

ANTIGUA AND BARBUDA

REPORT

TO

**THE 11th SESSION OF THE REGIONAL CONFERENCE OF WOMEN IN LATIN
AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN**

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Introduction

This report provides an overview of the initiatives undertaken by the Government of Antigua and Barbuda to promote gender equality and the empowerment of women in fulfillment of the Quito Consensus agreed at the 10th Regional Conference of Women in Latin America and the Caribbean.

In reviewing the implementation of the Quito Consensus some progress have been identified but there are still many serious challenges. The Quito Consensus recognizes “that parity is one of the key driving forces of democracy, that its aim is to achieve equality in the exercise of power, in decision-making, in mechanisms of social and political participation and representation, in diverse types of family relations, and in social, economic, political and cultural relations, and that it constitutes a goal for the eradication of women’s structural exclusion.”

The Government of Antigua and Barbuda remains committed to the goals of the BPfA, the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), the ICPD, Convention for the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women and its Optional protocol , and other agreements that provide a solid blueprint for to promote gender equality and women’s empowerment, despite the economic and social challenges facing our nation and the world at large. Moreover, the Government of Antigua & Barbuda recognises that continued investment in the realisation of these goals serves as a catalyst to national development.

The Directorate of Gender Affairs, which is the national machinery responsible for promoting gender equality and women’s empowerment continues to work towards the eradication of persisting and prevailing gender inequalities in all forms, through targeted interventions in key human rights and social justice areas. Gender Affairs has advanced as the focal agency for gender issues in Antigua and Barbuda, and succeeded in securing the support of local, regional and international partners to assist with its efforts.

Eradicating Gender based Violence

Although acts of gender based violence continue to be one of the country’s biggest challenges, a number of strides have been made to address this persisting and prevailing form of gender inequality. Antigua & Barbuda has pledged its commitment to the Secretary General’s campaign, Unite to End Violence Against Women, and has partnered with a number of agencies including UNFPA, United Nations Development Fund for Women and CHAA to strengthen state accountability and community action to end gender-based violence, particularly rape and sexual violence. Antigua & Barbuda has adopted an integrated, multi-agency approach to addressing gender-based violence, linking the judicial, health and social services sectors. the Directorate of Gender Affairs continues to direct its primary attention and efforts to realising the full eradication of gender based violence and provide survivors with the necessary care, treatment and support services.

In 2009, the Directorate was successful in securing support from a number of agencies to address gender-based violence from multi-sectoral and community-based approaches. This support assisted in building the capacity of various agencies to address gender-based violence, while sharing knowledge and information with the general public. The United Nations Development

Fund for Women (UNIFEM) committed assistance to the Directorate of Gender Affairs through a project entitled, “Strengthening State Accountability and Community-based Action to End Gender-based Violence”, which focuses on addressing overall state responses to gender-based violence, through strengthen the capacity of the Royal Police Force of Antigua & Barbuda to address these crimes, while raising gender awareness, gender analysis and gender sensitivity within the entire judicial sector, state service agencies and the general public. This project provided for the procurement of equipment, including new media technologies to improve the processes of investigation and response to gender-based violence and other crimes, and capacity building activities to improve judicial processes and strengthen community partnership in addressing gender-based violence. With further support from UNIFEM and through the assistance of the Caribbean HIV AIDS Alliance, the Directorate of Gender Affairs embarked upon the initiatives, “Strengthening Capacities, Sensitivity and Public Awareness on Gender-based Violence and HIV” and “Empowering Women and Girls to Halt and Reverse Persisting and Prevailing Gender Inequalities through HIV and GBV Initiatives”, to provide front line workers and key focal points with the tools to work towards the elimination of gender-based violence, while working to reduce the rates of HIV contraction and transmission among those who have been affected by sexual offences. Through these initiatives and the partnership of the Mount St. John Medical Centre, victims of rape and other sexual offences will benefit from a one-stop approach to treatment and response, with all supporting agencies tending to the needs of victims in a designated support location of the hospital. The British High Commission and the Florida Association for Volunteer Action in the Caribbean and the Americas (FAVACA) supported the work of the division in working towards the development of a coordinated, multi-sectoral approach to sexual offences. Through these efforts, key stakeholders in the health, legal, judicial and social services sectors established a protocol for addressing sexual offences that incorporates all aspects prevention, response, treatment, support and judicial process. These efforts will continue to strengthen the capacities of the health sector in the development of a gender-based violence-HIV protocol, which focuses on timely and effective, coordinated service. Through a newly formed partnership, the Directorate of Gender Affairs will work with the International Centre for the Prevention of Crime to promote research-based policies and practices that work to prevent crime and build community safety. These efforts will work to strengthen the women’s safety forum interventions the division undertakes in communities throughout Antigua & Barbuda.

