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Mexico D.F., Mexico

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(Item 2) on the agenda)



The Commonwealth of The Bahamas

Report to the

Thirty-Fifth Assembly of Delegates

of the

Organization of American States
Inter-American Commission of Women

November 3rd – 5th, 2010

Mexico City, Mexico

I GENERAL ASPECTS

At the time of the 2000 census of population, The Commonwealth of The Bahamas had a population of 303,611. The population in 2008 was estimated at 338,300; 164,800 males and 173,500 females. A census was conducted in May 2010 however the results are still being compiled. An increase in population is expected.

The Government of The Bahamas has continued its efforts to enact laws to protect women and their children. These include the Domestic Violence (Protection Order) Act, 2007, which came into force on December 1, 2008 and the Child Protection Act, 2007, which came into force on October 1, 2009.

Additional programmes have been initiated that aim to empower women, particularly those of the lower economic status. The Government through The Bahamas Agricultural and Industrial Corporation has embarked on training programmes in handicraft development. These programmes have been an empowerment tool particularly for unemployed women several of whom have become entrepreneurs of small businesses.

II JUDICIAL, POLITICAL AND SOCIAL SITUATION

The last general election in The Bahamas was held in May 2007, which resulted in a shift in the number of women elected to the Parliament. The total number of Parliamentary seats contested was forty one (41) and of this number, nineteen (19) were contested by women. The total number of seats won by women was five (5). By contrast in the previous general election held in May 2002, eight (8) women won seats in Parliament. Seven (7) women serve in the sixteen (16) member Senate, one of whom has held the position of President since May 2007. Presently, one (1) woman serves in the seventeen (17) member Cabinet of The Bahamas.

The positions of President of the Court of Appeal, Governor of the Central Bank of The Bahamas, Permanent Representative to The United Nations and Director of Legal Affairs are among those held by women in The Bahamas (See Annex I for a list of women in decision making positions).

III MONITORING OF THE CIM STRATEGIC PLAN OF ACTION

A **Eradication of Poverty**

The Government's Urban Renewal Liveable Neighbourhoods Programme was revamped in January 2008. The programme serves as a catalyst in inner city communities, supporting the social and economic needs of residents, which include a large percentage of women and girls. The programme partners with government ministries, the police, faith-based institutions, businesses and community minded citizens to help positively transform communities.

The Programme which operates from nine community based Centres in New Providence and seven in Grand Bahama, offers various activities including after- school programmes, youth clubs and community bands which are available to boys and girls from the age of six years. Some of the Centres also offer programmes in sewing, straw and jewelry craft where women are taught productive skills of creating garments, authentic Bahamian straw goods including handbags and jewelry made from indigenous materials as well as how to market these items.

Health and Parenting Seminars are also held as part of the Urban Renewal Liveable Neighbourhoods Programme. These seminars are attended by many single parents who are primarily young women. These provide much needed support, guidance and awareness to women who are oftentimes the nucleus of the Bahamian family unit.

The Women of Essence programme is fairly new and it focuses on mentoring girls between the ages of seven and seventeen. The women who coordinate and facilitate these meetings are all volunteers of various professions that teach the girls grooming, etiquette, community service and awareness. The girls are also provided with counseling services.

B **Trafficking in Persons**

The Bahamas continues to partner with the International Organization for Migration (IOM) on counter-trafficking measures. Since an initial project by the IOM and the OAS/CIM in 2004, which facilitated research and training, the country has focused on public awareness and training on this issue.

Measures on counter-trafficking in children have received attention with specialty training being provided to health care professionals, the Police, Defence Force and Immigration Officers, social workers, school guidance counselors and other related persons. The Bureau of Women's Affairs has enlisted the support of the IOM to extend training sessions to key communities on some of the major Family Islands. In November 2009, a training of trainers counter-trafficking initiative was launched. Since then, workshops have been held in New Providence, Grand Bahama and Abaco. Plans are underway to conduct a training workshop later this year in other Family Islands.

The Government of The Bahamas enacted the Trafficking in Persons (Prevention and Suppression) Act on December 10, 2008. The Act provides penalties for those persons convicted of human trafficking. Additionally, the Act states that reasonable protection and assistance is to be provided to victims.

C Health

HIV/AIDS remains a major health concern for The Bahamas. The total cumulative number of reported HIV infections as at December 31st, 2009 is 11,803 (5,346 females and 6,457 males). The reason for infected males being higher than females is due to the fact that males are not normally tested early. It is mandatory for pregnant females to be tested.

The Bahamas' national response to the HIV epidemic has included mandating HIV/AIDS as a priority programme, providing primary care services to prevent and treat opportunistic infections, providing Antiretroviral Therapy (ART) to all HIV infected pregnant women and children and establishing a Prevention of Mother-to-Child Transmission Programme (PMTCT). This programme has proven to be very effective. Since 2003, there has been a zero percent (0 %) mother-to-child transmission among women who received treatment for HIV infection. Presently, Antiretrovirals (ARVs) are provided to all patients who meet the CDC guideline of CD4 less than 350 or a Viral Load greater than 30,000.

