



# STATEMENT

BY

HON. MS. PRIYA MANICKCHAND  
MINISTER OF EDUCATION

OF THE REPUBLIC OF GUYANA

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Madam Chairperson,

Guyana is honoured to participate in today's discussion on gender equality and the empowerment of women. We welcome the opportunity to share our experiences particularly as it relates to the environment and women and their role in poverty and hunger eradication, development and current challenges. This Commission offers us an opportunity to evaluate progress in keeping with national priorities and international obligations and to recommend ways to address the challenges faced in this important endeavour.

Madam Chairperson,

Guyana accords high priority to gender equality and women's empowerment. Our national policy initiatives and programmes currently emphasise the elimination of gender based violence, expansion of economic opportunities for women and the promotion of increased participation of women in leadership and decision making.

Our country has registered successes in several areas of critical concern, including education, health, women and the environment, and women in politics and decision making. Education, which is compulsory, is provided free of cost up to age 15 and is universal at the primary level. The lack of incremental expenditure in this sector combined with incentives to encourage school attendance of our boys and girls of men by their female counterparts, including at the tertiary level is engaging the attention of officials as we strive towards true gender equality in this sector.

Legislative provisions such as the representation of individuals in political parties that women comprise at least 33% of the candidates on the slate of political parties, combined with practical measures are serving to foster the increasing participation of women in public life and decision making. Women have served at the highest levels in Guyana, as Head of State and Government, as head of the judiciary, and in other positions of influence in government. And as of January this year, we can now also boast of having the first female cabinet minister. Our female membership, community representation of women in Parliament, has significantly increased and now stands at

twenty one (21) of the sixty five (65) members of Parliament, covers 36 per cent, as compared to 1997 when only twelve (12) of the sixty five women. Ongoing leadership training and outreach programmes are part of the methodology in building a cadre of women leaders capable of equal participation in all spheres of public and private life.

Despite the enactment of Domestic Violence (Prohibition) Act (1996) which includes various remedies to aid victims of violence and complementary practical programmes to provide shelter, support to such victims as well as training in life and income generating skills, challenges abound in eliminating violence against women. As such, efforts will be intensified this year to re-vigorate the "Stable Start" campaign to end sexual violence and abuse, especially against women and girls.

Recognition of the nexus between economic empowerment and advancement of the status of women, complementary programmes are being implemented through various approaches to assist some categories of particular women to acquire skills and resources to establish micro-enterprises. Capacity building workshops are held frequently to enhance the entrepreneurial capabilities of women and a special trade fair was held in 2011. In June 2010, the innovative Women of World Programme was launched affording women access credit to establish or expand existing businesses. This programme has been deemed as a model for the region, by the Inter-American Development Bank, the Commission on Latin America and the Caribbean, Ms. Alicia Barco.

It would be immensely fruitful to reaffirm my country's support for UN Women which has been assiduously working to promote gender equality and the empowerment of women, in accordance with its strategic plan.

#### Madam Chairpersons,

Agriculture is fundamental to economic growth, employment, export earnings and sustainable development of Guyana and there is clear acknowledgment of the important role played by rural women in the eradication of poverty and hunger and in overall development. Rural women in Guyana are already being legislated in law and can access financial services, extension services and training, including Agricultural

Diversification Strategy, seeks to improve the living conditions of poor and rural households and is complemented by the appointment of gender representatives in all administrative regions of the country as well as active support (financial and technical) to rural women's organizations. Additionally, the Ministry of Agriculture works closely with the Ministry of Amerindian Affairs and the Women's Affairs Unit to facilitate processes through which these organizations can influence decisions regarding resources, strategies and interventions for gender and rural income generation. In this context, Guyana continues to work with the Inter-American Institute for Cooperation in Agriculture and the FAO for their continued support of national initiatives to empower rural women.

Madam Chair,

Our discussion on the empowerment of rural women would be pointless if we failed to address a question to the current chair of the Global Commission on the need for the revamping of the international trading system, especially as it relates to agricultural products. My view, country's experiences, hopes and the importance of international cooperation to assist developing states to implement appropriate programmes for rural women.

Guyana remains committed to the achievement of gender equality and the empowerment of all women, including women from rural communities. We stand ready to do our part but wish to underscore the need for continued efforts to dispel positive images of women, remove the remaining obstacles to their full participation in public life and decision-making, address all levels, promote inter-economic empowerment and empowerment and eliminate entrenched attitudes and practices which perpetuate inequalities and discrimination.

I thank you.