

The Government of Guyana remains unswerving in its commitment to promoting and advancing the rights of women throughout Guyana, and will expend every effort with available resources-human, financial and technical to enable Guyana to honour its obligations in fulfillment of the Brasilia Consensus.

Guyana now presents its National report on the implementation status of the Brasilia Consensus.

The Women's Affairs Bureau of the Ministry of Labour, Human Services and Social Security of the Government of Guyana is the Department tasked with the implementation of policies for the advancement of women's rights and the attainment of true equality for women in our country.

In this report the Government of Guyana wishes to highlight all efforts made at the national level to further improve the status of women in Guyana.

During the period under review, a number of initiatives were undertaken. There have been many positive developments in the areas of poverty alleviation, monitoring and evaluating the situation of women generally and the progress being made in society, with respect to the collection of statistical data to be utilized for the continued development of programmes aimed to empower our women.

Three of the eight focus areas of the Brasilia Consensus that are most relevant to the review of achievements over the period are as follow:

- *Attain Greater Economic Autonomy and Equality in the Workplace.*
- *Address all forms of violence against women.*
- *Promote the conditions for the integral health of women and for their sexual and reproductive rights.*

The notable achievements in these areas are incorporated in this report.

1. Attain Greater Economic Autonomy and Equality in the Workplace

- There is labour legislation in place to provide for the protection of Domestic Workers engaged in an employment relationship. Efforts are being made to place

the issue of unpaid domestic and care work, on the national agenda so as to bring recognition to its economic value.

- There are policies for the protection of all workers including domestic workers. These policies are implemented through programmes formulated through an effective Tripartite Body comprising representatives from Government, Organised Labour, Private Sector, Civil Society and employers.
- In Guyana, women are granted maternity leave up to thirteen weeks.
- All Domestic Workers and Care Givers in a recognized employment relationship are paid.
- The issue of unpaid / unwaged work has been discussed and placed on the National Agenda and steps are being taken by major stakeholders with a view to formulating policies to address this issue. On July 1st, 2013 there was the introduction of the National Minimum Wage for regular Working Hours (For All Workers in Guyana) Order, made under Section 8 of the Labour Act, Chapter 98:01. The Government of Guyana approved a National Minimum Wage and a forty (40) hour work week for both Private and Public sector employees. The National Minimum Wage specifies that a Minimum wage shall apply, but is not limited to workers employed in all the sectors, and shall be applicable to all workers in similar categories.
- There is no discrimination in employment policies. Additionally, there is a Women and Gender Equality Commission which is a constitutional body, appointed in 2010 following an agreed upon parliamentary mechanism. The Women and Gender Equality Commission is one of four (4) constitutional rights bodies that has been constitutionally set up to oversee and promote gender equality in the public and private sectors. The commission is mandated to monitor and protect the human rights of women and to vigilantly guard against

discrimination. Its mandate allows for it to receive and investigate complaints and to call for redress. Sensitisation of the public, specifically women's organizations to gender issues, form part of the mandate of the Commission, and this has been its focus in its first three years of existence. Like all other Constitution Commissions, it reports directly to the National Assembly and presented its third and final report in September, 2013.

The Women and Gender Equality Commission has developed a five year strategic plan for the period 2013-2018.

The Women Affairs Bureau of the Ministry of Labour, Human Services & Social Security is the national machinery whose main functions are:

- (i) To contribute to the formulation of a gender awareness policy for the advancement of women in Guyana
 - (ii) Provide administrative and technical assistance to non-governmental women's organizations in the planning and implementation of programmes.
 - (iii) Provide a referral service for women.
 - (iv) Initiate gender based research and provide disaggregated data to inform policy and programme formulation.
 - (v) Address issues of concerns related to the girl child.
- The Equal Rights Act and the Prevention of Discrimination Act (1997) provides protection regardless of gender race, ethnicity and sexual orientation in relation to access to the labour market and employment opportunities.
 - The Labour and Occupational Safety and Health Laws of Guyana provides protection to all categories of workers including Domestic Workers. Additionally, Guyana has taken steps to ratify the ILO Convention #189 on Domestic Workers thereby creating the basis for decent work with respect to those persons who are employed as Household Services Workers, whilst primarily ensuring that the rights of these workers are not violated..