These activities and interventions have all been introduced in addition to the Directorate’s on-going programme to address violence against women. The 24 Hour Crisis Hotline continues to provide non-emergency assistance to survivors of rape, domestic violence, child abuse and other issues. Through the collaborative relationship with 911 Operators, non-emergency callers are connected with the Crisis Hotline free of charge. The Crisis Centre provides on-going, professional counselling services to both male and female clients, helping to address a number of personal, familial and social issues affecting the lives of the citizens and residents of Antigua & Barbuda.

The Directorate of Gender Affairs will continue to be innovative in its approaches to addressing gender based violence, and work to ensure that women and men have access to its services from the places they frequent on a day-to-day basis. Through working with hairdressers and barbers across Antigua & Barbuda, women and men can now receive access to information about

domestic violence in beauty salons and barbershops, as well as receive a number of prevention and information materials, such as the female condom, safety tips, and warning signs of an abusive relationship. The hairdressers and barbers the division currently works with have reported that over 90% of their clients have either suffered directly from, or have been involved in incidents of domestic violence. With these alarming figures, the Directorate will continue to work with these specialised service providers to ensure that access to information and help is available to them, in a non-judgemental and non-discriminatory environment. Through creative partnerships with a number of men's groups and men's organisations, the Directorate of Gender Affairs is working to address violence against women through targeting perpetrators. Training of male gender advocates continues to be part of the division's activities, and will accelerate in the coming year, through partnerships formed with a number of concerned men who have committed themselves to ending violence against women in all forms.

It is the mandate of the Directorate of Gender Affairs to continue to work towards the full eradication of gender based violence. Through these key activities, and other efforts during the 16 Days of Activism Against Gender-based Violence annual campaign, and International Women's Day, and International Human Rights Day activities, the Directorate of Gender Affairs work to heighten awareness in all areas, while working to advance the ability of all social service providers to address gender based violence as to realise its end.

In the area of trafficking of persons, Antigua & Barbuda has developed a strong relationship with IOM to raise public awareness and training for the prevention and elimination of trafficking of women and girls. A national coalition for the prevention of trafficking of persons was established.

Addressing Economic Challenges and Alleviating Poverty

The government of Antigua and Barbuda recognises that adequate services are required to tackle specific gender inequalities faced by women. The participation of women in both the home and the labour force reveals that the challenges in the day-to-day lives of Antiguan and Barbudan women are often doubled. In challenging economic times, without the financial support provided by women, especially single mothers, families are often left strained to acquire the means of their subsistence. The Directorate of Gender Affairs continues to work towards providing support for self-employment initiatives, poverty reduction strategies and work to address the vulnerability of women to unemployment. The Directorate of Gender Affairs partnered with other agencies including the private sector and civil society organisation to address unemployment in young parents and out of school youth. Complimenting the Internationally Renowned Directorate's Work & Life Skills Programme, the "Caribbean Youth Employment Programme" works to equip young women and men for the world of work, while ensuring they acquire the necessary life skills, sexual and reproductive health education, information on HIV/AIDS and other areas, for the successful development of young people as contributors to the development of society. The Skills Training Programme, running since the inception of the Directorate, continues to empower women to develop their entrepreneurial skills, economic independence and self reliance in various traditional and non-traditional areas, including Information Communications Technology (ICT). The division will continue to expand its community outreach in this area, offering low or no-costing skills development through private-public partnerships that provide opportunities for the most vulnerable groups.

