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REPORT OF TURKS AND CAICOS ISLANDS
MINISTRY OF HOME AFFAIRS, TRANSPORTATION AND COMMUNICATIONS
TURKS AND CAICOS ISLANDS MINISTERS REPORT
TO THE
X111 REGIONAL CONFERENCE ON WOMEN IN LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN

MONTEVEDIO, OCTOBER 25-28, 2016
The Turks & Caicos Islands consists of two island groups, the ‘Turks Islands’, comprising of Grand Turk and Salt Cay, and the ‘Caicos Islands’ which is comprised of all the other islands and cays, these two island groups are divided by a 35 km water channel, the Columbus Passage. They are situated 575 miles south east of Miami and 39 miles south east of Mayaguana in the Bahamas. The country, a collection of more than 40 islands and cays, has a total land area of 430 sq. km (193 sq. miles). However, only nine of the islands are permanently inhabited: Grand Turk (10.5sq. miles), Salt Cay (2.5 sq. miles), South Caicos (8 sq. miles), Middle Caicos (41 sq. miles), North Caicos (41 sq. miles) Providenciales (38 sq. miles), three small privately owned cays, Pine Cay, Parrot Cay and Ambergris Cay. According to the 2012 census, most of the population is shared between Grand Turk (4,831) the government centre and Providenciales (23,769), one of the fastest growing tourist destinations in the Caribbean region.

GENDER EQUALITY, EQUITY AND EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN

Empowerment and status of women

In the area of political participation, the Turks and Caicos Islands have made significant progress in women’s participation within the political and public service arenas. In November 2012, after a period of three (3) years under direct rule, the country held its general elections which resulted in nine women being elected to the House of Assembly.

- Deputy Premier and Minister of Education Youth Sport and Library Services
- Minister of Tourism Cultural and Maritime
- Minister of Housing Infrastructure and Planning
- Leader of the Opposition
- Governor’s appointed member (female) to the House of Assembly
- Government’s appointed member (female) to the House of Assembly
- Deputy Speaker of the House
- Clerk to the House of Assembly
- Deputy Clerk to the House of Assembly

Additionally, women have advanced to prominent position in government. Women account for five Permanent Secretary Positions out of a total of seven in Government.
Between the years 2012 –2014, the country’s second female Deputy Governor was appointed as well as the first female local Attorney General was installed. Overall, women in both the public and private spheres are dominating the managerial positions and the Turks and Caicos Islands have already surpassed the 33% quota set by the Beijing Platform for Women (BPFA) regarding women in politics accounting for 46% increase of 13%.

**Education and training of women**

In line with international standards such as the right to education, the Ministry of Education, and by extension, the Government of the Turks and Caicos is committed to ensure equal access to education and training of women. The Turks and Caicos Constitution (Schedule 2, Sec. 12) as well as the Education Ordinance (Part III, Sec. 33) clearly outlined the right to education in a non-discriminatory manner for compulsory school-aged individuals.

**Eradicate illiteracy among women.**

The Ministry of Education has been very proactive and continues to work closely with various linguistics persons to diagnose and provide the necessary support in ensuring that illiteracy is reduced to a minimum in the Turks and Caicos Islands. One such initiative is the National Literacy Program. The central tenet is to achieve a 99% literacy rate by 2020. Improving women's access to vocational training, science and technology, and continuing education is also vital. To this end, the Ministry of Education has made financial contributions to the Turks and Caicos Islands Community College Technical unit for the refurbishment of the technical and vocational rooms and the purchase of modules to further expand Technical and Vocational programs and teaching.

**The Girl Child**

All government schools in the TCI are co-education institutions, meaning there are no ‘All Boys’ or ‘All Girls’ School, hence all students are given equal opportunity. Over the decade, women have made significant strides in areas like education, access to health, and social security; assistance which helps provide critical support. The ratio of girls to boys at primary and secondary school levels, and targets for enrolment rates for both girls and boys suggest that gender parity exists.
At the levels of tertiary education, reports indicate that girls have surpassed boys in enrolment. The visibility of women in senior administrative roles, and advances being made by girls at tertiary level education in comparison to boys should be viewed as achievements for women. This phenomenon was highlighted throughout the assessment and has given rise to a growing perception of women ‘doing well’ in comparison to men who are being ‘marginalized’.

The Ministry of Education in conjunction with other ministries and stakeholders have been a strong proponent of second chance or alternative education and training for girls and women. In light of this, institutions have been formed to render such services to girls and women who express an interest. Furthermore, the Ministry of Education is committed to strengthening Second Chance education programmes across the length and breadth of the Turks and Caicos Islands. It is the will of the Government to have each person given a fair chance in life to contribute to society in a meaningful way. Women’s achievement in education in both quantitative and qualitative dimensions should not be understated, at all levels of the education system women have achieved parity in attendance and certification. These attainment levels are reflected in the increased female participation in the labour force. Women in the Turks and Caicos Islands continue to outnumber men in most graduating classes from college to university. However, for all of these gains, gender equality could only exist when indirect forms of discrimination are eliminated.

In April of 2015 Cabinet granted approval for the increase of payment of social programmes being offered by the Department of Social Development. This increase is vital to programmes including Foster Care payment for orphan children or those placed in care due to abandonment, abuse and neglect; Social Enhancement Aid (S.E.A.) that assist low income families and Home Help that assist persons in need of care at home due to inability to care for themselves or disability. The increase in these programmes will have a tremendous impact on the overall well-being and daily survival of clients, as in most cases, clients are solely dependent on the government’s assistance.

**Legal Reform**
In 2015 the Turks and Caicos Island government passed four of the Family Law Legislation in the House of Assembly.

- Adoption Ordinance 2015
- Child (Care and Protection) Ordinance 2015
- Family Law (Guardianship, Custody and Access to Children) ordinance 2015
- Domestic Violence Ordinance 2015

We are extremely happy to finally witness the passage of these landmark pieces of legislation that represents a commitment to ending violence against women. The department of Gender Affairs believes that violence must be recognized as systemic and pervasive and a holistic approach must be undertaken to ensure that our response to the issue is as comprehensive as possible by targeting social institutions, attitudes and practices that perpetuate inequality.

**National Insurance Board**

The National Insurance Board assists women with a wide range of benefits including: maternity benefits, widow's pensions, retirement pensions, sickness benefits, employment injury benefits, old age pensions, invalidity pensions and funeral grants. A very important aspect of social security legislation, in keeping with social and cultural norms, is the provision for payment of benefits to women who are not legally married but who are living in common-law relationships. National Insurance schemes have therefore enabled all women to improve their financial status.

Over the last few years, significant increases were made to the following National Insurance benefits;

- Maternity Allowance has increased from 12 weeks to 14 weeks
- Increase of 10% maternity grant per child
- An increase of 10% in Non Contributory Old Age Pension per month
- An increase in the Minimum Retirement and Invalidity Pensions per month
- Increase in Minimum dependents pension (survivors benefit) per month
• An increase in Minimum widow/ widower’s pension per month

The government of the Turks and Caicos Islands recognizes the fundamental principles of gender equity and gender equality and has demonstrated the political will in ensuring that significant gains are made towards women’s empowerment. This will continue to be a priority on the government’s mandate.