Building a Coordinated Caribbean Position for CSW65
#ParlAmericasGEN #Covid19

The CARICOM Secretariat and the UN Women Multi-Country Office for the Caribbean, in collaboration with ParlAmericas, Caribbean Women in Leadership (CIWiL), and the University of West Indies (UWI), hosted the online CARICOM preparatory meeting Building a Coordinated Caribbean Position for CSW65.

The two-day meeting convened ministers with responsibility for Gender Affairs, parliamentarians, heads of national gender machinery, and representatives from multilateral organizations, civil society and academics from English CARICOM countries for focused dialogue and coordination around the 65th session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW65), taking place at UN Headquarters from March 15 to 26, 2021, with opportunities for virtual participation. The discussions contributed to the coordination of a unified subregional voice and advocacy strategy through the development of a CARICOM statement ahead of CSW65.

This activity is aligned with SDG 5 and 17.
Day one — Inauguration

The meeting was officially opened with welcoming remarks from Dr. Hilary Brown, Programme Manager, Culture and Community Development, CARICOM Secretariat; Lady Anande Trotman-Joseph, President of CIWiL; Dr. Tonya Haynes, Interim Head and Coordinator of Graduate Programmes, IGDS Nita Barrow Unit, UWI Cave Hill; the Honourable Bridgid Annisette-George (Trinidad and Tobago), Speaker of the House of Representatives and Vice-President of ParlAmericas; and Ms. Tonni Brodber, Representative, UN Women Multi Country Office - Caribbean. Ms. Ann-Marie Williams, Deputy Programme Manager, Gender and Development, CARICOM Secretariat facilitated the session.

Throughout the working sessions participants were encouraged to devise strategies that amplified Caribbean leadership and experiences while responding to the region’s current preoccupations.

Ms. Roberta Clarke, Regional Director (ag) for UN Women Eastern and Southern Africa, offered an opening address on the importance of inter-governmental processes and multilateralism, offering reflections on the Caribbean region and the inherent links between women’s leadership and development. Her remarks were followed by a presentation on CSW negotiations by Dr. Rosina Wiltshire, Gender and Development Specialist and CIWiL Regional Board Member. Dr. Wiltshire spoke about the historical context of CSW’s inception, the provisions for monitoring progress, and its contemporary role in upholding human rights.

Panel: The impact of women’s leadership

The meeting’s first panel was titled “The Impact of Women’s Leadership,” and focused on two case studies related to the priority themes of CSW65: women’s leadership and eliminating gender-based violence. Presentations were made by the Honourable Pennelope Beckles (Trinidad and Tobago), Minister of Housing and Urban Development, about the explicit criminalization of marital rape in her country in the year 2000 (Sexual Offences (Amendment) Act, Chp. 11: 28); and by the Honourable Dr. Vindhya Persaud (Guyana), Minister of Human Services and Social Security, on the context and impact of Guyana’s gender quota law (Elections Laws (Amendment) Act, No. 15), which was passed in the same year. The panel was moderated by Senator the Honourable Ranard Henfield (The Bahamas), Vice-President for the Caribbean of the ParlAmericas Open Parliament Network.

The speakers shared some of the specific factors that facilitated the passage of these landmark national legislative advances, namely the dedicated organizing of women who championed the reforms from inside and out of parliament. They also answered questions about how challenges and resistance to the initiatives were addressed, and reiterated the need for continued work on these and related issues in the region.

“Supporting women's leadership is a critical goal in itself, and it is also an objective that has myriad positive impacts for the inclusiveness and quality of our decision-making processes and their outputs. Collaborating with our partners in all sectors is essential to ensuring that we continue to advance women's representation in the region, and intergovernmental processes like CSW provide an excellent opportunity for focused dialogue, reflection, and then further action.”
Many women and girls, but also men, have recently demonstrated to ask that we put on the table legislation that speaks to the challenges women are facing as it relates to protection …

Some people were very concerned of speaking about rape within a marriage, and the reason to discuss it is because it has occurred and it will continue to occur. The objective is to give women the right, and to educate them about what they should not tolerate.

“The specific question of gender quotas and its correlation with increased representation of women in politics will beg the questions: should countries adopt a quota system if they have not? And if they have adopted it, is it fulfilling its purpose? Gender quotas represent a practical means for achieving the democratic ideal of inclusion … And so, the conversation still remains relevant.”

“The Honourable Dr. Vindhya Persaud (Guyana), Minister of Human Services and Social Security

“Parliamentarians need to acknowledge two realities: one, that parliaments and cabinets are critical spaces for women’s empowerment, representation and leadership. It is in parliaments and cabinets that we ensure that the diverse perspectives of women and girls in our countries are heard and addressed. The second is that the legislation we debate and pass must be drafted with a gender lens if we are to advance gender equality issues.”

