

**REMARKS BY**

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**RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT**

**FOR THE OPENING CEREMONY OF**  
**THE REGIONAL WORKSHOP ON CHILD AND GENDER**  
**RESPONSIVE BUDGETING AT**  
**THE TRADE WINDS HOTEL, 7<sup>TH</sup> MAY 2015**

<Acknowledgements>

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is indeed a privilege to present remarks this morning.

On behalf of our Prime Minister - the Hon. Gaston Browne, I extend regrets for his unavailability to attend and participate in this morning's opening ceremony. However, the Prime Minister has asked that I convey his profound gratitude for the unwavering support of the organizers and partners - UNICEF, UN- WOMEN, DFID and the OECS Commission, and to register his deep appreciation that you have selected Antigua and Barbuda as the venue to convene this historic meeting. As a Government and a people we are equally pleased to host this event and extend a warm welcome to all.

{Please join with me in a round of applause to welcoming our delegates to our shores}

I trust that whilst here, whether early in the morning or at the close of the days' events you will have an opportunity to sample any one of our 365 beaches.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

**Governments within the region have made significant public investments over the past two decades to guarantee gender equality and the rights of children and adolescents in the region. On average, such investments in social safety nets range between 1.3 % and 3.2 % of their GDP. Public investments in health, education, child protection and social protection have**

reaped important benefits in universal primary and secondary education; impressive human development indices and invaluable progress towards the MDG targets. In the presence of current economic and social realities, it is necessary that the sources of investments in children and in gender equality that is of the penniless and most vulnerable populations be protected; efficiently implemented; and assessments are made periodically to ascertain their impact.

The region has made steady progress towards the Millennium Development Goals, providing free and universal primary and secondary school education. We have achieved a significant drop in the levels of maternal mortality, improvements in child health and care services, early childhood development services and a

range of important living conditions and quality of life. Nonetheless, it is imperative that our social policies in education, health, social protection and human services and family affairs give particular attention to gender equality and the status of children within the region to ensure we do not erode our social development gains in the face of ongoing shocks to our national and regional economies. At the CARICOM Level, the Caribbean Joint Statement on Gender Equality and the Post 2015 and Small Islands Developing States (SIDS) Agenda expresses Caribbean perspectives and expectations as regards gender equality in the emerging Post 2015 Development and SIDS agendas. With the support of the UN Women Multi-Country Office for the Caribbean, the Joint Statement was generated by high level government officials and civil society representatives from CARICOM

countries, with inputs from regional inter-governmental bodies and international partners in the Caribbean.

The Statement represents Caribbean voices and expectations in the emerging Post 2015 and SIDS global agendas as it relates to gender equality. The Joint Statement emerged from a UN Women-supported “Caribbean Forum on Gender Equality and the Post 2015 Agenda” held in Barbados (22<sup>nd</sup> to 23<sup>rd</sup> August 2013).

In adopting the Joint Statement, participants committed to an advocacy strategy so as to ensure that the, priorities and perspective contained in the Joint Statement are considered by decision-makers within the emerging global processes around Post 2015 and SIDS.

Forum participants endorsed the need for a stand-alone goal on Gender Equality in the Post 2015 Agenda, as well as mainstreaming of gender equality priorities throughout Post 2015 and SIDS. They highlighted the need for poverty reduction strategies through macro-economic reforms which reduce the persistent and increasing burden of poverty on women and other vulnerable groups, including adolescent mothers, female heads of households, persons with disabilities, the elderly, indigenous people, domestic workers and rural women in particular.

The Year 2015 is also the 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. A Caribbean Synthesis and Appraisal of the implementation of the

Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action conducted by UN ECLAC shows major achievements on gender equality and women's empowerment. The CARICOM Region has made significant investments in legislation to protect survivors of Gender-Based Violence (GBV), and in several countries the police have increased efforts in GBV data collection. Yet, Violence against Women continues to persist in the CARICOM region at very high levels. There are strong indications that part of the efforts for reducing or eliminating such violence requires actions to increase the economic independence of women caught in the cycle of abuse by male partners on whom they depend for livelihood needs. Poverty reduction is therefore a crucial element of all efforts to eliminate GBV.



The analysis reveals that the group that is most affected by poverty and most vulnerable are the children and youth in all country poverty assessments reviewed. This trend will have a bearing on the future social stability of the countries, and poses the likelihood of increasing crime among youth perpetrators desperate for income and recognition. Current patterns suggest that male youth will be more prone to criminal activity, and this could have a destabilising impact on the already fragile households where females are sole providers.

**There is little doubt that the Government of Antigua & Barbuda and the other governments in the OECS region are committed to providing adequate, timely and sustainable social protection services to the most**

prevalent risks and vulnerabilities of its population. It is within these lens that the progressive realization of an integrated Social Protection Floor can be attained for adequate needs, rights, and the development of the full potential of all citizens. It adopts the equity principle of paying particular attention to the poorest and most vulnerable populations.

As such, investing in children's rights and gender equality to help them have a healthy, safe and happy life is a commitment made by the Governments of the OECS together with 193 countries through the ratification of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), the International Covenant on Economic Social and Cultural

Rights (ICESCR) and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The prioritization of public resources toward the fulfillment of the gender equality and rights of children and adolescents, contributes to the economic, social, political and cultural development in any country.

