



Launch of Spotlight Jamaica ECOVAWG Study

Remarks by the Representative, UN Women MCO Caribbean – Ms. Tonni Brodber

6th March – AC Hotel, Kingston

- **Hon. Olivia Grange OJ, CD, MP**, Minister of Culture, Gender, Entertainment and Sport
- **Other Members of Parliament**
- **H.E. Marianne Van Steen**, European Union Ambassador to Jamaica
- **Mr. Vincent Sweeney**, UN Resident Coordinator a.i.
- **Mr. Easton Williams**, Senior Director, Planning Institute of Jamaica (PIOJ)
- Other officers of the Government of Jamaica
- Representatives of civil society and academia
- Members of the Media
- Ladies and gentlemen

Good morning.

It's women's month and International Women's Day (IWD) is on the 8th. The United Nations observes International Women's Day and other international days, because it is a moment to educate the public on issues of concern and to mobilise political will and resources to address global problems. So it is an opportunity for us to demonstrate what is being done, what is not being done and what needs to be done.

As those who spoke before me indicated, violence against women and girls (VAWG) is one of the most pervasive human rights violations occurring in the world. It happens in every country, not only in situations of conflict or crisis, but

in contexts that some would call peaceful, and in both public and private spheres.

Figures across the world demonstrate the gravity of the scourge of violence against women and girls:

- 35 per cent of women have experienced some form of physical and/or sexual violence in their lifetime.
- The figure is at least 39% prevalence in Jamaica (above the global average). Now Jamaica is great at many things, and we do not need to best the world in these circumstances as well.

This Study is the first of its kind in the Caribbean, and this Launch is timely as it leads as I noted into International Women's Day but it also marks the first week of the 67th Commission on the Status of Women.

In 2013, the 57th session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW57) focus on the economic and social harm caused by violence against women and girls (para 11.) and identified the ways in which governments could take a multidisciplinary approach to addressing the issue.

Now I am not sure if she was aware of what was discussed at the 57th Session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) but around 2016/2017 Thalia Lyn approached UN Women and asked can't you tell us what the cost of VAWG and GBV is? At the time we couldn't.

We did not yet have prevalence data, and honestly, we were not thinking in that way. We were engaging strictly from a Human Rights perspective. That the investment should be made, because any form of violence perpetrated by a human being on another human being should be cause for action, whether it be age-based or gender-based. It is a violation of their human rights. But this is why we need diversity of perspective.

Through an EU Funded project called Win-Win we began to become more engaged with the private sector. Thank goodness for Thalia Lyn, because we realised, we were missing a key negotiation point. Key, meaning to bring persons some of whom are men, some of whom are women, to bring decision makers on board to understand why this is not just a soft issue, this is not just a woman's issue. This is a sustainable development, economic resilience issue.

A high-ranking official in the development industry who was in Jamaica at the time, noted it could not be done, those of you who know me, and the team at UN Women know that we like nothing more than to hear that something cannot be done. Alison Anderson McLean (our late Representative, a Jamaican woman) said how we are going to do it? The first step was the prevalence survey which we did and was led by my colleague Isiuwa Iyahan and Carol Watson Williams who I would like to thank.

The next step would not have been possible without the Spotlight Initiative. Thank you, Ambassador Van Steen, thank you to the European Union for the investment with the United Nations on this particular Jamaica Spotlight Initiative, because we needed that push to take it to the next level. This is demonstrative of the importance of multilateralism, of the **collaboration between several countries in pursuit of a common goal**; in this case it is peace.

The annual costs of intimate partner violence were calculated at \$5.8 billion US dollars in the United States of America and \$1.16 billion in Canada. In Australia, violence against women and children costs an estimated \$11.38 billion per year. Domestic violence alone costs approximately \$32.9 billion in England and Wales.

Research indicates that this would amount to around 2 per cent of the global gross domestic product (GDP).

