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COMMISSION DES DROITS DE L'HOMME
Soixantième session
Point 12 a) de l'ordre du jour

INTÉGRATION DES DROITS FONDAMENTAUX DES FEMMES ET DE
L'APPROCHE SEXOSPÉCIFIQUE: VIOLENCE CONTRE LES FEMMES

Lettre datée du 15 mars 2004, adressée au Président de la Commission
des droits de l'homme par le Représentant permanent de la Barbade
auprès de l'Office des Nations Unies à Genève

J'ai l'honneur de vous écrire au sujet de la participation de la Barbade au débat
de haut niveau de la soixantième session de la Commission des droits de l'homme.

S. E. M^{me} Billie Antoinette Miller, Ministre d'État et Ministre des affaires étrangères
et du commerce extérieur de la Barbade, a été invitée par S. E. la Ministre suisse des affaires
étrangères à participer au débat de haut niveau de la soixantième session de la Commission des
droits de l'homme, prévu le 16 mars 2004 et consacré à la question spécifique de la «violence
contre les femmes».

Retenue par d'autres engagements dans son pays, la Ministre est dans l'impossibilité
d'assister en personne à ce débat de haut niveau mais, en raison de l'intérêt qu'elle porte aux
droits de la femme et du soutien constant de la Barbade aux travaux de la Commission, elle a
établi une déclaration sur la question, dont vous trouverez le texte ci-joint pour information.

Je vous prie de faire distribuer la présente lettre et la déclaration ci-jointe* aux membres
et aux observateurs de la Commission des droits de l'homme au titre du point intitulé
«Violence contre les femmes».

L'ambassadeur,
Représentant permanent

(Signé) C. Trevor **Clarke**

* L'annexe est reproduite telle quelle, dans la langue dans laquelle elle a été reçue.

Annex

Statement of the Hon. Dame Billie Antoinette Miller
Senior Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs and
Foreign Trade of Barbados

At the High Level Segment of the 60th Session of
the United Nations Commission on Human Rights

Geneva

It is appropriate that the Commission on Human Rights should focus at its 60th Session on the issue of "Violence Against Women," given that the Commission is mandated with the task of monitoring the implementation of all human rights instruments and it has traditionally identified those areas in which women been disadvantaged and subject to discrimination.

As we mark the 10th Anniversary of the establishment of the Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women, its Causes and Consequences, it is important to stop and reflect on the gains we have made and the further steps necessary to achieve our goal of the elimination of all forms of violence against women.

The acceptance by the international community that violence against women is a fundamental violation of human rights was a major first step. This acceptance has appropriately shifted the issue of violence against women from the private domain to the public sphere, and has led to the acknowledgment that such violence reflects systemic and structural gender discrimination necessitating a focussed and active response from the state.

Violence against women, particularly domestic violence, is a manifestation of the unequal power-based gender relationship between men and women, which places women at an economic, social and political disadvantage. It is widely acknowledged that the exertion of power over women is one of the fundamental reasons underlying male violence against females. At the same time, it must be emphasized that because men are the major perpetrators of violence against women, they have a critical role to play in helping to end such violence.

Violence against women has a broad-based economic and social impact, with consequent implications for national development. There is therefore a need to regard violence in our society not as an individual problem, but as a societal one.

The correlation between violence and societal disruption is evident in the problems which afflict both the victim and the wider community, such as the loss of work, whether temporary or permanent, because of physical injuries or psychosomatic illnesses; the social isolation of the victims; the disruption of families; and public health costs.

Women are often the primary providers in the family and one of the more direct costs of violence against women is the loss of productive capacity.

Violence is also a profound mental and physical health problem since it saps physical and emotional vitality and undermines confidence. The psychological trauma of constant abuse and battering can create severe health problems.

In addition, domestic violence has lasting devastating repercussions on the family. Mothers are unable to care for their children properly. Often they transmit to them their own feelings of love self-esteem, helplessness and inadequacy. Children themselves may become victims of their father's abuse if they try to defend their mother, and boys who witness their father beating their mother are likely to emulate this behaviour in adulthood.

In today's environment, we cannot speak of violence against women without reference to its linkage to HIV/AIDS and without placing this pandemic within the context of male domination and the economic vulnerability of millions of women. Women are the fastest growing group of people becoming infected with HIV/AIDS and this battle cannot be won if women continue to be the victims of sexual mistreatment and other physical violence.

We must adopt strategies to combat unfair treatment and violence against women which include family life education in schools; public education to raise consciousness of the society; and the training of all health, law enforcement, judicial and other service personnel who come into contact with both the victims and perpetrators.

However, it is equally important that we continue to critically explore and challenge the historical and social basis of customs that use culture and religion as a justification for violence against women.

The government of Barbados reaffirms its fullest support of all UN initiatives on the protection of the human rights of women and specifically commends the work of the Special Rapporteur. Barbados is a signatory to a number of international and regional instruments on women's rights, including the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAR), the Inter-American Convention to Prevent, Punish and Eradicate Violence Against Women, and the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action.

In its fight to reduce and eventually eradicate this plague, the government of Barbados, through its Bureau of Gender Affairs, has implemented a number of national programmes which aim to combat and eliminate violence against women. In addition, the government has entered into partnership with a local women's non-governmental organization in order to establish a shelter for battered women. The Bureau of Women's Affairs has also collaborated with the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) to further strengthen Barbados' response in the area of the protection of women's human rights.

At the legislative level, Barbados has put in place a network of rules and regulations to ensure the protection of the human rights of women, including the adoption in 1992 of the Domestic Violence Protection Order Act and the Sexual Offences Act. In addition, in a recent review of the Constitution of Barbados, there has been acceptance of the recommendation to change any language which is deemed discriminatory and to ensure that rights to all citizens are enshrined regardless of sex.

As we gather in Geneva at this 60th session of the UN Commission on Human Rights to celebrate the recognition of the right of women to conduct lives free of violence, we must accept that our battle will not be won if we ignore the social and economic practices which continue to posit women as second class citizens without access to fundamental human rights and robbed of opportunities for education, health and employment.

As we chart the course to achieve our millennium goals, let us place firmly on the agenda the need for a real commitment to achieve gender equity and gender justice. When this commitment is enshrined not only in our constitutions and our government policies, but is also etched in the hearts of every man, woman and child, then we will finally be able to embrace a world of true justice and begin to hope that we can indeed eliminate violence against women.

We cannot fail in our endeavours.
