

**Overview of Violence Against Women:
The Commonwealth of The Bahamas**

UN Sabbatical Leave Report

Gaynel Curry

Gender and Women's Rights Advisor

OHCHR-NYO

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Background to and rationale for The Bahamas assessment

The UN Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women (1993) defines violence against women as, “any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life. Gender-based violence is any violence inflicted on a person because of their sex.” While women, men, girls and boys can be victims of gender-based violence, women and girls are the main victims due mainly to unequal distribution of power in society between women and men.¹ Gender-based violence reflects and reinforces inequalities between men and women in their homes and communities and compromises the health, dignity, security and autonomy of its victim.²

Several United Nations reports from the Universal Periodic Review process and the Human Rights Treaty Bodies on the situation of the rights of women in Commonwealth³ Caribbean States have revealed a high prevalence of violence against women and girls and the need to strengthen efforts to address marital rape, domestic violence, sexual harassment, violence against LGBT persons as well as other forms of sexual and gender based violence. The issue of gender-based violence in The Bahamas has been consistently raised before these and other international human rights bodies. In 2012 for example, the United Nations (UN) Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)⁴ listed violence against women in The Bahamas as among the two top concerns facing women. The Committee requested the Government to submit an advanced follow-up report specifically indicating the steps taken and envisaged to eliminate all forms of violence against women in The Bahamas.

¹UNFP, Defining Gender-Based Violence; <http://www.health-genderviolence.org/training-programme-for-health-care-providers/facts-on-gbv/defining-gender-based-violence/21>

² Rosina Wiltshire, ‘Gender-based violence in the Caribbean: A cause for concern and a call to action’, 2016 presentation at the Commission on the Status of Women, New York

³ The Commonwealth Caribbean countries are the independent English-speaking countries of the Caribbean region, which once constituted the Caribbean portion of the British Empire or the British West Indies. They include, Antigua and Barbuda, The Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, Dominica, Grenada, Guyana, Jamaica, St Kitts and Nevis, St Lucia, St Vincent and the Grenadines, and Trinidad and Tobago. The region is southeast of the Gulf of Mexico and the North American mainland, east of Central America, and north of South America. Available at: <http://countrystudies.us/caribbean-islands/2.htm>

⁴ The Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) is the body of independent experts that monitors implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. CEDAW Committee consists of 23 experts on women’s rights from around the world. Countries that have become party to the treaty are obliged to submit regular reports to the Committee on how the rights of the Convention are implemented. The Committee considers these reports and addresses its concerns and recommendations to the respective party in the form of concluding observations. Available at: <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/CEDAW/Pages/Introduction.aspx>

In this context, it is noted that as early as 2007, a Joint Report by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) and the Latin America and the Caribbean Region of the World Bank revealed that Caribbean countries generally experienced high rates of rape and other forms of violence.⁵ That report listed The Bahamas as one of three Caribbean countries considered to be among the top ten countries globally recognized as having high rates of rape and sexual violence.

These reports came to my attention in my role as Gender and Women's Rights Advisor for the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights in New York. As a Bahamas national, I was interested to know what the UN Human Rights Mechanisms were doing for The Bahamas and for other Commonwealth Caribbean Countries more generally, in terms of support in addressing violence against women and girls. After speaking with several colleagues and UN mandate holders, it was clear that greater focus was needed on this region in terms of support in elimination violence against women and girls.

Ms Rashida Manjoo,⁶ United Nations Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women, its Causes and Consequences, as well as Commissioner Tracy Robinson,⁷ in her capacity as Rapporteur on the Rights of Women of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, subsequently agreed to conduct an 'unofficial' joint study visit between 15 and 28 April 2015 to four English-speaking Caribbean countries. The countries visited were Jamaica⁸ (15-17 April), Barbados (20-21 April), Dominica (22-24 April), and Trinidad and Tobago (27-28 April). Although the experts wanted to include more countries, time and resources did not allow them to do so.

⁵ UNODC's Crime Trends Survey (CTS) reference-Crime, Violence, and Development: Trends, Costs, and Policy Options in the Caribbean. March 2007, p.12. Available at:

http://www.unodc.org/pdf/research/Cr_and_Vio_Car_E.pdf

⁶ Ms. Rashida Manjoo is a national of South Africa. She was appointed Special Rapporteur on Violence against women, its causes and consequences, in June 2009 by the UN Human Rights Council. As Special Rapporteur, she is independent from any government or organization and serves in her individual capacity. Ms Manjoo ended her term as Special Rapporteur on July 2014. She is currently a Professor in the Department of Public Law of the University of Cape Town.

⁷ Ms Tracy Robinson is a citizen of Jamaica. She was elected at the 41st OAS General Assembly in June 2011 for the standard four-year term, which began on January 1, 2012 and ended on December 31, 2015. She was the Rapporteur for the Rights of Women and the Rapporteur for the Rights of lesbian, bisexual and trans (LBT) women on the Commission. She held the post of Chair of the Commission from March 2014 to March 2015. She is also a senior lecturer at the Faculty of Law, University of the West Indies, Mona Campus.

⁸ As a Jamaican national, Commissioner Robinson did not participate in the Jamaica leg of the Study Visit. Ms Rosa Celerio, an attorney from the Executive Secretariat of the Inter-American Commission participated in the Jamaica leg of the Study Visit instead.

The four countries selected demonstrate the many similarities among Caribbean countries, including small size, history, political and legal traditions, and socio-economic concerns. Similarly, the countries selected highlighted the diversity among Caribbean peoples and the need for the human rights community to look more closely at the specific concerns of each of these countries.

I, along with Ms Rosa Celerio, Attorney and Specialist for the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, joined the Rapporteurs on the Caribbean study visit and led the drafting of a press statement at the end of that visit. Additionally, I led the preparation of the final report⁹ on behalf of former UN Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women, Ms Manjoo. Following on from this Caribbean study tour, I undertook my UN Sabbatical Research on ‘Violence against Women in The Bahamas’. My assessment of the situation of women and violence in The Bahamas, therefore, builds on the Caribbean study by the Rapporteurs on Violence and Women from the United Nations and the Inter-American Commission. This present report includes only the main findings of my assessment on the situation of violence against women in The Bahamas. A fuller report including all five countries is being prepared for publication.