In Jamaica the total costs of violence against women and girls, is 15.646 billion Jamaica dollars for a typical case and when my colleagues come on after they will explain the difference between a full and a typical case, the typical case which is based on administrative data. So these are just the women who are showing up to the police and this is an underreported crime. 15.646 billion Jamaica dollars.

That is approximately, as our colleague from PIOJ said - 6.49% of GDP.

Let's address the elephant in the room. Why the focus on women and girls? Violence against women and girls brings huge economic costs to any society. But also the decisions that are made to prioritise immediate economic challenges. We do not see these softer social issues as priorities. But the negative impact on women's participation in education, employment and civic life undermines

poverty reduction strategies. It results in lost employment and productivity, and it drains resources from social services as these costs show.

But it's important to acknowledge that resilience is not a set of traits only among individuals. It is the ability to tap into the collective resources within your space. It is not just about economic and financial resilience or environment and climate resilience – if we do not have social resilience, we do not have a stable foundation.

The discourse about why women, why are you not also focusing on men often devolves into blame-based language and “*whataboutism*”. Why focus on violence against women and girls? Look at the homicide rates?! Fingers point at the women who are the primary caregivers of children who may not have the tools other than violence, to discipline – and people say that is why boys grow into men who are so violent to women, because women are beating their sons. Others point fingers at the men most of them who are not necessarily consistently present in their homes and when they are, they are physically violent with the women in their lives, or the women who are emotionally violent with their partners or men who are economically violent with their partners - we could go on and on pointing fingers and devolving into *whataboutism* instead of recognising and addressing the symptoms of a major problem.

It goes beyond a discourse of good or evil, that absolves us, it absolves communities from engagement because it pathologizes individuals. This is about human beings raised and steeped in the belief that the only viable tool they have for conflict resolution, is violence. Esther Perel in a recent conversation noted that at times we pathologize individuals instead of understanding that society as a collective has deep seated challenges. That “*whataboutism*” is a deflection, instead of a call to action.

Many of us are working on the issue of preventing and responding to violence across society. Now at UN Women our approach is to start with violence in the home, violence against some of the most marginalised, who happen to be women. We see it as the canary in the coal mine. There's an evidence basis for this. It signals the normalization of violence in the most sacred space – in the home.

- In Jamaica 66% of the women who experienced violence in their relationships had partners who were physically violent with other men.
- The 61% of the women in Jamaica who experience violence witnessed their mothers being abused by their partners.
- The 68% of the men who abused women experienced their mothers being abused by their partners.
- And to Ambassador Van Steen's point, around 40% of those who were abused, believed that violence was a viable means that a man could use to correct his partners.

So, violence against women and girls is a canary in the coal mine, it is telling us a story about the normalisation of violence in our society and now we know the costs.

Thus, I want to thank first Senator Kamina Johnson Smith, Minister, for all that she did to advocate for Jamaica and the Caribbean to be a part of this global Programme.

Minister Olivia "Babsy" Grange and Sharon Coburn Robinson for driving this work in Jamaica; for every new shelter, every hotline, for every woman whose life has been impacted by a more robust response by the Government of Jamaica.

All of the women parliamentarians who sat down and listened to this and wanted to know how could they integrate this into the way in which they engage on budgets in Jamaica.

This information has been thoroughly curated by our excellent team of researchers, and I really want to thank the Planning Institute of Jamaica (PIOJ), the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Justice, of course again the Ministry of Culture, Gender, Entertainment and Sport, and the Statistics and Information Unit within the Jamaica Constabulary Force, Child Protection and Family Services Agency (CPFSA) and the University of the West Indies, among other key stakeholders for providing the necessary information, so that we could get this data to you.

And thanks always to Alison Anderson McLean for leading the charge. She worked across Jamaican government institutions with children and women and always told us, whatever you do, think about the impact. How are you challenging and changing the reality for someone? This study makes the case. This study provides evidence which will hopefully inform decision making and justify the budget decisions that are required for effective response yes, but also effective prevention. It is costing Jamaica too much. The stakes are really too high.

Thank you.



Spotlight Initiative
To eliminate violence against women and girls

An initiative of the United Nations funded by the European Union