Increasing Political Participation and Representation

Women in Antigua and Barbuda hold less than fifteen percent of the political positions from the local level, to party executives, to the national assembly, despite the tremendous participation of women in the political process. Recognising that the continued marginalisation of women from the echelons of political power perpetuates persisting gender inequality throughout society, the Directorate of Gender Affairs has worked to strengthen support for women aspiring for leadership, and contribute to the regional development of networks and institutions that build the capacity of women to contribute to the political development of the country, while articulating their concerns over the assurance of women's and human rights. The Directorate continues to serve as the Secretariat for the Caribbean Institute for Women in Leadership (CIWIL), a flagship institution promoting women in politics, leadership, and decision-making across the region. Through the support of CIWIL the Directorate provided the opportunity for all female candidates running the 2009 General Elections to network with other parliamentarians from Trinidad & Tobago, Barbados, Grenada, and St. Kitts & Nevis. Furthermore, women from across Antigua & Barbuda were provided with the opportunity to articulate their demands for social change, and enhance accountability to women's priorities through the development of the Women's Manifesto of Antigua & Barbuda, through the collaborative assistance of these agencies. The Directorate of Gender Affairs will continue to promote the active participation of women in politics, coordinate efforts throughout the region and advocate for gender parity in leadership at all levels and in all institutions.

Women and Health

Advancements in the health sector have resulted in improved sexual and reproductive health services, including measures to address the HIV AIDS pandemic in Antigua & Barbuda. The Directorate of Gender Affairs has contributed to the development of these efforts, ensuring that they take account of vulnerabilities of women, and strengthen the ability for various service providers to better provide for care, treatment and support. The introduction of rapid-result testing and pre and post HIV test counselling by the National HIV Programme and community partners is working to empower the citizens and residents of Antigua & Barbuda to know their status and receive the support necessary to ensure health living. Through the assistance of the Caribbean HIV AIDS Alliance, 3 Officers of the Directorate received advanced training in administering these services, and now offer Voluntary HIV Counselling to clients of the division. The Directorate of Gender Affairs will further extend its services in the coming year to offer rapid HIV testing, upon the approval of the National AIDS Programme. Women and men across Antigua and Barbuda have benefited from increased access to resources for family planning, contraception and the treatment of sexually transmitted illnesses through the outreach approaches of the division. Female condoms continue to be provided without cost to users, through the assistance of the United Nations Development Fund (UNFPA), and post-exposure prophylactics (PEP) are given to survivors of rape and sexual abuse free of charge. Meeting the needs of vulnerable groups, including the disabled and elderly has remained high priority through social programmes which provide relief in utilities and amenities for those who demonstrate need. The Directorate continues to manage the Over 80s Programme, ensuring that those with identified needs are relieved of some of the expenses of utilities. The Directorate of Gender Affairs has further worked to ensure that young people are gain knowledge and accurate information to guard their sexual and reproductive health in the future. Through adopting abstinence, prevention and education programming on HIV/AIDS and its interconnection to gender-based violence,

disability and other issues facing young people, the division is working to ensure that young people are equipped with the tools to continue their education and develop into well-rounded citizens. Meeting the needs of vulnerable young people, including teenage mothers remains critical to the work of the division, not only ensuring they have access to health information and resources, but are supported in continuing their education and advancing the lives of their families.

Future Actions to Advance the Implementation of the Quito Consensus and the Brasilia Consensus

At the national level research will form a key part of the strategies to address gender issues and to guide the introduction of mechanism to ensure equality and equity.

At the regional level there will be active participation in fora to ensure that policies and programmes aimed at advancing the status of women are promoted in regional initiatives.

There will also be the promotion of collaborative efforts to attain the principal priorities and policies of various conventions, plan of actions and agreements aimed at achieving gender equity and equality.