“The Honourable Pennelope Beckles (Trinidad and Tobago), Minister of Housing and Urban Development

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Senator the Honourable Ranard Henfield (The Bahamas), Vice-President for the Caribbean of the ParlAmericas Open Parliament Network

After the parliamentary panel, there was a robust discussion on the themes raised, with a particular emphasis on strategies to increase women’s representation in decision-making and the application of gender-responsive approaches to all legislation and policy. Following a break, participants dedicated the afternoon to a technical review of CARICOM’s draft CSW65 statement, led by Ms. Williams.
Day two - Opening

Ms. Tonni Brodber, Representative of the UN Women Multi Country Office - Caribbean, introduced the second day of the meeting, which began with a spoken word performance by Ms. Oshun Trim, youth activist and artist from Trinidad and Tobago.

The keynote speaker, Barbara Bailey, Professor Emerita at the University of the West Indies and CARICOM Triennial Awardee, provided an analysis of the progress in the Caribbean towards achievement of the two components of the CSW65 priority theme: women’s full and effective participation in public leadership and ending gender-based violence. Professor Bailey shared Caribbean-specific data on both themes to illustrate progress and remaining gaps, analyzed underlying causes, and identified recommendations for legislation and other initiatives that can be adopted in order to move forward.

Presentations and panel: CSW65 and issues of concern in the Caribbean in the context of COVID-19

Next, Dr. Rosina Wiltshire, Gender and Development Specialist and CIWiL Regional Board Member, provided background on the annual processes related to CSW negotiations and gave an overview of the upcoming 65th session (CSW65). She emphasized the longstanding role of Caribbean women leaders in the gender equality movement and political advocacy spaces like the World Conferences on Women. She also stressed the continued importance of CSW, particularly in the COVID-19 context as inequalities are being visibilized and exacerbated, as it allows for awareness raising and can galvanize critical actions.

Ms. Dylis Mc Donald, CIWiL Project Coordinator, moderated the panel discussion on developing a common position on issues of concern to the Caribbean within the context of COVID-19, with the participation of Ms. Roberta Clarke, Regional Director (ag), UN Women Eastern and Southern Africa; Ambassador Dr. Halimah Deshong, Ambassador/Second Deputy Permanent Representative at the Permanent Mission of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines to the UN; and Ms. Vanda Radzik, Women and Gender Equality Commissioner and Women’s Rights Advocate at Red Thread, Guyana. Each presenter underscored the importance of national and regional action on COVID-19 taking a gender-responsive approach that builds on, values, and recognizes the contributions of women leaders.

Ambassador Dr. Deshong clarified that the question cannot be whether women’s leadership is necessary, but how we can correct the harmful inequalities in representation that should never have existed. She shared examples of the ways in which women’s leadership in the region has led to positive policy and legislative change, but stressed that more work remains and that further progress requires inclusive decision-making that prioritizes Caribbean perspectives. These points were echoed by Ms. Radzik, who articulated key issues that require attention at national and regional levels to address
inequality and advance sustainable development. She highlighted the need for goals of gender justice and climate justice in determining policy priorities. Lastly, Ms. Clarke focused on the current COVID-19 pandemic and the ways in which this has placed an excessive burden - the full extent of which is not yet known - on low-income and other historically marginalized groups. To chart a course forward, she reiterated the need for consultations with women’s and other grassroots organizations, and to have strong social security nets in place to protect all members of the public.

Final Statement Review

Following a thoughtful dialogue and reflections on panel presentations, the meeting’s focus returned to the CARICOM draft statement which had been reviewed throughout the week by various stakeholders. The updated document was presented in full during Friday’s session for additional comments, and participants were invited to submit final insights in writing in the days after the meeting before a final document would be submitted to the relevant body, the New York Permanent Mission, to inform the CSW65 Outcome Document.

The following are a few of the actions that the various stakeholders committed to:

- Establish targets, action plans and timelines to achieve gender parity for all executive, legislative and administrative positions, as well as in public commissions, tasks forces and negotiations teams;

- Implement gender responsive budgeting (GRB), bringing together the inter-related issues of gender equality and public finance, to integrate socio-economic dimensions into the process of budget planning and financing;

- Resource specialized gender equality committees or commissions and women’s caucuses, and networking forums, as well as institutional capacity-building on gender equality in parliaments, ministries and public administration;

- Increase the quality and quantity of funding available to support women in public life through the creation and financing of specific funds that prioritize direct funding to women’s organizations and feminist movements;

- Facilitate the entry of women into the political pipeline through capacity-building and training and awareness raising, and provide targeted support to women facing multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination to participate in public life and politics;

- Increase young women’s representation and participation in public life through community outreach, mentoring, capacity development programmes and early exposure to legislative and policymaking spaces;
### Countries Represented

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### Organizing Partners

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ParlAmericas is headquartered in OTTAWA, CANADA.

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