Expressions of appreciation to key interlocutors on the ground

My sincere appreciation is expressed to The Bahamas Ministry of Social Services and Community Development and especially the staff of the Bureau of Women’s Affairs for allowing me the use of their facilities (during mid July – mid August 2015) to undertake my work as well as for their role in facilitating my meetings with the relevant interlocutors in the public sector and civil society working to prevent and respond to gender-based violence in The Bahamas.

A heartfelt thank you is also extended to the thirty plus individuals and groups who kindly agreed to share their views and opinions with me on the successes and remaining gaps in preventing and effectively responding to gender-based violence in The Bahamas. In particular, I would like to thank those representatives from the following groups that met with me in person or through Skype/ telephone calls:

- Department of Social Services/ Family Services: Abaco, Acklins, Eleuthera, Grand Bahama and New Providence.
- The Bahamas Social Safety Net Reform Program

⁹ Unlike Official visits of the Special Rapporteur, her report on the Caribbean study tour was not submitted to the Human Rights Council for examination. Instead, the report was intended to be shared for information only with main interlocutors working to end all forms of discrimination and violence against women and girls across the region, including State institutions, civil society, United Nations entities and other international and regional mechanisms.

- Bahamas Police Force
- Attorney General’s Office
- National Task Force to End Gender-Based Violence
- Department of Public Health
- AIDS Foundation of The Bahamas
- The National Commission for Persons with Disabilities
- The College of The Bahamas
- UNHCR Bahamas
- Bahamas Crisis Centre
- Bahamas Women’s Watch
- One Eleuthera Foundation
- Author and Producer of the Documentary ‘Womanish Ways, Freedom, Human Rights and Democracy: The Women’s Suffrage Movement in The Bahamas’
- Rainbow Alliance Bahamas on behalf of LGBT community
- Hands for Hunger Bahamas
- Safe House – The Links Incorporated
- The Salvation Army
- Salvation Army Safe House – Domestic Violence Shelter
- Bahamas Red Cross
- Great Commission Ministries International – Bahamas Local
- Town Hall/ Community Meetings in Eleuthera and Andros, including nurses, teachers, students, school counsellors, education officers, welfare officers, island administrators, church and community leaders, and women’s groups

Objectives of The Bahamas assessment

The main objectives of this assessment are to: (a) allow government officials, civil society actors and relevant stakeholders, particularly in remote Family Island communities, to discuss constructively the manifestations of violence against women, and debate strategies to reduce and eliminate all forms of violence against women and address its causes; (b) to assess the situation of violence against women in The Bahamas building on the broader review of the Commonwealth Caribbean Study recently undertaken by the Rapporteurs from the United Nations and the Inter-American Commission; and (c) to identify and share good practices developed in The Bahamas as well as areas in which additional work is needed, through inter alia, law and policy reform, institutional development, technical cooperation, training, and capacity building.

Approach, preparation and conduct of the assessment

A desk review of existing reports and publications on violence against women and gender equality in The Bahamas was undertaken prior to the study tour. The review fed into a Bahamas Country Analyses on Human Rights, which was developed prior to my visit in July and August 2015. The in-country assessment was conducted through bilateral meetings, small discussion groups, and larger information sharing forums. It also involved site visits to two shelters for women in New Providence as well as one-day visits to Eleuthera and Andros.

The normative framework and standards for The Bahamas assessment was the same as those used for the Caribbean study tour. These included the standards articulated in the CEDAW Convention and the Inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment and Eradication of Violence against Women (“Convention of Belém do Pará”) both of which The Bahamas have ratified as States parties. This assessment also includes the standards set out in the International Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women. Based on these standards, States have a duty to respond to all forms of violence against women and girls with due diligence in the protection, prevention, investigation, prosecution, punishment and provision of effective remedies, including reparations. The duty to respond to and prevent violence involves a set of measures including legislation, policies, programs, and services, which should be responsive to the needs of the women and girls. The response of the State should consider the varying needs of different groups of women due to factors such as the history of discrimination and inequality, age, race, ethnic background, disabilities, sexual orientation and gender identity, among others.

Political and economic context of The Bahamas and the implications for women

The Bahamas is an archipelago State on the North Western edge of the West Indies. The islands occupy a strategic position as the gateway to the Gulf of Mexico, the Caribbean Sea, and the entire Central American region. The capital of the Bahamas is Nassau, and is located on the small but important New Providence Island. Their location has given them a rich history. It was there that Christopher Columbus made his original landfall in the Americas. As a result of the tragic fate of the peaceful original inhabitants and the creation of European-dominated settlements, the society and culture that has evolved in The Bahamas is a distinct blend of European and African heritages. The African heritage is the legacy of a slave trade that introduced Africans to the plantation system.¹⁰

The islands lack natural resources other than their temperate climate and beautiful beaches, and thus have come to rely on income generated by the extensive tourist facilities and the financial sector that has developed with the aid of foreign capital. The continued popularity of these islands with tourists, especially those from North America,

¹⁰ Encyclopedia Britannica, <http://www.britannica.com/place/The-Bahamas>, accessed 16 June 2015.

has helped to maintain a relatively high standard of living for the population, most of whom are of African descent. The Bahamas gained its independence from the United Kingdom in 1973 and remains a member of the Commonwealth.¹¹ As a former British colony, The Bahamas shares a common history of colonialism and slavery with other Commonwealth Caribbean Countries.

¹¹ Ibid.

Basic Data¹²

Capital	Nassau (located on New Providence Island)
Population	321,834
Age structure	0-14 years: 23.2% (male 37,962/female 36,857) 15-24 years: 17.4% (male 28,387/female 27,639) 25-54 years: 44.1% (male 70,765/female 71,038) 55-64 years: 8.3% (male 11,882/female 14,885) 65 years and over: 7% (male 8,591/female 13,828) (2014 est.)
Land Area	10,010 sq km
Religions	Protestant 69.9% (includes Baptist 34.9%, Anglican 13.7%, Pentecostal 8.9% Seventh Day Adventist 4.4%, Methodist 3.6%, Church of God 1.9%, Brethren 1.6%), Roman Catholic 12%, other Christian 13% (includes Jehovah's Witness 1.1%), other 0.6%, none 1.9%, unspecified 2.6% (2010 est.)
Ethnic groups	Black 90.6%, White 4.7%, Black and White 2.1%, other 1.9%, unspecified 0.7% (2010 est.)
Languages	English (official), Creole (among Haitian immigrants)
Currency	Bahamian Dollar
Government	Constitutional Parliamentary Democracy and a Commonwealth Realm
Chief of state	Queen Elizabeth II (since 6 February 1952); represented by Governor General Dame Marguerite Pindling (since 8 July 2014)
Proportion of seats held by women in national parliament	13% ¹³
Gross domestic product (GDP) per capita (PPP)	\$25,100 (2014 estimate)