Pre-adolescent and adolescent girls continue to face challenges as a result of HIV infection, sexually-transmitted diseases and unplanned pregnancies. As part of a national strategy to address this concern, the Government of The Bahamas invited a group of social scientists from the Institute of Human Virology of the University of Maryland, Baltimore to work with health educators to implement an HIV/AIDS behavioural intervention programme called "Focus on Kids", which was implemented in 1998.

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The programme was renamed "Focus on Youth" in 2000, to include males. It is a life- skills based prevention/intervention programme that is evidenced-based and is recognized by the National Institute of Health as "a programme that works". The curriculum is holistic and comprehensive and it addresses topics such as decision making, values clarification, communication and knowledge about risk behaviours associated with HIV infection, other STI's, teen pregnancy, violence and drug abuse. This programme, which also has a parent component has been operating in primary and senior high schools, and has been expanded to the islands of Exuma, Grand Bahama, Abaco and Andros.

The Government of The Bahamas is adding to the local safety net and enhancing the health of the population through a National Prescription Drug Plan (NPDP), which was launched on 20 September 2010. The plan provides over 160 prescription drugs and supplies to individuals suffering from one or more of eleven covered chronic diseases including breast cancer, hypertension, heart disease and high cholesterol. A high percentage of women suffer from these diseases.

D Education

In The Bahamas there is universal and equal access to education for males and females between the ages of 5 and 16 years. Section 24 of the Education Act stipulates that “it shall be the duty of parents of every child of compulsory age to cause him/her to receive full education suitable to his or her age”. Social programmes are in place to assist children from low income families to take advantage of educational opportunities. These include a National Lunch Programme and the provision of school uniforms.

Teen pregnancy has affected the education of some of the young women in The Bahamas. The Government has made efforts to minimize the number of girls who suspend or interrupt their education due to pregnancy. Teen mothers are encouraged to continue their education during and after pregnancy. Currently, two public facilities are available for teens who become pregnant while in school; The Providing Access to Continued Education (PACE) programme, which is located in New Providence, and The Haven, which is located on Grand Bahama Island. PACE and The Haven are designed to offer comprehensive educational, socioeconomic, spiritual, emotional and health care services to pregnant adolescent/teen parents. The girls and the fathers of their babies, also have access to education on reproductive health and counseling, and referral services as PACE works in partnership with the Department of Social Services and the Government’s Family Life and Health Education Programme (FLHE).

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IV FUTURE ACTIONS TO ADVANCE THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE STRATEGIC PLAN OF ACTION OF THE CIM

A Participation of Women in the Structures of Power and Decision Making:

The Bahamas has not implemented any quotas to ensure equal representation of women in Parliament; however, the number of women in executive positions in the country is very encouraging (See Annex I for listing).

The decrease in women’s representation in the Parliament is a matter for concern. The Bureau of Women’s Affairs will enlist the support of Non-governmental organizations to promote seminars and programmes that seek to encourage and prepare women for participation in politics and other leadership roles.

B Violence against Women/Implementation of Belem do Para

Violence against women remains an area of major concern to The Bahamas and the Government has attempted to address this area through the introduction of new legislation and the revision of current legislation.

After extensive public consultations, Parliament passed the Domestic Violence (Protection Orders) Act, 2007, which came into force on December 1, 2008. Among the provisions of this Act are the expanded definitions of domestic violence, which now incorporates and criminalizes harassment and stalking. It also gives the court the power to mandate counseling for the batterer.

The Sexual Offences and Domestic Violence Amendment Act, 2008 removed the minimum sentences for sexual offences, and broadened the scope of procurement to incorporate procurement by electronic means. This Act also includes, among other things, voyeurism, child pornography and rape. The Act states that any person who commits rape; attempts to commit rape or assaults with intent to commit rape is guilty of an offence and liable to imprisonment for life.

Government Agencies such as the Department of Social Services provide assistance in the area of violence against women. The Government provides financial support to the Crisis Centre of The Bahamas, the Links Safe House for Women in crisis and to other entities to assist women who face abuse. The Roman Catholic Archdiocese with a grant from the Government operates a Men's Programme for batterers, which is yielding some positive results.

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C National Women's Machinery

The Bureau of Women's Affairs, a government agency was placed under the Ministry of Labour and Social Development in July, 2008. The Bureau's responsibilities include monitoring gender and development issues both at home and abroad; coordinating and/or participating in awareness raising on gender issues generally, and specifically on law and policy which impact the status of women.

Over the years, the Bureau has given focus to promoting education and awareness on trafficking in persons, particularly as it pertains to women and children, domestic violence, legal literacy and the financial empowerment of women.

