



Remarks

Representative (ad interim) UN Women MCO Caribbean – Ms. Tonni Brodber
Bureau of Gender Affairs Barbados Launch of the 16 Days of Activism 2020-
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I know not many of us would be surprised to hear me say, this has been a difficult year. Probably one of the most difficult that any of us have experienced in our lifetimes, in large part because it has been over 100 years since the world experienced a pandemic of this magnitude. The latest COVID-19 count is 58 million cases globally and approx. 1.4 million deaths. The Caribbean has crossed the 50,000 cases threshold and over 1200 deaths. Barbados has for the most part been spared with only 7 deaths and 253 confirmed cases, but like everywhere else – people’s livelihoods have been impacted. With reduced incomes, people are less able to meet their basic needs and manage their debt. The corona virus like any other hazard is insidious in that it exploits already present inequalities, and its impacts linger long beyond the direct cases of those who have been physically affected. The economic and social impacts of the corona virus force us to make the decision where we can either build back better or be resigned to a very difficult and traumatic new normal.

Globally and regionally, COVID-19 has seen women experiencing intimate partner violence (IPV) in situations where they face even more violence because physical distancing measures could make it more difficult to find pathways for escaping a violent situation and loss of jobs reduces women’s economic independence. In the Caribbean, recent UN Women research shows that 69% of our women work in the services sector which includes hospitality and accommodation, a sector which has severe contractions owing to closed and reduced border access because of COVID-19. Domestic violence and IPV in particular has grown in parallel to the virus.

We know that some of the risk factors that lead to IPV have been severely exacerbated by the impacts of COVID-19. According to research on the

prevalence of Gender-based violence in five Caribbean countries, all those countries have higher rates than the global average of 1 in 3 women will experience violence in her lifetime. These same surveys also garnered data on the risk factors for IPV including quarrelling between partners – on average 81% of the women experience abuse, had frequent quarrels with their partners. This tells us a lot of people are still not managing conflict well and were seeing violence as an acceptable means of conflict resolution. We can categorically state that it is not.

Our perceptions or the normalisation and acceptance of intimate partner violence is also a risk factor. Of the women who had experienced abuse, too high a number - between 42-58% - felt a man is justified in hitting a woman if she burns the food, neglects the children or argues back.

COVID-19 is contracting our economic spaces, it is making childcare responsibilities multiply unequally. This all contributes to quarreling, this contributes to the perceptions that a woman is neglecting her duties to take care of the children. This contributes to adding to the “gasoline” that exists already in the Caribbean that people believe hitting a woman is a viable option when it comes to conflict resolution.

Therefore it is not surprising that although Barbados does not have national prevalence data, and yet, in spite of the low direct impact of the corona virus, there is evidence that there has been an increase in reported domestic violence cases to the police in the months of May and June of 37.5%.

To the men in our lives and in the country, when we have these conversations, we need to be clear that *‘Being held accountable and feeling shame is not the same as being shame’ – Brene Brown.*

This is why the 16 Days of Activism is so important, it is because we need to use the moments of advocacy to urge that we do the self-reflection and analysis of our perceptions of what is acceptable behaviour. What it confirms is that in this moment of extreme vulnerability where hazards natural and man-made undermine the progress we’ve made globally towards equality; we see with extreme clarity the ways in which inequalities and violence become further compounded. Resilience lies in gender equality, resilience lies in spaces where violence is not relied upon as a means to address problems, resilience lies in

ending all forms of gender-based violence, specifically violence against women and girls and leaving no one behind, in ending all forms violence against those most at risk, whether gender-based or not, all violence, especially violence against children.

This is why this year for the 16 Days of activism we focus on the need to **Fund** (women's organisations), **Respond** (to survivors needs), **Prevent** (by addressing social norms that normalise violence against women and girls) and **Collect** (data to inform policies and programmes).

UN Women seeks to assure the Government of Barbados that not only our agency but our sister agencies across the UN system stand ready to support this beautiful island nation to build back better. Already, UN Women under a joint UN programme is undertaking a pilot to promote the full empowerment of women, noting that income support may not be sufficient to address systemic poverty and women's economic empowerment to escape violent homes and relationships through 3 pathways:

Pathway 1: Enhancing economic security and well-being of the household

Pathway 2: Strategies for reducing intra-household conflict

Pathway 3: Women's empowerment through increasing self-esteem, opportunities to increase employability through skills training and certification

In addition, through the EU-UN **Spotlight Initiative**, a focus has also already been placed to "Fund, Respond, Prevent and Collect" on violence against women and girls within the context of family violence will continue to unravel the root causes of gender based violence. While Barbados is not supported through a national Spotlight Initiative, it will benefit from the regional Spotlight programme.

I wish you much success in your advocacy and programming for the 16 Days of Activism, 2020. Thank you.