In October 2014, 220 delegates from 22 countries convened in Peru in a sharing and learning international Seminar on Investing in Children: A commitment to Equity at 25 Years of the CRC. Dr. Jorge Cardona, Member of the Committee on the Rights of the Child, in the keynote address outlined that investing in children was legally required, economically profitable, politically advisable and morally right. Cardona is convinced that public finance investments in children must reflect the principles of non-discriminatory, participation and the

best interests of the child enshrined within the CRC. He contended that, within the context of high inequalities in Latin America and the Caribbean, it is not only more investments but rather better investments are compulsory (see Peru Summary Report 2014).

At the corresponding regional workshop held in Barbados (October 29 & 30, 2014), 33 participants from 9 Caribbean Islands echoed convictions that the Caribbean stands to benefit from significant social, economic and political returns on investments made in our children, especially those who are most at-risk and vulnerable. The multiplier effect of investments in girls would transform the nature of our societies positively.

**A fundamental message drawn from the development literature and Convention for the Rights of the Child**

(CRC, Article 4) is that “there are no rights without resources”, which makes it essential to develop a framework requiring States to assign the maximum amount of available resources in programs and policies toward the holistic development of children and their caregivers. Likewise, articles in the CEDAW and also the International Covenant on Economic Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), commit signatories to invest the maximum available resources, without undermining the economic viability of the State, in gender equality and women's rights. As such, investing in gender equality and children to help them have a healthy, safe and happy life is a commitment made by the Governments in CARICOM, all of whom are signatories to the CEDAW, CRC and ICESCR. These human rights agreements provide for the progressive realization of

those rights and the non-discrimination and equality of men, women, boys and girls in the region.

Second, we must embrace the fact that childhood and adolescence is a window of opportunity to develop the future capabilities of our children and adolescents. It is a moment when investments made can materialize into extra-ordinary returns for their health, education, child protection, wellbeing and futures. The endless benefits of social cohesion from the protection and development of our children warrants our current investments in social policy in the region.

Third, the economic benefits and productivity gains to be derived by the countries of the region would be

significant. The measure of the investments made today will reap significant benefits to our nations as we invest in gender equality and in our children's education, health, protection and development.

**My Government is currently engaged in a comprehensive transformation process to implement an integrated social protection system, which embraces a multi-sector and participatory approach.**

The Ministry of Social Transformation and Human Resource Development is the coordinating partner agency for the social protection programs. The foundation of the social protection system is built on the fundamental rights-based and equity-oriented approach, promoting respect for the rights and dignity of all citizens,

especially the most vulnerable groups. We recognize that social protection plays a vital role in strengthening the resilience of vulnerable populations, including children, women, older persons, families and communities.

Three areas of peculiar attention to the Government of Antigua and Barbuda and the Ministry of Social Transformation and Human Resource Development are the revision of the legislative framework (Social Protection Act, 2016) for social protection; development of a National Social Protection Policy, Costed Action Plan and Monitoring and Evaluation Framework; and national capacity development and advocacy workshops.

**A key first step in ensuring that children's rights and gender equality are integrated into national planning**



and budgeting frameworks is to adopt evidence based costing, utilizing relevant tools and strategies. In St. Lucia, for example, a Budget Analysis and Fiscal Space Analysis for Investment in Children was undertaken to help identify potential funding sources, improve equitable allocation and implementation and monitor and track expenditure for investment in children. In addition, a Costing and Budgeting Framework for the Gender Equality Priorities of the Public Assistance Programme is being developed in order to ascertain the adequate investments needed to ensure equity between men, women and children who are beneficiaries of this programme. These methodological approaches and tools offer the sector evidence-based strategies for decision-making in improving the quality and equity of investments. The analyses provide insights

to inefficiencies and barriers to maximise outcomes for key performance indicators and help gather contextual data for evidence based costing and valuation of social protection programmes services and benefits.

**Furthermore, it will be critical to collectively engage in monitoring, tracking and analysing the quality of expenditure for a transformative social protection floor.** The collaborative partnership and participatory engagement in the overall budgetary framework and processes is pivotal to the realisation of meaningful outcomes for the most vulnerable population. It is imperative that the social sectors actively participate in the strategic planning and monitoring of public spending on social programmes against key performance indicators to ensure quality, efficient and equitable outcomes. In

this manner, there is greater opportunity for accountability, participation and transparency for the investment in children and gender responsive social protection in the OECS and also throughout the CARICOM region.

Integrating children's rights and gender equality in performance-based budgeting is necessary to ensure the realisation of the rights of all citizens. It contributes to the economic, social, political and cultural development in any country. The Government of Antigua and Barbuda is committed to the progressive realization of a child and gender sensitive social protection policy and system.

In closing I am enthused about this event due to the fact that the two day workshop is a forerunner of what we will be implemented locally, in short order, and if I

am not mistaken we will also have a shot at been able to pilot the Gender and Child Responsive Budgeting Toolkit.

Therefore, it gives me great pleasure to declare this Regional Workshop open.

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