¹² CIA World Factbook, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/jm.html>, accessed 16 June 2015

¹³ The World Bank, <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SG.GEN.PARL.ZS>, accessed 16 June 2015

GNI per capita (Atlas method)	\$21,570 ¹⁴ (2013)
Infant mortality rate	Total: 12.5 deaths/1,000 live births Male: 12.51 deaths/1,000 live births Female: 12.49/1,000 live births
Life expectancy at birth	Total Population: 71.93 years Male: 69.48 years Female: 74.46 years
Total fertility rate	1.97 children born/woman
Ratio of girls to boys in primary and secondary education (%)	104% ¹⁵ (2010)
Education ¹⁶	(2010 Census) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 1/3 children 3-4 years attending school; up to age 16, little difference between sexes ○ Student / Teacher ratio 13.8 (Statistics 2010) ○ 34% of males, 27% females had no qualifications; 53% of those without qualifications = males ○ 64.7% aged 3+ years had access to internet; 67% females had internet access vs 62% males
Vital Statistics ¹⁷	Life expectancy 69.9 for males and 76.4 for females Birth Rate 14.4; Mortality Rates: 6.5 = M, 5.0 = F (2010, Statistics
Health ¹⁸	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 15% of national budget & 2.9% of GDP allocated to health 2009/2010 (Ministry of Health) ○ 23.6 physicians; 27.5 Registered Nurses; 12.8 Trained Clinical Nurses; per 10,000 pop (2011) ○ 35.1 hospital beds per 10,000 in 2010 (Ministry of Health) ○ HIV infections: overall F:M ratio = 1.1:1; ○ 52.8% had no health insurance; 49% in New Providence uninsured (2010 Census)

¹⁴ The World Bank, <http://databank.worldbank.org/data/views/reports/tableview.aspx>, accessed 16 June 2015

¹⁵ The World Bank: <http://databank.worldbank.org/data/views/reports/tableview.aspx>, accessed 16 June 2015

¹⁶ National Policy For Gender Equality: The Commonwealth of the Bahamas

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

Government and politics in The Bahamas^{19,20}

Constitutional framework

The constitution of 1973 is based on the Westminster Model of Government. The Constitution established Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II as the Head of State along with The Executive Branch, The Legislative Branch, and the Judicial Branch. As a member of the Commonwealth of Nations, The Bahamas recognizes Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II as the Head of State. The Governor-General is Her Majesty's representative in the Bahamas and is a symbol of the nation's unity.

Executive Branch

The Executive Branch is made up of the Cabinet, which has general direction and control of the Government. In the Cabinet, there must be at least nine Ministers including the Prime Minister and the Attorney General. All Ministers are Members of Parliament either in the House of Assembly or the Senate. The number of Ministers from the Senate is limited to three. The Prime Minister and the Minister of Finance are required to be members of the House of Assembly. The Cabinet's role is to make final determinations of government policy, to control government activities, and coordinate with government Ministries and Departments.

- Chief of state: Queen Elizabeth II (since 6 February 1952); represented by Governor General Dame Marguerite Pindling (since 8 July 2014)
- Head of government: Prime Minister Perry Christie (since 8 May 2012)
- Cabinet: Cabinet appointed by the governor general on the advice of the prime minister
- Elections: the monarchy is hereditary; governor general appointed by the monarch; following legislative elections, the leader of the majority party or the leader of the majority coalition is usually appointed prime minister by the governor general; the prime minister recommends the deputy prime minister.

Legislative Branch

The Legislative Branch consists of the Parliament of the Bahamas. The Parliament is made up of the Senate and a House of Assembly. The Senate has 16 seats; members are appointed by the governor general upon the advice of the prime minister and the opposition leader to serve 5-year terms. The House of Assembly has 38 seats; the

¹⁹ CIA World Factbook, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/bf.html>, accessed 18 June 2015

²⁰ Encyclopaedia Britannica, <http://www.britannica.com/place/The-Bahamas/Economy#toc276765>, accessed 18 June 2015

members are directly elected in single-seat constituencies by simple majority vote to serve 5-year terms. Parliament may make laws for the peace, order and good government of the Bahamas. The Constitution authorizes Parliament to make laws by passing Bills. The Constitution also empowers Parliament to: determine the privileges, immunities and powers of the Senate and House of Assembly; alter or amend any of the provisions of the constitution; regulate its own procedures by making rules of procedure; prescribe the number of Justices of the Supreme Court and Court of Appeal; and to approve the Government's budget. In addition, Parliament maintains oversight of the Government's financial matters.

- Elections: last held on 7 May 2012 (next to be held by May 2017)

Judicial Branch

Judicial Authority is entrusted in the Judicature, which is made up of the Supreme Court and the Court of Appeals. The Magistrates' Courts have civil and criminal jurisdiction. There are 20 Magistrates' Courts spread out through the islands of the Bahamas. These courts are presided over by Stipendiary and Circuit Magistrates who exercise summary jurisdiction in criminal matters and in civil matters involving amounts not exceeding 5,000 Bahamian dollars. There are 12 justices appointed to the Bench of the Supreme Court, including the Chief Justice. The Governor General appoints the Justices. The Supreme Court has unlimited jurisdiction in general, civil and criminal matters. The highest tribunal resident within the Bahamas is the Court of Appeal. This Court has jurisdiction in criminal, constitutional and civil matters. The Court of Appeal is separate from the Supreme Court and is comprised of a President, the Chief Justice, three resident justices of Appeal, and one non-resident Justice of Appeal. The Privy Council is the highest Court for the Bahamas and is located in England to hear appeals from the Court of Appeals.

- Judge selection and term of office: Court of Appeal president and Supreme Court chief justice appointed by the governor general on the advice of the prime minister after consultation with the leader of the opposition party; other Court of Appeal and Supreme Court justices appointed by the governor general upon recommendation of the Judicial and Legal Services Commission, a 5-member body headed by the chief justice; Court of Appeal justices appointed for life with mandatory retirement normally at age 68, but can be extended until age 70; Supreme Court justices appointed for life with mandatory retirement normally at age 65, but can be extended until age 67
- As of 2008, the Bahamas was not a party to the agreement establishing the Caribbean Court of Justice as the highest appellate court for the 15-member Caribbean Community (CARICOM). The Privy Council serves as the final court of appeal for The Bahamas.

