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NATIONAL REPORT: SAINT KITTS AND NEVIS

(Item 3 b) on the agenda)

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GENERAL ASPECTS OF THE REPORT

Saint Kitts and Nevis has been committed to the advancement of women, as has been demonstrated in its signing and ratification of the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women, (CEDAW) 1985, its Optional Protocol, January of 2006, and the Convention on the Prevention, Punishment and Eradication of Violence against Women, Belem do Para in 1992.

Women are engaged in the productive sphere in large numbers and are the majority of workers in the manufacturing sector, ninety five percent (95%), and the hospitality sector. Women in the public sector hold sixty two (62%) percent of the management positions, and the portfolios are not limited to the traditional areas, but are in the areas of Finance, International Trade, Industry, Commerce and Consumer Affairs, Foreign Affairs, National Security, Legal Affairs, and Sustainable Development.

Despite the progress made, women are still positioned at the lower end of the labour market in larger numbers, with an average annual wage of approximately two thousand seven hundred (\$2,700) dollars less than men. Women are also grossly under represented at the level of political decision making. Currently there is one woman in the local Island Government of Nevis; however the National Parliament has no elected or nominated female representative of the fourteen members of Parliament.

There has been marked improvement in the mainstreaming of gender in the private sphere, since more and more men are actively engaged in the care giving responsibilities. The work of the Men's Association, Men under Pinning St. Kitts (MUSK) in calling men to higher stewardship in their families over the past four (4) years, seems to be bearing fruit, as men's understanding of the benefits of sharing in the domestic sphere is heightened. This increased participation is noticed in child care clinic visits, time spent with children and requests for child custody by men.

LEGAL, POLITICAL AND SOCIO-ECONOMIC SITUATION

LEGAL

The Constitution of St. Kitts-Nevis (1983) forbids discrimination on the grounds of sex and various pieces of legislation seek to protect the rights of women as equals of men before the law. The Legal Aid Clinic which was established in 2005 ensures that no one is denied representation in court because of his or her inability to pay for counsel.

In March of 2008, the statutory limitations on sexual offences were removed, thus making it possible for sexual offences to be reported at anytime. In the past offences had to be reported within a twelve month period, thus making it difficult for victims who were grappling with emotional trauma

to address the issues related to disclosure, and help seeking in an extremely small society. This legislative change is extremely beneficial to women who are mainly the victims of sexual offences, since it gives them the opportunity to report their abuse in a time which is comfortable to them, and without the fear of exhausting the Statutes of Limitation.

Stiffer penalties were also imposed in March 2008, under the Criminal Law Amendment Act, against sex offenders of children between the ages of fourteen to sixteen (14-16) years of age. Violations of children in this age group carried a much lighter penalty of a maximum of five years, while the under fourteen age group carried a penalty of a maximum of life. Both age groups are now uniformed with reference to the maximum penalty which is life in both cases.

The Attorney General has put out for discussion the possibility of raising the age of consent from sixteen to eighteen years of age, thus making the age of consent the same as the age of majority. The public discussion of the issue and the youth parliamentary debate of the issue indicate that there is a good possibility for the passage of the increased age of consent legislation.

Saint Kitts and Nevis passed Trafficking Legislation in August of 2008, thus making it a crime to traffick in persons for any reason, including forced labour and sexual exploitation. There however, needs to be enhanced awareness of the issue of trafficking, its detection and prevention amongst State Agencies, and Civil Society.

Consultations are taking place in Saint Kitts and Nevis for the development of an Ageing Policy and a Mental Health Policy. Both have implications for the status of women, since the majority of older persons within the country are women. Also, women because of their physiology and their social environment, face many challenges that pre-dispose them to mental health issues.

SOCIO-ECONOMIC SITUATION

Women in Saint Kitts and Nevis out number men in every level of the educational system except the primary level in which the enrollment is almost equal. At the tertiary level, women outnumber men with a ratio of almost two to one. Female students out number male students in every faculty, except the Technical and Vocational Division, and the traditionally female areas like teaching and nursing still attract very few male students. Women are out performing males at the secondary and tertiary level and the majority of students pursuing university education abroad are women. Despite women's academic achievements, there seems to be little translation into economic gains, since women were fifty nine point three percent of the poor in the Poverty Assessment Survey of 2001. The results of the Poverty Assessment of 2007-2008 are expected to be released shortly.

