mass support ahead of exceptional women who enter the political arena



Organization of American States Director Jean Ricot Dorneus encourages action until acceptable levels of female representation is achieved

Women in leadership call for equal opportunities in politics

Minister of Gender Affairs Dr Jacqui Quinn-Leandro has proposed that the Antigua & Barbuda Constitution, as well as the country's political structures might need to be revisited to stop women being marginalised from political life.

She lamented the fact that here and throughout the region, the highest corridors of power continue to reflect unacceptably low levels of female representation.

"Women's participation ranges from a high of 13 per cent in Jamaica to a low of zero in Belize. In Antigua & Barbuda the general elections of 2004 brought the first election of a female candidate in our political history," Dr Quinn-Leandro said. "This may mean that we challenge our political parties to adopt special measures to better engage and include its most capable members."

She was speaking at the national workshop "Promoting the Participation of Women in Politics for Good Governance" hosted by the Caribbean Institute for Women in Leadership

(CIWIL) and the Organization of American States (OAS) at City View Hotel yesterday.

The minister told participants there continues to be a lack of transparency in the selection process of candidates, a lack of support networks for mentoring women and a limited resource base for females in public life.

Her statement that male political hopefuls are able to attract more financing for their campaigns than are women, was well punctuated with loud applause from the delegates, which included a few men.

"Very often the corporate community, they prefer to double and sometimes triple the amount of money they would use to back male political candidates as opposed to female political candidates," this country's sole female MP lamented.

She noted that far too often, capable women, who are the bedrock of political parties, are shunted aside during the selection process to make way for "average" men.

"I have to put it that

way. Less than average men are chosen over excellent, brilliant women who have the potential and the capacity. Not just here in Antigua but when we stack up the candidates across the region, we see that men are given the nod over women who have the capacity to perform and outperform their male colleagues," Dr Quinn-Leandro put forward.

Keynote Speaker and guest facilitator was Linette Vassell, the noted Jamaican writer, political activist and gender specialist who is also a member of the CIWIL Network.

She said Jamaica and Antigua & Barbuda are on the same page when it comes to "affirmative action" implemented in all decision-making bodies such as boards.

"We have come up with a policy paper for quotas. We are saying we want the government to institute quotas so every public board has no less than 40 per cent and no more than 60 per cent of either sex," Vassell said. "My organisation, the Women's Resource and Outreach Centre has

just completed a two-year programme where we have identified and trained 83 women for leadership and we have a data base we can take to politicians and private sectors."

Meantime, Director of the Antigua & Barbuda Gender Affairs Division Sheila Roseau said the workshop is premised on the regional reality that women have and continue to play crucial roles in the landscape of politics which has not translated into significant representation in the upper echelons of power.

She said the country ranks 98th in the world in terms of the women's representation in Parliament and reminded that the goal of CIWIL is to see a 50 per cent representation of women in politics.

"Our presence here today is to assist this situation, to work together with great diligence and to consider strategies to remove the barriers that are preventing women from participating in politics and decision-making. The current economic and financial crisis should be taken as an opportunity to strengthen women's role to engage in transformative politics. In some countries they have been formulating systems and enacting laws to help women become more active

in politics," Roseau said.

OAS Director Jean Ricot Dormeus said yesterday's national consultation paved the way for a regional high-level meeting on the same topic in Trinidad & Tobago at month-end.

He assured that aspirations for equal political opportunities would remain robust until an acceptable level of women representation is reached.

"How would we be satisfied when a large number of women do not even want to take a chance because political structures and culture make it difficult for them to gain wide range support and mobilise resources for a good campaign," he questioned.

Dormeus reaffirmed the OAS commitment to helping the region reach the third Millennium Development Goal for gender equality and women empowerment by 2015.



The Bombardier Q400 at FBO2000. (Photo by Tameika Malone)

LIAT experiences demo number two

By Tameika Malone

Canadian Aircraft manufacturer Bombardier yesterday conducted a demo flight on a 74-seater aircraft in a bid to convince decision makers at LIAT to choose them for a planned fleet expansion.

"We are here to show our fast Q400 to LIAT so that the airline can get to see the product we are offering. This configuration carries 74 but the airplane can carry up to 78 and there is some configuration to allow 80 passengers," Bombardier Director Fernando Rodriguez

told The Daily OBSERVER.

The aircraft has a range of 1,000 knots and Rodrigues said the aircraft can cover "the whole Caribbean from here and even further."

LIAT's Communication Manager Desmond Browne said the airline is now awaiting the arrival of a European manufacturer, ATR, to make a decision on which aircraft it will choose to expand its fleet.

Last month, a Brazilian manufacturer demonstrated the 100-passenger Embraer 190 aircraft.

Browne said the airline is currently in discussions with manufacturers who have already signalled interests in securing the contract to the airline with the plane needed for its fleet renewal process.

"We are not at a point of making any final decisions. These will be *Continued on page 28*



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