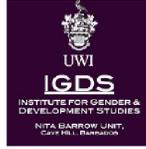




CIWIL
Caribbean Women in Leadership



**The Honourable Bridgid Mary Annisette-George
Speaker of the House of Representatives of Trinidad and
Tobago
Vice-President of ParlAmericas**

**Opening Remarks at the Third Multi-stakeholder
meeting in advance of the 65th Session of the Commission
on the Status of Women Building a Coordinated Caribbean
position for SCW65**

Monday 8th February and Friday 12th February 2021

Salutations

- Dr. Hilary Brown, Programme Manager, Culture and Community Development, CARICOM Secretariat
- Lady Anande Trotman-Joseph, President of the Regional Board of Directors of Caribbean Women in Leadership (CIWiL)
- Dr. Tonya Haynes Lecturer and Interim Head and Coordinator of Graduate Programmes at the Institute for Gender and Development Studies, Nita Barrow Unit, University of the West Indies, Cave Hill
- Ms. Tonni Brodber, Representative, UN Women Multi-Country Office-Caribbean.
- Fellow Parliamentarians,
- Representatives of national gender organisations agencies and civil society
- Other Distinguished Participants and Guests
- Ladies and Gentlemen.

Good morning.

It is my pleasure to bring greetings on behalf of the Board of Directors of ParlAmericas at this two-day multi-stakeholder meeting in preparation for the 65th Commission on the Status of Women aimed at building a coordinated Caribbean position. Undeniably I

regret not being able to meet you in person and to warmly welcome this gathering to Trinidad and Tobago but by now we have all become accustomed to “the new normal” which brings a different appreciation to the concept of being “present at an event.” So I warmly welcome you on your virtual visit to Trinidad and Tobago. From our experiences over the past 11 months, I feel confident to assert that we can bear witness to the efficiency and efficacy of virtual interfaces.

This meeting marks ParlAmericas’ Third collaboration with this group of partners that is to say the CARICOM Secretariat Gender and Development Programme, the UN Women Multi-Country Office for the Caribbean, Caribbean Women in Leadership (CIWiL) and the Institute for Gender and Development Studies (IGDS) at the University of the West Indies in convening regional stakeholders comprising parliamentarians, ministers of government, academia, representatives of gender organisations and agencies and members of civil society. As organizing partners, we individually recognize and accept that our regions’ sustainable advancement towards gender equality requires the commitment and co-operation of, and communication among the groups which are present. Every institution, organization, agency, entity and group represented plays an essential role in the continuum of change through the promotion of awareness, creation of policy and the enactment of legislation all of which are aimed at withering away systemic biases and consequentially causing the cultural shifts towards the advancement of the goals and ideals of the Beijing Declaration.

Our experiences from the first of these meetings in 2018 has fortified the organizing partners in the view that an annual meeting of stakeholders is invaluable as it provides us all with an opportunity to dialogue on priority issues within the context of the gender equality agenda, to assess our progress, to reaffirm our collective commitment and to chart our next steps. The annual stake holder meeting therefore is a strategic evaluation and charting tool and more so meeting prior to a CSW Session enables us to set our

compass and chart our course to ensure not only a co-ordinated but an impacting contribution to the deliberations.

While our experiences alone are sufficient justification for the exercise in which we are to be engaged shortly, I am reminded that Goal 17 of the Sustainable Development Goals speaks of Building Partnerships. The authors of the SDG Partnership Guidebook which was copyrighted by the United Nations and the Partnering Initiative in 2020, identified the value which partnerships create as (1) *the Collaborative Advantage which the publication defined as “the extra power alchemy or magic that allows a group of actors to collectively deliver”* and (2) *Partnership Difference defined as “the additional impact a partnership delivers compared with single actor approaches”*. One of the benefits resulting from the Partnership Difference was CONNECTION- which is achieved through the convening of multiple organisations and catalysing collaborative action to deliver additional impact. I posit that it is both the Collaborative Advantage and the Partnership Difference which are the *raison d’être* of our meetings and which make our meetings productive.

This year the priority theme for the 65th Meeting of CSW is Women’s full and effective participation and decision-making in public life as well as the elimination of violence. The theme may at first blush appear disjunctive, but all of you are keenly aware how intertwined the two aspects of the theme are. Real and sustainable gender Equality will not be attained without women’s participation in decision making- This must not amount to tokenism. It must be full and effective. Women’s needs and interests can only be articulated and addressed with policies, plans and programmes and of course budgets all of which must be designed by inputs of Women’s experiences and perspectives. Who else can articulate women’s experiences and needs? None other than Women!

We accept that gains have been made since 1995 in Women’s representation in decision making and yes we celebrate the progress and are grateful to all who have laboured and advocated for the realization of those achievement. But we are fully cognizant that

women still remain considerably underrepresented at all levels of decision making and thus we are committed, dedicated and we shall persevere until the goal of gender equality is achieved. The imperative of achieving gender equality is heightened by the potential of the Pandemic to undermine the gains which have been made. The corrosive effect of the Pandemic is two pronged as it is likely to increase the inequality divide in every aspect of life and thus increase the likelihood that women's needs and interests are overlooked in policy decisions, plans, programmes and budgets.

In addition, anecdotal evidence suggests that there is a co-relationship between women's and girls' advancement and the incidence of gender-based violence, so as our women and girls achieve greater socio-economic-political status they are increasingly the subjects of gender-based violence. It has been reported internationally and our Region is no exception, the Pandemic has increased the exposure to our women and girls to incidences of domestic violence in their homes with the restrictions on movements imposed in our countries in order to contain its spread.

According to UN Women in a COVID-19 publication the new burdens of the Pandemic risk further hindering of women's participation in decision making positions

I feel that in speaking to you this morning I am speaking to the converted. We know that word "women" does not refer to a homogenous group; we understand that to achieve the goals of the Beijing Declaration that our societies' decision making tables must be a microcosm of our societies populated with women at all levels with their myriad of experiences making their contribution to the realization of a more just and equitable society. We know that there still exist many gaps in the implementation of the 1995 Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action 25 + years later but we shall not be disheartened as we are encouraged by the words of the French Novelist Honore de Balzac that:

All human power is a compound of time and patience-

and that includes woman empowerment so we shall work in earnest and persevere - assured that by our consistent and targeted actions as legislators, ministers of government, representatives of academia, social activists, leaders, advisors, advocates, mentors that we shall advance the cause of equity equality inclusion and justice for women specifically and for our societies generally.

On behalf of the Board the Director General and the staff of ParlAmericas I express thanks to our partners for this important collaboration and to all of you on behalf of the Women and Girls of our Region sincere gratitude for using your voices to safeguard their future in a more just and equitable future.

I wish us all a productive two days of exchange.

Thank you.