Political process

The main political parties are the Progressive Liberal Party (founded 1953), which led the movement for government by the majority in the 1950s and '60s, and the Free National Movement (founded in 1972), which grew out of the PLP. All Bahamian citizens 18 years of age and older can vote. Women obtained the franchise in 1962.

Political parties and leaders

- Democratic National Alliance (DNA) (Leader – Branville McCartney)
- Free National movement or FNM (Leader - Hubert Minnis)
- Progressive Liberal Party or PLP (Leader - Perry Christie)

Political pressure groups and leaders

- Friends of the Environment
- Trade Unions
- Rainbow Alliance Bahamas
- Bahamas Women's Watch

The Economy of The Bahamas^{21,22}

The Bahamas is one of the wealthiest Caribbean countries with an economy heavily dependent on tourism and offshore banking. Tourism together with tourism-driven construction and manufacturing accounts for approximately 60% of GDP and directly or indirectly employs half of the archipelago's labour force. Financial services constitute the second-most important sector of the Bahamian economy and, when combined with business services, account for about 35% of GDP. Manufacturing and agriculture combined contribute less than a 10th of GDP and show little growth, despite government incentives aimed at those sectors. The economy of The Bahamas shrank at an average pace of 0.8% annually between 2007 and 2011, and tourism, financial services, and construction - pillars of the national economy - remain subdued. Conditions are improving in the tourism sector, however, due to steady foreign investment led activity. New resort and marina developments are likely to provide sustained employment opportunities.

- Economy based on services = 90.8% of GDP, industry = 7.1% of GDP (2012 estimates)

²¹ The CIA World Factbook, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/bf.html>, accessed 18 June 2015

²² National Policy For Gender Equality: The Commonwealth of the Bahamas

- GDP \$7.79 billion in 2011 (provisional); Per capita GNI US\$21,970 in 2010 (World Bank)
- Absolute poverty line of B\$2,863 (BLCS, 2001)
- GDP (Current Prices 2012) grew by 3.5%; GDP (Constant Prices 2012) grew at 1.83%
- Labour Force participation rate: Overall = 73.7%; M = 77.6%; F = 70.3%
- Unemployed = 15.4% M = 15.9% and F = 15.8%
- Discouraged Workers declined by 15% for the period May to November 2013
- More males than females were in the discouraged workers category (2013 LF Survey)

Socio-economic challenges certainly have an impact on development and on the realisation of rights, particularly the rights of women in the Caribbean. Despite their socio-economic and political progress as revealed in the statistics and information shared, many women in the Caribbean, including in The Bahamas continue to be disadvantaged due to legal and policy constraints and face discrimination and violence due to gender stereotypes and historical perceptions of their roles. The following sections of this report highlights the extent to which women in The Bahamas are affected by these issues and the need for enhanced measures to promote and ensure their right to a life free from all forms of discrimination and violence.

The situation of women and violence against them

Throughout the world, violence against women is pervasive and widespread, and seriously impedes women's enjoyment of their human rights. Rooted in multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination and inequalities, and strongly linked to the social and economic situation of women, violence against women constitutes a continuum of exploitation and abuse, which often ends with the ultimate form of violence, death.

The Caribbean has one of the highest violence rates in the world, including societal crime, illicit drug trade, and youth/gang violence, which has become more disconcerting and deadly due to the high numbers and accessibility of small firearms. Violence against women in that region is widespread and normalised. It is estimated that one in three women in the Caribbean on average will experience domestic violence.²³ According to

²³ UNODC's Crime Trends Survey (CTS) reference-Crime, Violence, and Development: Trends, Costs, and Policy Options in the Caribbean. A Joint Report by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime and the Latin America and the Caribbean Region of the World Bank; March 2007, p.12. Available at: http://www.unodc.org/pdf/research/Cr_and_Vio_Car_E.pdf

data from the Crime Trends Survey (CTS) of the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), three of the top ten recorded rape rates in the world occur in the Caribbean, and Caribbean countries for which comparable data are available (Bahamas, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, Jamaica, St. Kitts and Nevis, Dominica, Barbados, and Trinidad and Tobago) experienced a rate of rape above the average of the 102 countries in the CTS.²⁴

In spite of the deficiencies in the data collection, it is known that forty-eight per cent of adolescent girls report sexual initiation to be forced or somewhat forced in nine Caribbean countries;²⁵ and country studies for Antigua and Barbuda, Guyana, and Suriname suggest that between twenty to sixty-nine per cent of women in intimate relationships have been victims of domestic violence.²⁶

Article 1 of the CEDAW Convention defines the term 'discrimination against women' as any distinction, exclusion or restriction made on the basis of sex which has the effect or purpose of impairing or nullifying the recognition, enjoyment or exercise by women, irrespective of their marital status, on a basis of equality of men and women, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural, civil or any other field'. Based on this definition, discrimination against women remains a concern in The Bahamas, in practice and in law.²⁷

*Citizenship and gender equality in law in The Bahamas*²⁸

The Commonwealth of The Bahamas is currently seeking to amend its 41-year-old constitution to address remaining gender inequalities in law. This process started thirteen years ago in 2002 when a constitutional referendum was held and failed. The main issue at hand was and still is the question of equality between women and men. While the most striking instance of inequality in the Constitution is that between men and women in relation to their ability to pass on Bahamian citizenship to their children and spouses, however, as the most recent Constitutional Commission has noted, the inequalities in the current Constitution are manifold:

- Married Bahamian men and unmarried Bahamian women automatically pass their citizenship on to their children at birth.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ http://www.unifemcar.org/ge_iss.cfm?SubID=169&link=12

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ United States Department of State Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2013, <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/220627.pdf>, accessed 18 June 2015

²⁸ Bahamas Constitution Reform to Address Citizenship, Gender Equality, <http://globalvoicesonline.org/2014/10/10/bahamas-constitutional-reform-to-address-citizenship-gender-equality/>, accessed 22 June 2015

- Bahamian women cannot pass their citizenship on to their overseas-born children at birth, if they are married to a non-Bahamian.
- Single Bahamian fathers may not pass their citizenship on to their children, as the constitution defines children born out of wedlock as not having a father.
- The non-Bahamian wives of Bahamian men are afforded the right to be granted citizenship upon application.
- The non-Bahamian husbands of Bahamian women are afforded no such right.

