

Building a Coordinated Caribbean position for CSW65
Remarks delivered by the Lady Anande Trotman-Joseph, President of
the CIWiL Regional Board of Directors
8 February 2021

Good Morning distinguished Ministers with responsibility for Gender Affairs, Members of Parliament, Representatives of Embassies and Donor Agencies, Colleague hosts of this regional dialogue, Tonni Brodber and Team of the UN Women Multi-Country Office for the Caribbean, CARICOM Secretariat, University of the West Indies Institute for Gender and Development Studies and ParlAmericas, heads of the National Gender Machineries, representatives of civil society and academia, Sisters, Brothers, members of the Media.

It is my pleasure to extend greetings to you all on behalf of civil society in my capacity as President of the Caribbean Women in leadership (CIWiL).

It seems like only yesterday we gathered in Barbados in 2020, ahead of the 64th session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW).

This year, 2021, the 65th session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) will consider the theme:

“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”.

Twenty-five years ago, the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (BPfA) blueprint for gender equality, confronted the vexing and global problem of violence against women and girls.

The Plan also recognized women’s unequal share of power and decision-making as one of twelve critical areas of concern. It laid out concrete actions to ensure women’s equal access to, and full participation in, power structures, and to develop women’s capacity to participate in decision-making and leadership.

The realization of gender equality was expected to be achieved with set international targets designed to achieve ‘gender balance’ and inform decision-making by Member States

Successive commitments to women's leadership, most recently in 2015, recognised that women's "full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic and public life," is required to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

However, we all know that despite some gains in women's formal political and public sector national, regional and global participation, overall, women continue to face myriad obstacles in accessing power. They are underrepresented in local and national decision-making in all regions of the world and are often targeted by tangible and intangible violence in the private and public spheres, aimed at discouraging and removing them from service in public life.

The 2020 review of the BPfA found that women's representation in national parliaments doubled from 12 per cent in 1995 to an average of 24.3 per cent globally in 2019, with the global median representation of women at 21 per cent. Only 9 per cent of States have achieved or surpassed the target of gender balance in their parliaments. The reality is that women's participation - particularly in public life and decision making has stalled in many countries.

In our Caribbean, the results are mixed. Grenada leads the region with 47.6 % of women in Parliament, Guyana has a mandatory 30% of women on the national parties' lists, and recently we saw great strides being made by our sisters in Jamaica. There was heartening progress in Belize which saw Hon President Carolyn Trench Sandiford and Hon Speaker Natalie Woods, both members of CIWiL. However, many regional countries are still a long way off the goal.

"The challenges women face in participating in public life are multifaceted are not abstract. Social and cultural norms and a vicious systemic cycle contribute to holding women back from political participation, through: a male centric political arena, often excluding women from the pinnacle of leadership, patriarchal norms that inhibit women and girls, and prevent their equal participation. Women are expected to choose between caring for their loved ones and participating in public life.

Negative experiences of young women who wish to lead, especially those with a feminist agenda have been reported.

Acts and threats of violence including specific sexist propaganda, misinformation and disinformation, result in women's limited participation in public life. The elimination of violence against women and girls remains critical for achieving women's full and effective participation and decision-making in public life." (Report of the Expert Group, EGM/2020/REPORT October 2020)

The reality of COVID 19, is found by research to suggest further negative impacts on vulnerable groups and particularly women, who will be disproportionately affected by the pandemic. The UN Secretary-General has warned that "COVID-19 could reverse the limited progress that has been made on gender equality and women's rights." (See <https://www.un.org/en/un-coronavirus-communications-team/put-women-and-girls-centre-efforts-recover-covid-19>).

There must be a genuine joinder of state actors and civil society to regionally recommit to realising the goal of comprehensive gender parity (50-50), in all leadership and decision-making bodies and executive and public administration positions at all levels.

Where necessary, though not popular, or fully understood as a necessary concept, there **must be** implementation of temporary special measures that support and advance gender parity and the full inclusion of women and men in decision-making at all levels.

The work of civil society may have to be reset as the challenges to gender equality and female vulnerabilities have been exacerbated by the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Civil society through its committed and unwavering advocacy and work, must hold states accountable, continue mobilisation and strident calls for the protection of the rights of our women and girls at this critical juncture.

We must all be accountable in our representation and delivery of our work for **substantive** gender equality. Such sustained efforts will realise our region's transformation and sustainable development, achieving more just, violence-free and equitable nations.

Our deliberations must highlight that we cannot rest on the laurels of our past achievements and gains, for our region's women and girls.

Our watch words are: We must act and we must act **now!**