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Disabilities and Youth of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines**

- 1) The Vincentian national report on the Montevideo Strategy identifies as one of the Government's major achievements the strengthening of the institutional framework, including the Gender Affairs Department. An account of these developments would be welcome, including assessment of the positive impact this may have had on accelerating the implementation of the global and regional gender agendas at the national level.**

- 2) In addition, considering that Saint Vincent and the Grenadines will become this year the new chair of the ECLAC subsidiary body, the Caribbean Development and Cooperation Committee, it will be interesting to hear the priority issues your country would wish to see advanced at the subregional level to accelerate the achievement of gender equality by 2030 in the Caribbean.**

The strengthening of the Gender Affairs Division (GAD) is one of the Government of St. Vincent and the Grenadines' major achievement in the advancement of women.

In 2015, the Ministry of National Mobilisation, Social Development, Family, Gender Affairs, Persons with Disabilities and Youth was strategically reformed to effectively carry out its mandate in ensuring that all citizens have equal access to opportunities that will shape their social, cultural, spiritual, educational, economic and political development. This included the reorganizing and reorientation of the division towards a more targeted approach in the areas of Gender Mainstreaming, Gender Policy Development and implementation.

The Gender Affairs Division is guided by the international conventions and human rights treaties which the GoSVG have signed, ratified and acceded, and is a member of the National Mechanism and Follow-up for International Conventions, which is chaired by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. It continues to build networks with other key stakeholders such as the National Commission for Gender-Based Violence that comprises other government agencies, the private sector, CSOs, and NGOs in an effort to provide understanding and gain acceptance on the role and significance of gender relations in an equitable society. With this networking and collaboration, the division is provided technical and financial support in meeting its mandate, goals and objectives in promoting gender equality nationally.

The division has instituted a series of interventions aimed at reducing gender-based violence, poverty, addressing HIV/AIDS, sexual and reproductive health, strengthening legislative reform and gender-responsive social policies. In fact, since 2019, the division has been leading the reform process of the sexual offences legislation through international relationships with human rights organisations.

However, In spite of the apparent inclusion of gender-related considerations in sectoral and cross-sectoral plans, programmes and policies at the national level, the chronic under-utilization of these documents in practice makes it is doubtful that this form of “mainstreaming” will in fact be successful at promoting better decision-making and development planning in the country.

There is still widespread concern that gender is still somewhat of an after-thought. Furthermore, the lack of sustained funding and resources to support implementation of the plans makes it extremely difficult to coordinate and enforce the requirements for the gender equity. Consequently, there is a need to promote a better understanding and awareness of the importance of gender related issues and the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and Montevideo is an ongoing necessity. With that in mind, we started soliciting support towards the development of a Gender Equality Policy

Framework that would further advance gender equality and equity, gender mainstreaming, and gender-based violence.

The staff composition within the Gender Affairs Division has not been substantially increased during the period under review, and continues to impede their effectiveness and efficiency. Nevertheless, the NGM utilizes every human resource available with the use of assigned staff, on-the-job trainees, and even academic interns to the Division in implementing its programme activities,

Futhermore, the GoSVG commits in the upcoming period to strengthen the authority and visibility as the National Gender Machinery in the Government's institutional structure, and provide it with adequate human, financial and technical resources to coordinate and work effectively for the integration of a gender perspective into all policies and programmes across all sectors and levels of government.

As it relates to St. Vincent and the Grenadines being the new chair of the ECLAC Subsidiary body – The Caribbean Development and Cooperation Committee – my country acknowledges priority areas that we wish to see advanced at the subregional level in an effort to achieving gender equality by 2030 in the Caribbean. These include: -

- The economic empowerment of women by providing not only employment and access to micro-financing grants and insurance for sustainable livelihoods, but also financial management education to women as entrepreneurs especially in rural communities that would include indigenous methods such as “su-su”.
- The promotion of legislative and policy reform relative to inheritance that places women in common-law unions at a disadvantage.

- Undertake qualitative research to determine how women's soci-economic well-being can be enhanced, and the impact of Gender-Based Violence on women and their communities.
- Incorporate gender equality in school curriculum and in community-based capacity building workshops that would assist in breaking gender stereotypes that supports patriarchy.
- Provision of day care facilities at a reasonable cost that will enable women to access employment opportunities and provide for their households.
- Increase public awareness on technical vocational education training opportunities that would provide employability skills, and which caters for early childhood education.

St. Vincent and the Grenadines has made progressive strides since Beijing Declaration in 1995, however there is need to accelerate our efforts in guaranteeing gender equality and the advancement of all women. We cannot hope that things would change, as hope is NOT a strategy. For there to be transformation, there must be a disruption!

Thus all the key stakeholders that includes the government and civil society must work closer in advancing the women's agenda faster.