STATEMENT

On behalf of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM)

by

H.E Mr. George W. Talbot
Ambassador and Permanent Representative

IN THE THIRD COMMITTEE

on

Agenda Item 28:
Advancement of Women

68th SESSION OF THE UNITED NATIONS
GENERAL ASSEMBLY
NEW YORK

October 11, 2013

Please check against delivery
Mr. Chairman,

I have the honour to speak on behalf of the Member States of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) on Agenda Item 28: Advancement of Women. Allow me at the outset to congratulate you and the other members of the Bureau on your election. Be assured of CARICOM's full support to you in the execution of your mandate.

We wish to thank the Secretary General for the reports before the Committee under this agenda item.

CARICOM aligns itself with the statement made by the representative of Fiji, on behalf of the Group of 77 and China and the statement to be delivered by Cuba on behalf of the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC).

Mr. Chairman, discrimination against women and girls is one of the most pervasive violations of human rights. A concern on every continent and in every culture, it manifests itself in many forms, transcends race and class, and occurs in the most diverse of settings. It causes significant harm to the individual, degrades the fundamental moral and social fabric of society, and adversely affects the pursuit of sustainable development.

Combatting discrimination and promoting the advancement of women and girls is a task to which CARICOM Member States accord high priority. Our community is committed to accelerating progress toward achievement of the Millennium Development Goals, including those related to gender equality and the empowerment of women. Women have played and continue to play a critical role in the socio-economic and political development of the Caribbean, and Member States of the region take special pride in their achievements. However, persistent gender inequalities serve to emphasise the fact that the task of ending discrimination and of empowering women is far from over.

Mr. Chairman, it is therefore apposite to recognise the cost to human development that gender inequality represents. According to the 2012 Caribbean Human Development Report, the Gender Inequality Index reflected women's disadvantage in three main dimensions - reproductive health, empowerment, and economic activity. The findings evidenced the reality that gender inequality represented a socio-economic loss of significant proportions for the countries concerned. In responding to these realities, CARICOM underlines the need to address the full spectrum of health needs of women and girls; to enable women's effective participation in decision-making at all levels; and to
foster their access to economic and investment opportunities which promote entrepreneurship and financial independence.

Mr. Chairman, the commitment to end violence against women is affirmed in the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and reiterated in other international instruments, including the Beijing Platform for Action and the outcome of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly.

In fulfilling this commitment, however, the international community is forced to contend with difficult realities. Violence against women and girls is a global pandemic, with up to seven (7) in ten (10) women facing physical or sexual violence from an intimate partner during their lifetime. The International Labour Organisation (ILO) further estimates that globally about 4.5 million people, mainly women and girls, are forced into labour as victims of sexual exploitation. According to the University of the West Indies (UWI) Institute of Gender Studies, domestic violence accounts for between thirty (30) to fifty (50) percent of all murders in many Caribbean countries. The multifaceted issue of domestic violence is one with which our region has historically grappled. The emerging challenge of trafficking in persons has now become a new and pressing concern. CARICOM therefore underscores the need to develop innovative and effective multi-sectoral approaches to address these threats to the well-being and safety of women and girls in our region.

The Fifty-seventh Session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women highlighted the fact that violence against women is a complex issue. Particular groups of women and girls are exposed to an increased risk of violence, including those in rural areas and urban slums, and those who suffer multiple forms of discrimination, such as women and girls with disabilities, women and girls living with HIV, widows, and indigenous and migrant women and girls. Our approaches to these forms of discrimination must therefore address the specific needs of each of these groups.

We must also tackle the root causes of violence and discrimination and strengthen efforts at prevention, including by confronting negative gender stereotypes. The cultural stereotype of an aggressive male is often exhibited early in Caribbean youth. A study of more than one thousand high school boys and girls in six Caribbean countries demonstrated that both boys and girls believe that aggression is a normal aspect of masculinity. Evidently, a more balanced model of masculinity could aid the combat of the violence to which women in the Caribbean are subjected.

Our efforts to ensure inclusion of women and girls must not be at the exclusion of men and boys. In this regard, CARICOM underscores the need to engage men and boys in
efforts to confront negative gender stereotypes and to end all forms of violence against women.

UN-Women has advanced a useful 16-step policy agenda to end violence against women and promote their empowerment. The agenda encompasses prevention, protection and the provision of services, including capacity building for service providers, public awareness, and social mobilization of young people, both male and female, as champions for change. CARICOM once again acknowledges the important role played by UN-Women in addressing the issues of concern to women and girls. In this regard, we take this opportunity to thank Ms. Michele Bachelet, former Director of UN-Women, for her leadership and service. We welcome Ms. Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka to the helm of UN-Women and look forward to working with her in advancing the cause of gender equality and women's rights.

Mr. Chairman, capacity building is vital to enabling States Parties to implement their treaty obligations in this and other fields. CARICOM concurs with the Secretary-General’s findings on the subject contained in document A/68/121. Our delegations will continue to actively engage in the intergovernmental process of the General Assembly on strengthening and enhancing the effective functioning of the human rights treaty body system to ensure that the outcome of the process includes comprehensive measures as well as the allocation of adequate financial resources to support capacity building. The convening of one session of the Committee on the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in New York can serve, in addition to contributing to capacity building, to further the dialogue with all Member States, in particular those not represented in Geneva.

Mr. Chairman, the importance of education to empowerment of girls and women and the achievement of gender equality cannot be overstated. In this connection, CARICOM welcomes the timely focus on the theme ‘Innovating for Girls Education’ in today’s observance of the second International Day of the Girl Child. It is our hope that this celebration will serve to highlight the important linkages between education and women’s development. In this regard, we also look forward to the high-level event to be convened by the President of the 68th Session of the General Assembly on the ‘contributions of women, the young and civil society to the post-2015 development agenda’.

Mr. Chairman, in conclusion, it is appropriate to underline that women from all walks of life in the Caribbean have made great strides in the face of multiple challenges. They have taken advantage of education and other development opportunities and have excelled in politics, education, law, medicine, business, sport, health and many other
fields of endeavour. Even as we celebrate these women today, we cannot but be concerned that so many other women have had their dreams thwarted through discrimination, violence or poverty.

Indeed, the cross-cutting challenge of women's disempowerment is exacerbated by other factors such as the global financial crisis, agriculture and food security concerns, climate change, conflicts and instability, all of which impinge on the capacity of States to implement development and poverty eradication programmes, with often adverse implications for efforts to enhance the status of women. For many Small Island Developing States (SIDS), middle income status has become an albatross, belying their vulnerability and depriving them of much needed resources to support critical development interventions.

CARICOM considers that in setting the stage for the post-2015 development agenda, women and girls must not be left behind. In order to consolidate and build on the gains made thus far, CARICOM strongly calls for the advancement of women and girls to be reflected as a priority in the post-2015 development agenda.

I thank you.