



ST. VINCENT AND THE GRENADINES

Permanent Mission of St. Vincent and the Grenadines to the United Nations

800 2nd Ave., Ste. 400G, New York, NY 10017 • Tel: (212) 599-0950 • Fax: (212) 599-1020 • www.svg-un.org

Statement

By

H.E. Michael Browne

Honourable Minister of National Mobilisation, Social Development, Local Government, Gender Affairs, Family Affairs, Persons with Disabilities and Non Governmental Organisations of St. Vincent and the Grenadines

At the

52nd Session of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women

26th February, 2008
New York

Please check against delivery

1. Introduction

The Saint Vincent and the Grenadines delegation is pleased to, once again, participate in this important exercise, the 52nd Session of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women, the mandate of which includes the monitoring of the global advancement of women and charting the way forward. Our delegation notes that this event is institutionalized and advises that clearly defined decisions must be taken to avoid the danger of routinization.

2. Philosophical Frame

The Unity Labour Party administration in Saint Vincent and the Grenadines has, since coming to office in 2001, embarked on the historic mission of transforming our Vincentian society with its inherited inequities, into one based on justice and opportunities for all. It is an undertaking which is, at one and the same time, exciting and challenging. This transformation, by definition, involves correcting many historic wrongs including those perpetrated against our women.

Our administration is guided by a philosophical outlook which is predicated on a contemporary humanism which holds that human dignity (enshrined in our national constitution) must occupy center-stage, which strives for the maximal development of the human potential and personality, which struggles against all things inimical to human dignity and development. Our programme for gender equality and empowerment of women is accordingly guided by this outlook.

3. Women and Government

- (a) **Judiciary:** 50% of our magistrates are women, including one in the most senior position. The Family-Court which addresses many gender-issues is headed by a woman and one of our two High Court Judges is female.
- (b) **Legislature:** Prior to 2001, when this administration took office, there were no women in Parliament representing the Government. Since 2001, 24% of government parliamentarians are women, one of whom is the Attorney General, one the Deputy Speaker and one a senior Minister. The Deputy Governor-General is also female.
- (c) **Executive:** Meetings of Cabinet which is responsible for financing the nation's programmes including those directly and indirectly impacting on women, are comprised of 25% of

women. Cabinet holds that education and poverty elimination are our top two developmental priorities.

4. Financing For Gender-Equality and Women's Empowerment

(i) Education: In 2005, history was created in SVG when, for the first time, universal access to secondary education was established. The educational budget has received annual sizeable increases, which include support for lower-income families. Student loans for university education as well as scholarships have been substantially increased. Of note is a special programme for economically disadvantaged students under which our government provides loans to students lacking the family-resources for securing those loans. About 75% of our university-students are women. Our administration finances the return of teenage-mothers to school through the payment of fees, purchase of books, provision of transportation, and the provision of day-care services for babies.

(ii) Poverty Elimination:

Business-Financing and Economic Empowerment: Financing for business enterprises are available from a variety of sources. Of note, is the Micro and Small Enterprise Loan Programme, under which loans of \$15,000.00 are allowed without security. Women comprise 56% of recipients.

(iii) Housing: The Government's programme of providing low-income houses is fully underway. Women comprise 67% of recipients.

(iv) Security: Our administration places a high premium on the security of all citizens. Accordingly, our work addresses crime and its causes. In the seven years of this administration, there has been a 36% decrease in crimes in the country. Crimes against women, however, have not shown a parallel decline, and remain a priority concern of the administration.

5. Conclusion

In addressing this issue of financing for gender equality and women's empowerment, in the context of this forum, the dialectical connection between the national and the international must be underscored. There are "developed" countries which are failing in their commitment to provide 0.7% of the GDP in Overseas

Development Aid. This forum must address this issue. We acknowledge those European countries that have lived-up to their commitments and, in some cases, gone beyond that commitment.

Additionally, countries such as ours with the history of slavery and colonial exploitation remind that our underdevelopment is linked to the development of other notably European-countries. Both myself and our Prime Minister, Dr. Ralph E. Gonsalves, have addressed in this august body, the issue of reparation. "This issue must be put squarely on the agenda of the United Nations for speedy resolution", said our Prime Minister in September 2006. This is yet to happen.

I conclude with a repetition of this call and ask that the Commission on the Status of Women take up the issue of reparation in the interest of women.

Thank you!