The Constitution also does not include sex as a basis for protection from discrimination. The need for amendments to The Bahamas Constitution persists and ever since 2012 a referendum in this regard has been imminent. The current date for the referendum to amend the Constitution based on the aforementioned posts is 7 June 2016.

Women's lack of aware about their rights

While noting the existence of legal sanctions for acts of discrimination against women, the CEDAW Committee in its concluding observations²⁹ to The Bahamas expressed concern about the limited number of cases brought before courts for redress in instances of discrimination against women. In this context, the Committee was concerned that women, particularly in the Family Islands, were not aware of their rights under the Convention and thus lacked the capacity to claim them. In discussions with interlocutors, it was evident that many women were not aware of the CEDAW Convention or their rights guaranteed therein. Efforts are needed to correct this and empower women to claim their rights.

Gender stereotypes, discrimination and violence

Patriarchal attitudes and deep-rooted stereotypes regarding the roles, responsibilities and identities of women and men in Bahamian families continue, including for example the belief that men are breadwinners and women family caretakers. This stereotype persists despite the high academic and economic achievement of women and leads to unconscious bias and discrimination against women in public and private life. It also perpetuates sex-based inequalities in all areas of life and the normalization of violence against women.

Normalization of violence against women

In addition to the high levels of violence against women in The Bahamas, interlocutors noted with concern the apparent normalisation of violence against women and girls across the country. A similar concern was seen in other Caribbean countries where

²⁹ CEDAW/C/BHS/CI/1-5

interlocutors described the violence as normalized, widespread and of pandemic proportions.

This cultural normalcy of violence against women was confirmed in a 2011 research project by the Gender Advocate for the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) on masculinities and violence involving over 1000 high school youth in six English speaking countries, as well as focus group meetings with adults. The results showed that young men felt strongly influenced by their families, schools, peers and young girls to demonstrate aggressiveness as an integral aspect of their manhood. Their perception of manhood involved being physically strong and athletic, tough and aggressive, demonstrating their sexual prowess and having multiple partners. Many boys expressed fear of ridicule for being seen as ‘sissies’ or homosexual. This stereotype was often held and reinforced by girls and the view about the normalcy of aggressiveness and male behaviour received support from parents and teachers in the focus groups.³⁰

When asked whether there were instances in which a woman should be disciplined, the largest proportion (47.8%) of respondents indicated that it was important for a female intimate partner to be ‘disciplined’. Boys were significantly more likely to answer yes to this question.³¹

This normalisation of violence against women often leads to underreporting as well as ridicule and stigmatization of victims who do come forward. Ending such violence against women is one of the most serious challenges facing The Bahamas today, where underreporting remains a concern, reflecting a lack of trust in the justice system as well as fear of ridicule and stigmatization. In this connection, very effort must be made to identify strategies effectively address cultural and stereotypical attitudes that: i) perpetuate violence against women, ii) limit reporting of violations and abuse against women and girls, and iii) directly or indirectly encourage impunity for gender-based crimes that disproportionately affect women and girls.

Manifestations and prevalence of violence against women

Gender-based violence is directed against women because they are women, and affects women disproportionately. It includes acts that inflict physical, mental or sexual harm or suffering, threats of such acts, coercion and other deprivations of liberty. Gender-based violence, which impairs or nullifies the enjoyment by women of human rights and fundamental freedoms under international law, is discrimination within the

³⁰ Rosina Wiltshire, ‘Gender-based violence in the Caribbean: A cause for concern and a call to action’, 2016 presentation at the Commission on the Status of Women, New York

³¹ Rosina Wiltshire, ‘Gender-based violence in the Caribbean: A cause for concern and a call to action’, 2016 presentation at the Commission on the Status of Women, New York

meaning of Article 1 of the CEDAW Convention.³² Addressing discrimination against women in law and practice in The Bahamas is crucial given the linkages between discrimination and violence and the high prevalence of violence against women in the country.

As noted in several UN reports and mentioned by most interlocutors, violence against women and girls is evident in the home, community and workplace³³ in The Bahamas and this violence is manifested as psychological, physical, sexual and economic and violence.

Girls enjoy equal access to education in The Bahamas and often outperform boys in the formal educational sphere. Women across the country are generally free of economic discrimination. However, as noted by a number of interlocutors, while law provides for equal pay for equal work, it is not always the case in practice. Interlocutors advise that women often earn less than men in the workplace, despite their high levels of education.

The main forms of violence facing women and girls were said to be domestic violence; marital rape; sexual abuse of children; sexual harassment; sex-based discrimination; discrimination and violence based on sexual orientation and gender identity; discrimination and violence based on HIV status; sexual, reproductive health and rights; trafficking in persons; inadequate services for vulnerable children and the elderly, especially in rural areas; and gender related killings. The rise in the prevalence of intimate partner violence and gender-related killings, as the ultimate act in a continuum of violence, was highlighted as a serious concern in some contexts, including in connection with lesbian, bisexual and transgender women.

Sexual Harassment

The law prohibits criminal “quid pro quo” sexual harassment and authorizes penalties of up to Bahamas \$5,000 (\$5,000) and a maximum of two years’ imprisonment. There were no reports of workplace sexual harassment during the year 2012. Civil rights advocates complained that criminal prohibitions were not enforced effectively and civil remedies, including a prohibition on “hostile environment” sexual harassment, were still needed.

Moreover, many interlocutors felt that sexual harassment did not get as much attention because it was accepted as the norm and very rarely viewed as abusive conduct. One

³² Violence Against Women and the Responsibility of the State, <http://www.tribune242.com/news/2014/apr/22/violence-against-women-and-responsibility-state>, accessed 18 June 2015

³³ US State Department Bahamas Country Report on Human Rights Practices 2013, <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/220627>, accessed 18 June 2015

organization reported that sexual harassment is still socially acceptable and as such treated lightly. Interlocutors suggested that more analysis is needed to understand the physiology and impact of sexual harassment for women in the workplace and wider community.

Rape and Domestic Violence

Rape is illegal, but the law does not protect against spousal rape, except if the couple is separating, in the process of divorce, or if there is a restraining order in place. The maximum penalty for an initial rape conviction is seven years; the maximum for subsequent rape convictions is life imprisonment. In practice, however, the maximum sentence was 14 years.

Violence against women continues to be a serious, widespread problem. In November 2012 the Bahamas Crisis Centre told the media that the level of domestic violence had exceeded 1,200 cases annually. In 2012, the police commissioner reported that many of the killings were related to domestic violence, and another official indicated that 45 per cent of all homicides over the last 20 years could be attributed to domestic violence.

