

**Remarks by Dr. Hilary Brown**  
**Programme Manager, Culture and Community Development**  
**CARICOM Secretariat**  
**CARICOM/UN Women Meeting Preparatory to CSW65**  
**Monday 8<sup>th</sup> February & Friday 12<sup>th</sup> February 2021**

I'm delighted to bring you greetings on behalf of the Secretary General, Ambassador Irwin LaRocque and to participate in this two-day Regional meeting on Building a Coordinated Caribbean position, preparatory to the 65<sup>th</sup> Session of the *Commission on the Status of Women*, scheduled for March at the United Nations in New York.

This meeting of so many key stakeholders and partners, intended to strengthen our collaboration to advance gender equality in our region, is being held in collaboration with UN Women Multi-Country Office for the Caribbean; the UWI Institute of Gender and Development Studies: Nita Barrow Unit; Caribbean Women in Leadership (CIWiL) and ParlAmericas. I want to say a big thank you to all the partners for the excellent collaboration we have shared over a short period of time to make this meeting a reality. And also to thank our speakers and presenters, parliamentarians, government officials and civil society representatives who agreed to participate with such enthusiasm – we are looking forward to your expert contributions.

This year, the CSW theme focuses on: *Women's full and effective participation and decision-making in public life, as well as the elimination of violence, for achieving gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls.*

It can be argued that the theme highlights two of the most important pillars of the 12-point Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action which was agreed upon by 185 heads of state, women's organizations and academia. Twenty-five years on, globally and in the region, there is still much work to be done to increase women's voices and presence at the highest levels of decision-making in government and governance frameworks, and to ensure that women and girls are able to live their lives free of violence. As such, progress toward achieving SDG Goal5 on Gender Equality regrettably remains slow and uneven.

It is my hope, that the next two days of expert panels, rich discussion, review and adoption of the CARICOM Draft Statement, affords us the opportunity to take stock of the gender equality commitments we've made, and to re-strategize around advancing them more effectively, especially during this time of the COVID-19 pandemic when gender equality and commitment to women's rights, risk being pushed further into the margins.

It is my pleasure to wish everyone a fruitful meeting and to say how much I'm looking forward to the outcome of our deliberations.

Thank-you.

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