- In Guyana, women and men are given equal opportunities and are paid equal remuneration for work of equal value.
- There are policies and programmes in place to cater for professional training for both rural and urban women. They are given access to training in Information Technology, and skills training programmes are offered in other technical vocational skills.
- In Guyana, women have access to productive assets. They are entitled to apply for land and other natural resources for both economic and residential purposes.
- Women's economic contribution in rural areas are recognized and valued. They have access to equal opportunities to engage in economic activities. Women are encouraged to engage in entrepreneurship, and training programmes are readily accessible.
- Labour related rights in respect of women are upheld in accordance with the labour laws.

4. Address all forms of violence against women

Guyana has recognized that the endemic culture of violence generally and widespread gender-based violence in particular, demands intensive and extensive strategic action and multi-layered interventions by all in our society. Hence, the Government has made this a national priority.

Violence against women is a global issue reaching across national boundaries as well as socio-economic, cultural, racial and class distinction.

Recognizing the complexity of this pervasive scourge which deeply concerns the Government of Guyana, a number of initiatives have been introduced, in some instances independently by the Government in collaboration with various Institutions as well as Non Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and International Donor Partners.

Several pieces of Legislation have been enacted for the protection of women in Guyana. Domestic Violence is deemed a crime under the law, but more specifically there is the Domestic

Violence Act (1996) which allows victims to seek Protection, Occupation or Tenancy Orders from a Magistrate. Penalties for violation of a Protection Order include significant fines or incarceration. The Ministry of Labour, Human Services and Social Security has also formulated a National Policy on Domestic Violence which is informed by both the Domestic Violence Act, the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and the Belem do Para.

More recently the National Assembly passed the new Sexual Offences Act 2010 which was amended and assented to in February, 2013. This Legislation has been hailed to be very modern and comprehensive. This Act strengthens the existing legislative framework for dealing with sexual violence by introducing new offences, severe penalties for offences, making provisions for the rules and procedures in the court, introducing mandatory counselling for victims and perpetrators, and instituting an integrated, multi-stakeholder approach. Additionally, the establishment of white zones or safe zones where victims of abuse could go to seek help and protection began and still continues.

In order to create an enabling environment to reduce Domestic and Gender- Based Violence, there has been a plethora of activities to focus on this issue within Guyana. The Government of Guyana in collaboration with a number of Faith Based Organizations, Donor Partners, and NGOs embarked upon several campaigns to sensitize the populace on the adverse effects of interpersonal and gender based violence in Guyana. These campaigns were conducted through media programmes, public awareness activities in various communities and workplaces with representatives from Faith Based Organizations, the Guyana Police Force, Schools, NGOs and Indigenous People's Organizations.

In its on-going efforts to ensure that the struggle to end domestic violence is kept on the front burner, the Ministry of Human Services and Social Security recently launched a National Conversation on Domestic Violence on June 27th, 2012 under the theme, "It's Our Problem, Let's Solve It!". Community-level discussions were held in seventeen targeted communities across Guyana during the period July to November, 2012. The ultimate objective being the formulation of a revised National Action Plan for the eradication and prevention of Domestic Violence. The Plan would be accompanied by a Comprehensive Communication Strategy and a Monitoring and Evaluation Framework for monitoring domestic violence cases and other reported cases of violence in our society in keeping with the new Sexual Offences Act.

Going forward the Government of Guyana continues to hold strongly to the view that the campaign to prevent and end domestic violence requires constant, consistent and on-going consultation and partnerships between government, the non-governmental sector and faith-based organizations and adequate resources. Expanding the availability of counsellors across the country, and the need to train and recruit psychologists to provide specialized services have been identified as actions to be pursued.

Extensive government-led campaigns and advocacy work done by non-governmental organisations, has disseminated the relevant messages in schools, the mass media, in communities and at other levels, and has resulted in increased awareness. The establishment of a hotline has been another such initiative. A list of Probation and Social Welfare Officers available for this crucial task has been published. Protocols were developed in 2009-2010 to guide the police, health practitioners, social workers and the Judiciary with regard to domestic and sexual violence cases.