As noted by the CARIOM Gender Advisor in a recent presentation at a side event of the Commission on the Status of Women, ‘the implications of high levels of sexual and physical abuse and related high levels of teenage pregnancy, high levels of youth violence and incarceration, high incidence of HIV/AIDS and other Sexually Transmitted Diseases, alongside loss of productivity and employment represent serious causes for concern across the Caribbean; increased collaboration among Caribbean countries on these issues is crucial in finding a way forward.’³⁴

Reproductive rights and adolescent health services

Couples and individuals generally could decide freely and responsibly the number, spacing, and timing of their children and were not subject to discrimination, coercion, or violence regarding these choices. Access to family planning is universally available to individuals over the age of 18 years and to younger persons with the consent of a parent or guardian. It is noted that while the age of sexual consent is 16 years, sexual and reproductive services is only available to 16 year olds with parental consent. This places girls at risk of early pregnancy and exposes them in higher numbers to sexually transmitted diseases (STDs), including HIV/AIDS. Interlocutors informed that these are major concerns for girls in The Bahamas.

³⁴ Rosina Wiltshire, ‘Gender-based violence in the Caribbean: A cause for concern and a call to action’, 2016 presentation at the Commission on the Status of Women, New York

Authorities removed pregnant teens from government educational institutions and placed them in a special school operated by the Providing Access to Continued Education Foundation until after the birth of their children. Although this decision was intended to avoid stigmatization of pregnant teens and teen mothers, it remains a concern in The Bahamas.

The Maternal and Child Health Unit of the Ministry of Health provided information pamphlets on maternal and child health to clinics. A government website provided information for maternal and child health-care services provided by various clinics throughout the country. Women had access to maternal health services. According to the UN, in 2010 skilled personnel attended 99 per cent of births, and 98 per cent of mothers received prenatal and postpartum care. Services were available on a non-discriminatory basis, although some irregular immigrants (primarily those of Haitian origin) did not receive postpartum care because they lacked a fixed address.

Trafficking as a form of violence against women and girls

While few interlocutors highlighted trafficking as a major concern for women and girls in The Bahamas, the UN Special Rapporteur on Trafficking in persons, raised a number of challenges in this regard, particularly the issue of invisibility of victims and the confusion between trafficking and irregular migration. The Special Rapporteur called for additional training for relevant stakeholders, more efficient reporting and referral mechanisms, and greater protection for women most at risk of falling victim to trafficking. The Rapporteur also called for more public awareness about trafficking as a form of gender-based violence as well as the timely investigation and prosecution of traffickers.

Child abuse and the girl child

While there appears to be a lack of documentation and statistics on the situation of violence against the girl child, many of the interlocutors highlight this as a particular concern, especially in the Family Islands. The Committee on the Rights of the Child³⁵ expressed concern in its concluding observation to The Bahamas that the National Child Abuse Hotline is underused by the public due to lack of awareness. The Committee encouraged the Government to raise awareness about the child abuse hotline; implement an effective reporting system and timely investigations into all forms of violence against children, particular girls who are at risk of sexual abuse and exploitation; and ensure punishment for perpetrators of such violence.

³⁵ CRC/C/15/Add.253

Lesbian, bisexual and transgender women

Human rights issues affecting lesbian, bisexual and transgender women (LBT) were referred to in a number of meetings. The practice described as corrective rape, was also raised as a concern despite the situation of underreporting. In addition to physical violence against LBT women, concerns were expressed about the use of hate speech in the media, forms of intimate partner violence, and the invisibility of these issues in the government agenda to grantee greater protection for LBT women. Information was shared about the need to repeal and reform existing laws to ensure that the rights of LBT communities and individuals are properly respected. LGBT groups have noted with concern that the Constitutional reform initiatives do not address their concerns regarding non-discrimination in The Bahamas.

Migrant and refugee women and girls

While little information was provided on the situation of migrant and refugee women and girls, it was suggested by some interlocutors that women and girls of Haitian decent are vulnerable to violence. The Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination in its recommendation³⁶ to The Bahamas, noted the inadequacy of statistical information on the ethnic composition of the population, and pointed out that such information is necessary to assess how the Convention is being applied in practice. Statistical and other information on the population remains a concern today, which raises a further challenge regarding the provision of services for women victims of violence across ethnic divides.

Causes, patterns and trends of violence against women and girls in The Bahamas

Like elsewhere in the Caribbean, violence against women in The Bahamas is seemingly rooted in culture, gender socialization and stereotyping as well as socio-economic realities. Interlocutors also described violence against women as normal. They noted that women in The Bahamas often tolerated violence due to their economic dependence on their male partners. Women were also often blamed for “being too materialistic” and thus inviting the violence perpetrated against them. Such economic dependence has been at the heart of many incidence of intimate partner violence. Interlocutors also stated that there were women who encouraged their daughters toward economic dependence on male partners to support the family. Given the financial challenges brought on by the global economic crisis in recent years it would be important to assess the linkages between poverty and violence in The Bahamas and measures to address such concerns and to prevent and effectively respond to related violence.

³⁶ CERD/C/64/CO/1 (2004)

In an examination of conflict, gender relations, poverty and health of women in two low income areas in Jamaica, for example, the researchers found that women were more likely to be the recipients of physical abuse linked to the struggles of status-deprived males coping with poverty and inner-city conditions and gender socialization and stereotyping.³⁷ The researchers here contended that wherever there is evidence of gender inequality and male alienation, violence against women will increase and the health of women is likely to be negatively affected. Interlocutors working on gender-based violence in The Bahamas have indicated that given the high rates of girls' education in The Bahamas, including at the tertiary level where they outnumber the boys, a similar situation is evident, particularly as more boys are dropping out and becoming involved in gangs and criminality. Interlocutors in The Bahamas also concurred with reports from females in the wider Caribbean who felt that the use of physical violence by men against their partners, while regrettable, is inevitable.³⁸

Some interlocutors suggested that male violence was motivated by the belief that gender identity was defined by physical power and that certain challenges to the male power (such as disrespect or nagging) ought to be met by violence. As such, female partners were to be ruled and when necessary punished for disobedience or nagging. Female infidelity and a man's perceived need to control a woman to satisfy his own self-esteem were seen as another driver of male violence in the country. This emotionally driven male violence is often coupled with socioeconomic drivers of violence as well as the childhood or intergenerational experiences of violence in the wider Caribbean region.