The Bureau has also strengthened its partnerships with local NGOs and international agencies to support its programmes. With regard to the local Non- governmental Women's Organizations, the Bureau continues to maintain a monthly forum with this group to ensure the dissemination of pertinent information and to encourage dialogue on issues of concern to women and how these can be addressed.

D Regional Cooperation

The Government of The Bahamas is grateful to the Organization of American States, Inter-

American Commission of Women (OAS/CIM), the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA, Jamaica), The United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) Regional Office and the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), the Commonwealth Secretariat and other agencies for the various training opportunities they have provided to the staff of the Bureau of Women's Affairs and for the funding of some of its programmes.

The Bureau was successful in securing funding from UNFPA for a consultant to assist with the preparation of the country's CEDAW report. The University of the West Indies' Centre for Gender and Development Studies (Mona Campus) in Jamaica provided technical assistance for the preparation of the report. This assistance will help The Bahamas to meet its reporting obligation.

Additionally, funding was also received from ECLAC, UNFPA and UNIFEM to carry out a Needs Assessment throughout the country. The assessment is expected to inform a Gender Policy and shape future programmes of the Bureau.

27 September, 2010

Annex I

WOMEN IN EXECUTIVE POSITIONS (MINISTRIES AND STATE INSTITUTIONS)

Female Cabinet Minister

The Honourable Loretta Butler-Turner - Minister of State,
Ministry of Labour and Social
Development

Female Senators

Sen. The Hon. Lyn Holowesko (President of the Senate)
Sen. The Hon. Allyson Maynard-Gibson (Leader of the Opposition Business in the Senate)
Sen. The Hon. Jacinta Higgs
Sen. The Hon. Hope Strachan
Sen. The Hon. Tanya Wright

Female Members of Parliament

Hon. Loretta Butler-Turner

Hon. Verna Grant
 Hon. Melanie Griffin
 Hon. Glenys Hanna-Martin
 Hon. Cynthia Pratt

Court of Appeal

Dame Joan Sawyer - President of the Court of Appeal

Female Justices

The Hon. Anita Allen - Justice of the Supreme Court
 The Hon. Rhonda Bain - Justice of the Supreme Court
 The Hon. Estelle Gray-Evans - Justice of the Supreme Court
 The Hon. Claire Hepburn - Justice of the Supreme Court
 The Hon. Vera Watkins - Justice of the Supreme Court

Other Women in Executive Positions

Mrs. Anita Bernard Secretary to the Cabinet
 Mrs. Donella Bodie Acting Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Public Service
 Mrs. Barbara Burrows Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Labour & Social Development

Mrs. Elma Garraway Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Education
 Ms Camille Johnson Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Health
 Mrs. Coleen Nottage Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Finance
 Mrs. Hyacinth Pratt Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Tourism
 Dr. Patricia Rodgers Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Foreign Affairs
 Mrs. A. Missouri Sherman-Peter Permanent Secretary, Ministry of National Security
 Mrs. Lorraine Symonette-Armbrister Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Housing
 Mrs. Wendy Craigg Governor, Central Bank of The Bahamas
 Mrs. Deborah Fraser Director of Legal Affairs
 Dr. Iva Dahl Manager, Bahamas Technical & Vocational Institute (BTVI)
 Dr. Merceline Dahl-Regis Chief Medical Officer
 Ms Mellany Zonicle Director of Social Services

Updated August, 2010

Appendix 1

MEMORANDUM

MINISTRY OF LABOUR AND

SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

TO: Permanent Secretary
ML&SD/ADM/8B

Ministry of Foreign Affairs
ML&SD/ADM/78
NASSAU, The Bahamas

Our

Ref.:

September, 2010

Date:

29th

**BAHAMAS' REPORT TO THE THIRTY-FIFTH ASSEMBLY OF
DELEGATES OF THE ORGANIZATION OF AMERICAN
STATES/INTER-AMERICAN COMMISSION OF WOMEN (OAS/CIM)
3RD – 5TH NOVEMBER, 2010
MEXICO CITY, MEXICO**

Forwarded for your attention is The Bahamas' Report to the Thirty-Fifth Assembly of Delegates of the Organization of American States/Inter-American Commission of Women (OAS/CIM), which is scheduled to be held from 3rd to 5th November, 2010, in Mexico City, Mexico.

Please note that the deadline to submit country Reports to the OAS/CIM was extended to September 30th, 2010.

Please further note that the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) Questionnaire Related to the Report on Forms of Discrimination that Restrict Women's Full Exercise of their Economic, Social and Cultural Right, which is also to be forwarded for the Meeting in Mexico will be sent under separate cover.

Lynn Symonette
(for) Permanent Secretary

cc: Bahamas Permanent Mission to the OAS
cc: CARICOM Focal Point, OAS/CIM