

High-level panel on the Beijing Platform for Action and the Montevideo Strategy for Implementation of the Regional Gender Agenda within the Sustainable Development Framework by 2030 and international and regional instruments on women's rights and gender equality: The Caribbean Perspective.

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- It is a pleasure to join this panel dialogue as we share our perspectives and unique realities as small island developing states within this region.
- This platform provides the space for us to pay attention to our similarities, differences and combined strength and opportunities. We are living at a time where we have so much to celebrate as we move ahead 25 years since the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and towards our 2030 targets for sustainable development. But as states, civil society, academia, agencies, and private sector come together to review our progress, we can all agree that significant gaps remain and, in some instances, we are still fighting battles we thought we had long put behind us. While we accept that we must secure and protect the gains we have made; we must also acknowledge that there are new and emerging challenges that require a paradigm shift in order to realize our development goals.
- The reality is, as we try to fulfill our commitments to the international and regional “gender agenda” and advocate for more recognition and stronger voices in these spaces, we are being faced with challenges that have been described as “unfamiliar, unprecedented and urgent.” We are constantly considering whether we will be impacted by tropical storms, hurricanes, droughts, floods, earthquakes and or tsunamis.
- Just yesterday as we participated in the opening ceremony, we anxiously checked in with our brothers and sisters in Jamaica and nearby countries after learning of a magnitude 7.7 earthquake that rocked sections of the islands followed by an immediate albeit brief tsunami watch.
- As small island developing states, while we contribute relatively little to global climate change, we are greatly impacted by changes in climate patterns and their consequences. Our vulnerability to these climate events acts as a

major challenge to our ability to sustain our development interventions. While we remain ambitious and committed to the achievement of the sustainable development agenda, we are mindful that years of progress, gains, and advancements, are at risk of being halted and even reversed, with just a single extreme weather event.

- During the 2017 hurricane season, of the 13 named tropical storms, two catastrophic category 5+++ hurricanes- Irma and Maria made landfall and caused havoc and devastation across the Caribbean. In the aftermath of Hurricane Irma, 95 percent of the homes in Barbuda were damaged or destroyed. Barbuda was deemed uninhabitable, and the entire population of 1,600 persons was evacuated to the main island of Antigua. We also saw the recent destruction of Abaco and Grand Bahama in the Bahamas. We take this opportunity to once again thank the international community for their support as we continue to rebuild our countries.
- Our Prime Minister at the last sitting of the UNGA reminded us that, "small island states are the greatest victims of climate change, causing our economies to decline, creating climate refugees, impacting opportunities for direct investments, escalating cost of insurance and rebuilding and increasing the level of our debt. The cost of the damages from the 2017 hurricane season alone was way beyond the size of our combined economies in the Caribbean."
- Climate change aggravates the pre-existing inequalities. It thwarts progress towards gender equality by exacerbating poverty, reinforcing traditional patterns of discrimination and directly affecting gender-defined livelihoods. Women are affected in their multiple roles as food producers and providers, as guardians of health, caregivers, and economic actors. Women still have a lesser economic, political and legal status which increases their vulnerability.
- As we continue to grapple with climate events, we recognize the urgency in ensuring that mitigation and adaptation efforts integrate gender at all levels. Additionally, other intersecting issues must be taken into account to minimize risks to women and children and ensure greater success of efforts to address climate change. Climate change is not just an environmental issue. It is linked to social justice, equity, economic empowerment, and human rights and as such should not be addressed in isolation.

- The economic development of SIDS is dependent on tourism, industry, services, and agriculture. The threat of sea-level rise and accelerated beach erosion and degradation of coral reefs, along with the frequency or intensity of hurricanes, and cyclones have significant impact on the tourism sector. This threat to the tourism sector will affect the economic growth, stability and overall development of SIDS.
- In Antigua and Barbuda, women comprise the majority of workers in the hotel, restaurant and services sectors of tourism. Women are over-represented in the lower echelons of employment in the service industry. Thus, the vulnerability of the sector to external shocks will continue to challenge their economic opportunities. The unemployment rate is also higher among women in the Caribbean and women still face gender-based discrimination on ownership of land and access to natural resources and credit facilities.
- The empowerment of women is an important ingredient in building climate resilience. Improving gender equality contributes to policy choices that lead to better environmental governance, whether through increased representation and voice of women within their communities, in society at large, and at the political level, or through increased labor force participation.
- It is important to note, therefore, that women are not only victims of climate change, but also active agents of change. The strengthening of women's participation in decision-making and political representation can contribute to the kinds of institutional transformations that are necessary to put our countries on a sustainable development path.
- The natural disasters resulting from climate change do not discriminate. However, the impacts are experienced differently by women, girls, boys, and men. Many people can become displaced during and after disasters. Displacement can lead to exposure to violence and the visibility of pre-existing violence. The Caribbean region has high levels of gender-based violence which can be exacerbated by climate events. Violence impedes economic productivity, which leads to greater rates of poverty and health challenges.

- Although women face particular socio-economic issues that shape their vulnerability to climate change and unabated climate change impacts can worsen traditional gender disparities, mitigation and adaptation efforts offer opportunities to advance gender equality and women's empowerment.
- **In Antigua and Barbuda, we are making progress in implementing several actions to mitigate and adapt to climate change. These actions include:**
 1. Strengthen coordination between the national gender machinery and the department of environment
 2. Passage of the Environmental Protection and Management Act for Climate Intervention with a special national fund for the implementation of climate change mitigation and adaptation activities. The fund also provides financial support to vulnerable groups, communities, and women to adapt to climate change and disaster preparedness, including for the construction of climate resilient community shelters
 3. Gender Policy for Climate and Environmental Projects and Programmes
 4. Commitments to transition from fossil fuel to clean renewable energy and build the capacity of women to participate in the energy sector
 5. Improve the resilience of schools and public institutions to climate events
 6. Introduce and strengthen integrated social protection systems through a National Social Protection Legislation and Policy to assist the most vulnerable
 7. Secure accreditation through the Department of Environment to both the Adaptation Fund and the Green Climate Fund and increase capacity to conduct gender, social and environmental assessments of development programmes and projects
 8. Ensure the full participation of women in decision-making, design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of climate and disaster risk reduction programmes and projects
 9. Provide 2% concessional financing loans to households in vulnerable communities particularly those in areas prone to flooding for adaptation measures with specific targets to ensure women's access to funding
 10. Explore ocean policies and the potential of the blue economy
- In conclusion, we stand on the frontline of this climate crisis, we must focus on closing the structural gaps that continue to widen inequalities. We need fiscal and policy space, access to financing, technical support, new technologies, the creation of new industries, and a new national development

pathway to achieve sustainable development. We need solidarity and support from an international community that understands and recognizes our unique needs and realities. We appreciate and commend the efforts of countries within Latin America and other countries to address the issue of Climate Change and we call on all governments to uphold the commitments to the Paris Agreement on climate change. It is also important for us to promote accountability and the inclusion of women, harness the energies and knowledge of our youth, civil society and the private sector to address these emerging complex realities. As stated in the 2016 Caribbean Human Development Report, the Sustainable Development agenda provides the opportunity for us to collectively adopt a new way of building resilience and integrating economic, social and environmental dimensions worldwide, including peace and justice. The time is now- the future generations are depending on us.