Additionally, the Ministry of Labour, Human Services and Social Security has established the Men's Affairs Bureau (MAB) which seeks to solely address the issues of Men and boys both as perpetrators and as victims. The MAB engages stakeholders to raise awareness among men and boys about gender norms and the consequences of violence against women. Interventions are carried out in schools, prisons and communities throughout the country. This agency also supports the work of the Women's Affairs Bureau.

Further, the issue of violence has acquired the commitment at the Parliamentary level as it was unanimously agreed and a motion passed at the National Assembly as of May 2013, to condemn all forms of Interpersonal Violence. It was further resolved that via Resolution No. 47 of the 10th Parliament of Guyana for the Session 2012-2013: "That the members of the National Assembly commit to actively supporting existing programmes in Ministries, agencies and civil society bodies such as religious, women, youth and community organizations, that address violence and interpersonal violence in particular, such as, the Domestic Violence and Gender Based Violence programme, the Men's Affairs Bureau and the Child Care and Protection Agency in the Ministry of Labour, Human Services and Social Security, the National

Commission on the Family, the National Commission on Law and Order, Prisoner reintegration programmes, anger management and substance abuse programmes both in the Ministries of Health and Home Affairs and civil society bodies, and the Ministry of Education on school violence;

The level of concern about the continuing presence of Domestic and Gender Based Violence has been further highlighted by the various Seminars and Workshops which have been organized to address these issues, and to seek solutions at the wider level. In November 2013 Guyana is hosting a National Conference on Violence with the aim of seeking measures to reduce these crimes. This event is expected to coincide with the start of the sixteen (16) days of activism in observance of the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women.

The Government of Guyana remains committed to working with all stakeholders on Gender Based Violence prevention. More rigorous and longer-term data collection and analysis is required to understand the impact of programmes and factors that commonly contribute to the perpetuation of violence against women and gender inequality.

6. **Promote the conditions for the integral health of women and for their sexual and reproductive rights.**

The Government of Guyana remains committed to ensuring that high quality health care services are provided based upon equity and accountability. In the year 2013, the sum of G\$19B has been allocated in the National Budget to enable the Health Sector to achieve universal health coverage through the primary health care approach.

The Government of Guyana in recognizing its obligation to fulfill the rights of its people to access quality health care throughout the ten regions of Guyana, saw the adoption of a National Health Strategy, and allocation of financial resources was the primary objective to achieve major outcomes as outlined in the Health Strategy.

As recommended by the Platform for Action of the Fourth World Conference on Women, where it was established that countries review laws that punish women who have undergone abortions. Guyana passed in 1995 the Medical Termination of Pregnancy Act. This Act made abortion legal within the conditions set out in the law. The Family Planning Association liaises with the Ministry of Health in addressing the issue of

unwanted pregnancies. These services are legally provided for in the Medical Termination of Pregnancy Act 1995.

The Guyana Responsible Parenthood Association works in several regions and facilitates the enhancement of Sexual and Reproductive Health and Family Life.

The Government's response to HIV/AIDS is multi-sectoral. A Presidential Commission on HIV and AIDS was established under the guidance of the Office of the President and is chaired by his Excellency, the President of Guyana. In scaling up HIV prevention, the Ministry of Health implemented an intensified prevention programme that included access to Voluntary counseling and testing, prevention of mother to child transmission and comprehensive sexually transmitted infection services and information, education and communication on stigma and discrimination reduction together with HIV prevention related issues. Mother to child transmission of HIV continues to decline with the absolute number of babies being infected, reducing each year.

There is currently a National Aids Programme Secretariat (NAPS) which is tasked primarily with collaborating with various Non-Governmental Organisations (NGO's) throughout the country on implementing HIV/Aids Awareness and prevention programmes. Today, we are proud of our efforts as a developing country with respect to the investment made in offering free anti-retroviral treatment and the prevention of the mother to child transmission programmes to our people.

For the period 2003-2012 some 9,598 cases of persons infected with HIV and 2,439 cases of aids were reported to the Ministry of Health.

In the year 2013, the National Aids Programme Secretariat developed Guyana's National HIV Strategic Plan for the period 2013-2020 with two (2) primary strategic objectives being:

- To reduce the spread of HIV; and
- To improve the quality of life of persons living with HIV.

Prepared by:

The Ministry of Labour, Human Services & Social Security

Georgetown

Guyana

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