Legal, policy and institutional developments

Accountability for perpetrators

Interlocutors noted that crimes, including violence against women and girls, were often met with a lack of accountability and appropriate remedies, and practices that re-victimized those who made complaints. The US State Department Human Rights Report on The Bahamas noted that among the main concerns were police abuse and challenges within judicial system evident in delays in trial and witness intimidation; all of this directly affects reporting by victims of violence, impedes effective remedies and accountability, and places doubt rather than confidence in the system.

In addition to underreporting by victims interlocutors suggested that violence against women was generally not seen as priority or as a serious concern unless the crime was

³⁷ Eliminating Gender-Based Violence, Ensuring Equality, ECLAC/UNIFEM Regional Assessment of actions to end violence against women in the Caribbean, 2003, p7-8

³⁸ Eliminating Gender-Based Violence, Ensuring Equality, ECLAC/UNIFEM Regional Assessment of actions to end violence against women in the Caribbean, 2003

excessively gruesome and/or involved a child victim.³⁹ Recognizing the importance of address the concerns of all victims of violence, women's groups in The Bahamas are working to ensure that violence against women remains a national priority. They advocate for women, including in the Family Islands, to know their rights and claim those rights, including the right to a life free from discrimination and violence.

Legislative and policy and reform

Despite the legislative and policy initiatives in place to response to sexual and gender-based violence, additional efforts are needed in The Bahamas to address specific forms of violence against women. As noted by the CEDAW Committee, there is a need to adopt comprehensive legislation with the view to ensuring more effective response to violence against women.

The limitations of existing laws as well as the narrow interpretation and the lack of implementation of laws, policies and protocols were also noted by the Committee as challenges prohibiting the rights of women to a life free from violence. Regarding protection orders, in theory they should be speedy, effective and accessible but in practice they were not always respected and occasionally referred to as just 'pieces of paper', which did not provide adequate protection to women facing real threats to their safety from intimate partners.

National Gender Policy

Most Caribbean countries have adopted national policies for gender equality but are struggling with implementation. While The Bahamas has elaborated a National Policy for Gender Equality, adoption has been pending for more than one year. The draft Policy is premised on the core ideal/philosophy that differences on the basis of sex and gender are not to be used to justify unequal and inequitable arrangements, entitlements and privileges. The policy identifies a range of issues, customs, practices, legislation and institutions that need to be addressed so that equal rights and justice for women and men can be achieved in The Bahamas.

The draft National Policy on Gender Equality, which is to be implemented over a 10-year period, is basis of a human rights framework, which aims to:

- Effect systemic change to historical and contemporary structures of inequality;
- Eliminate attitudinal and behavioural barriers that impede equitable access to resources and opportunities;

³⁹ US State Department, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2013.

- Attain gender equality and sustainable human development; and
- Promote social justice and equity, respect and tolerance

The Bureau of Women's Affairs will lead the implementation of the Gender Policy by:

- Initiating, formulating and developing a plan of action, in consultation with all stakeholders;
- Collecting and disseminating information on gender issues;
- Monitoring the implementation of gender related conventions and agreements to which The Bahamas has acceded; and
- Overseeing and ensuring regular reporting on the status of gender equality as well as the Policy.

The adoption and implementation of this policy will be important in addressing gender equality, promoting non-discrimination based on sex, and alleviating gender-based violence, especially among those most vulnerable to violence.

National machinery for gender equality

The eleven critical areas of the Beijing Platform for Action address the situation of women in the areas of poverty, education, health, violence, armed conflict, the economy, decision making, human rights, the media, the environment and the girl child. The Platform further outlines the national institutional mechanisms that should be put in place and adequately resourced to ensure the implementation of the eleven areas. While most Caribbean countries have set up Bureaux or Departments for the advancement of women and to address violence against them, these national machineries are generally not sufficiently funded or staffed and are not functioning well.

In its consideration of report of The Bahamas in 2012, the CEDAW Committee⁴⁰ noted with concern the limited financial and human resources allocated directly to the Bureau, which consists of four staff members and less than 1% of the national budget. The Committee recommended the strengthening of the Bureau, including its technical capacity to promote the advancement of women and address discrimination and violence against women and girls across the country. Interlocutors have indicated that efforts are underway to strengthen the Bureau by elevating it to the level of a Department of Gender and Family Affairs and increasing its staffing and budget to better respond to the needs of women, men and the family as a unit in terms of addressing gender inequalities and violence against women. This new Department would take on the implementation of the

⁴⁰ CEDAW/C/BHS/CO/1-5

National Policy on Gender Equality, mainstream gender, and increase programming on gender-based violence as well as in other areas relevant areas.

Enhanced coordination to end gender-based violence

The Bahamas has taken great strides to increase coordination and response to gender-based violence across the country. In July 2013, the Government commenced an initiative to make The Bahamas ‘a zero tolerance’ country as it relates to gender-based violence. A Ministerial Oversight Committee and a National Task Force were established to oversee the development, implementation and coordination of a national strategic plan to address gender based violence.

The Ministerial Oversight Committee consisted of Ministers from the following Ministries: The Ministries of National Security, Legal Affairs, Education, Science and Technology, of Health and Youth, Sports and Culture.

The Task Force was chaired by a retired Justice and co-chaired by the Director of The Bahamas Crisis Centre, and the Director and Senior Lecturer of the University of The West Indies School of Clinical Medicine and Research (Bahamas), who is also a Consultant urologist. The Task Force comprised government ministries and non-governmental organizations.

The mandate of the Task Force was to define the problem, analyse all factors involved, and generate a strategic plan of action, the intent being, to reduce and hopefully eradicate gender-based violence. The Task Force developed a National Strategic Plan, identifying ten programmes of prevention that are “practicable, doable, and measurable”, and can be carried out in the first year. Among these ‘ten low-hanging fruit’ are:

- i. The creation of a unified family court system;
- ii. The creation of a department of family and gender affairs;
- iii. Focus on male mentoring;
- iv. The establishment of family island coordination councils;
- v. A national early intervention programme for children exposed to violence; and
- vi. A domestic violence fatality team project.

The completed National Strategic Plan was presented to the Prime Minister of The Bahamas February 2016 and subsequently laid in Parliament generating wide public interest. UN Women provided the technical support for the National Strategic Implementation Plan which is expected to be implemented in the coming months.