The closure of the Sugar Industry in 2005, making redundant approximately three hundred (300) women, most of whom were in the elementary areas of the industry, posed severe challenges for the States' Agency for the Advancement of Women, to facilitate the creation of livelihoods, and the provision of Social Safety Net Programmes. Several Programmes were implemented with funding from the Organization of American States and the United Nations Development Fund for Women. These programmes included Uniform Designing and Production, Craft Making, House Keeping, Upholstery and Tiling.

One group of women currently makes school uniforms for purchase by the State's Social Assistance Programme, for distribution to eligible students. Another Group of women produces craft for sale locally in the tourism sector, while a third group produces upholstered materials, such as market bags, throw pillows, cushions, and foot stools, using the facilities of the instructor, until their own outlet is out fitted by the Canada Fund for Local Initiatives, shortly. Of the three hundred women made redundant by the closure of the sugar industry, seventy eight (78%) percent are gainfully employed.

VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

Saint Kitts and Nevis criminalized Domestic Violence in 2000, and amended the Act in 2005, to include electronic harassment, financial abuse, and to allow for the inclusion of household furnishings with the Tenancy and Occupancy Orders. In addition, a Penalty clause for the Act of abuse was added, since previously there was only a penalty for breaches of Court Orders under the Act.

There is heightened awareness of the issue of Violence against Women, since public awareness activities on the issue are on going. The Department of Gender Affairs commissioned the Silent Witnesses, silhouettes which represent victims of gender based violence in 2006, and they have been displayed in public places, and at public events, supported by the distribution of literature on violence against women. Last year, (2007) twenty eight (28) orders were made under the Domestic Violence Legislation, this year, there have been forty four (44) requests made for orders under the legislation. The increase could be attributed to the public awareness of the issue. St. Kitts and Nevis does not have a representative on the Monitoring Body of the Belem Do Para, however, it is hoped that St. Kitts and Nevis will be represented during the next biennium.

PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN IN POWER AND DECISION MAKING

Although women are the majority of voters in St. Kitts and Nevis, and are in large numbers in political parties, their roles seem to be culturally defined, so that they are seldom the candidates seeking political office. St. Kitts and Nevis has elected only two (2) women to its National Assembly and one (1) woman to the local government in its fifty (56) six years of universal suffrage, and its twenty (25) five years of Nationhood.

The State's Agency for Advancement of Women, the Department of Gender Affairs has been providing training in Democracy and Governance for women and young persons, since 2002. During this biennium, approximately one hundred women from various political parties, and non-affiliated women have been trained in areas such as Community Mobilization, Campaign Finance, International Instruments for the Advancement of Women, The Constitution of St. Kitts and Nevis, Protocol and Grooming for Public Life and other topics that would equip them for political office or to support the campaign of other women. Currently there are three support groups of women articulating the need for equality in political decision making. It is hoped that these efforts would bear fruit in the near future.

FUTURE ACTION TO IMPLEMENT PROGRAMME ON PROMOTION OF HUMAN RIGHTS AND THE STRATEGIC PLAN OF ACTION OF THE CIM

NATIONAL LEVEL

In the Electoral Reform Process which is currently being carried out in St. Kitts and Nevis, the Department of Gender Affairs made a submission to the Community Consultations Sub-Committee, outlining the State's commitment for the advancement of women in political decision making and strongly recommending that the state honours its commitments.

Women's access to political decision making would be beneficial in enhancing women's status, as major decisions that affect women's lives are being made at that level, and with their participation, their realities and concerns would be factored into the decision making processes.

The first Batterer Intervention Programme has been modified and will be ready for implementation early in 2009. The programme is a collaboration of the Department of Gender Affairs and the Peace Corps.

REGIONAL LEVEL

Saint Kitts and Nevis will be partnering with Chile in a Gender Mainstreaming Project in the near future. In addition, an agreement was recently signed with the United Nations Development Fund for Women, to participate in a multi-country project on Gender Based Violence, with special emphasis on Sexual Violence. The other countries participating are Antigua and Barbuda, Belize and Jamaica.

The Change Centre, a Non- Governmental Crisis Centre on Nevis, in collaboration with the Women and Development Unit of the University of the West Indies, Cave Hill Campus, Barbados, has begun a series of training and will continue over the next six months to train Police Officers, Public Health Workers, Clergy Persons, Social Workers, and other front line workers in the area of Violence Against Women.

CONCLUSION

Heartiest congratulations to the Inter American Commission on Women, from the Government and people of St. Kitts and Nevis, on its eightieth year of struggles for the advancement of the women in the hemisphere. May we as beneficiaries of the work done by those who have gone before us, not let the "line break" where we stand, so that those who come behind us may find us faithful of the task of advancing women's equality with men.