Shelters and other services for victims of violence

Domestic abuse law prohibits domestic violence as a crime separate from assault and battery, and the government generally enforced the law. However, women's rights groups cited some reluctance on the part of law enforcement authorities to intervene in domestic disputes. Organizations such as The Bahamas Crisis Centre have been cooperating with the police by providing them with a counsellor referral service to utilize when encountering rape victims. The Crisis Centre also operates a toll-free hotline in New Providence and Grand Bahama, run by trained volunteers to respond to emergency calls 24 hours a day. Government and private women's organizations continued public awareness campaigns highlighting the problems of abuse and domestic violence. Many of the service providers interviewed highlighted the limited human and financial resources available to address the increasing number of persons needing assistance, including in domestic violence situations.

The issue of insufficient shelters and/or inadequate services for women victims of violence, especially domestic violence was highlighted as a serious concern in The Bahamas. This limited number of shelters for victims of domestic violence was said to be due largely to resource constraints; however, some interlocutors mentioned the issue of the small size of some communities and the challenge of maintaining confidentiality of and safety for victims. The archipelagic structure of the Bahamas reinforces the changes of reproduces services in all communities, including Family Island settlements some of which have only a few hundred inhabitants.⁴¹

Even where shelters had been established, insufficient resources meant that the length of stay for victims was often limited. The restrictions limiting boys over the age of 10 years from joining their mothers in shelters for domestic violence was raised as an impediment for women, many of whom were not willing to leave their boys behind while they checked themselves into a shelter. The CEDAW Committee⁴² has recommended that The Government address these concerns and provide better services for women victims of violence across the country.

Statistics and data collection

Interlocutors engaged for this assessment noted that in order to provide an effective response to violence against women and girls in The Bahamas, there needs to be:

- i) More resources allocated for programming and services for victims;

⁴¹ The country has 700 islands: 12 are significantly populated and a few others are very sparsely populated. The majority of these islands are uninhabited.

⁴² CEDAW/C/BHS/CO/1-5

- ii) Ongoing monitoring and evaluation of policies and training programmes;
- iii) Proper collection of disaggregated data to inform policy; and
- iv) An effective functioning complaints mechanism to strengthen accountability.

Enhanced data, disaggregated on the basis of age, race, and other factors, was considered among the top priorities in understanding the magnitude of the problem of violence against women and girls. Similar concerns have been raised by UN experts in their consideration of human rights violations, including violence against women, in The Bahamas. In this context, the experts and the interlocutors stressed the importance of focusing on vulnerable groups of women, such as women with disabilities, women living with HIV/AIDS, and LBT women, with the view to strengthening prevention and ensuring effective responses.

The way forward in addressing remaining gaps on violence against women

Reports and recommendations from the Human Rights Treaty Bodies, particularly CEDAW and CRC, as well as from the Human Rights Council processes such as the Universal Periodic Review and the Special Rapporteur on Trafficking in Persons, have highlighted some positive gains by The Bahamas in addressing violence against women. Among these gains are the country's adoption and reform of existing legislation concerning domestic violence and sexual offenses; drafting of a national gender policies; creation of a bureau in charge of gender issues, and provision of a number of programs and services for victims of violence against women. Development of training programs, protocols and new institutions, particularly in cooperation with civil society organization such as The Bahamas Crisis Centre, were also noted as favourable.

The establishment of a Ministerial Oversight Committee and a National Task Force to oversee the development, implementation and coordination of a national strategic plan to address gender based violence should also be mentioned among the gains for The Bahamas in this area. The development of the National Strategic Plan as well as the accompanying Implementation Plan should add momentum to the agenda to prevent and effectively respond to gender-based violence across The Bahamas.

Despite these gains, more must be done to protect the rights of women and girls and to prevent all forms of violence against them. Additional steps by the Government, in partnership with civil society, must include:

- a. Strengthening efforts to understanding the root causes of violence against women and to develop appropriate laws, policies and programmes to address them;

- b. Amending or abolishing remaining laws that impede the full realization of the rights of women and girls to a life free from discrimination and violence, including in the Constitution where there remains discrimination based on sex;
- c. Educating the public and raising awareness through sensitization campaigns, media outreach, and incorporation of human rights and non-violence into school curricula at all levels with the view to addressing gender stereotyping and changing the perception that violence against women is normal;
- d. Improving and making more accessible services for women victims of violence, including through the adoption and implementation of the draft National Policy on Gender Equality as well as the strengthening of the Bureau of Women's Affairs to a Department with enhanced human and financial resources; and
- e. Prosecuting perpetrators for all forms of violence against women and girls with the view to ending impunity for such acts.

Caribbean Community's Joint Statement on Gender Equality and the Post 2015 and the Small Island Developing States (SIDS) agenda advances similar recommendations on the way forward in addressing gender inequality as well as gender-based violence. These recommendations highlight that progress towards a new socio-economic and political paradigm, based on a strong human rights and human development framework must:

- Strengthen legislation, and approve, implement and monitor National Action Plans; provide training for police, legal, and related personnel including health professionals on GBV and equality; work with youth and male partnerships for peace and security building on good practice in the region such as initiatives with CARIMAN. A Caribbean male network that promotes gender equality and an end to gender based violence. Institute stronger measures to end human trafficking and abuse of women in the workplace, including migrants and domestic workers.
- Promote quality education which integrates gender equality from early childhood. Review school Curricula and Teacher education Training to integrate emotional intelligence (EI) into curricula at all levels, which would promote kindness, self-discipline, self-respect and self-control; greater use of technology to promote peer learning and re-engagement of boys;
- Enhance capacity for positive child rearing of all parents including fathers.
- Abolish the use of corporal punishment in schools, which reinforces the legitimacy of violence and supports the cycle of violence.
- Support inclusive governance with urgent consideration and implementation of special measures that will enable at least 30% elected female participation at the highest levels of political office.

- Promote women's Economic Empowerment, decent work agendas and gender responsive economic policies
- Build leadership and gender- sensitive capacity of women and people in leadership
- Reduce teenage pregnancies and end punishment of girls who wander often because of abuse in the home.
- Promote healthy living food security and improved nutrition and an understanding of the importance of the importance of care of the earth, including water and the marine environment
- Strengthen data and monitoring systems.

Gender equality, women's empowerment and the eradication of all forms of gender-based discrimination and violence must be at the centre of all efforts toward development, progress and change in The Bahamas. The recommendations from international, regional and national levels to facilitate development, progress and change are many; it is now up to the Government and its partners to implement them.