

Thank you Madam Moderator,
Distinguished colleagues and fellow panelists,
Excellencies,
Ladies and gentlemen

1. At the outset, let me congratulate UN Women for convening this multi-stakeholder forum in preparation for the upcoming session of the CSW. It is most opportune for us to engage in these discussions on aspects of the theme of empowering women in the changing world of work, and set the stage for the important interactions and decisions to be taken during the CSW in March.

2. Before delving in, I wanted to give you a few statistics to illustrate the status of women in Jamaica:
 - a. According to the Statistical Institute of Jamaica (STATIN), females comprise 50.7% of Jamaica's population of 2.7 million;

 - b. STATIN also reports that women continue to outnumber their male counterparts in the total labour force, comprising 59.2%;

 - c. According to data from the Planning Institute of Jamaica, females head 45% of all Jamaican households, though these households have a lower per capita consumption than those headed by males;

 - d. WHO data published in 2015 indicates that life expectancy for females in Jamaica is 78.6 while that of males is 73.9;

- e. In the education sector, females continue to outperform their counterparts in the area of literacy (93% - 84%), and make up the majority of both the professionally trained workforce (72%) and skilled/semi-skilled personnel (60%);
 - f. Women hold several key posts in the state architecture, among them Chief Justice, Leader of the Opposition, Director of Public Prosecutions, Solicitor-General, Attorney-General, Auditor-General, Public Defender, Commissioner of Police, Commissioner of Corrections and Chief of State Protocol. 50% of Heads of diplomatic and consular missions are women and so too are 60% of the Permanent Secretaries (heads) of our 19 Government ministries.
3. On the surface, these appear to auger well for women's empowerment, and indeed they represent some level of achievement of which we can be proud. However, they belie persistent inequalities and latent discrimination, which continue to restrict full empowerment of women.
4. In the political arena, women hold only 19% of seats in the lower house of Parliament and 24% of the Senate. 18% of the Cabinet are women, including for the first time my Minister of Foreign Affairs and Foreign Trade. At the municipal level, 21% of elected representatives are women as are 14% of our mayors. These are well below the 40% recommended by the CEDAW and even the 30% minimum stated in our own National Policy for Gender Equality.

5. To accelerate and reap the benefits of women's empowerment, Jamaica is continuing its efforts to ensure adequate social and economic policies are put in place to do so. From as far back as the 1970s, Jamaica enacted the **Equal Pay for Men and Women Act (1975)** which provides for the payment of equal pay for equal work between male and female employees in the same establishment. Another landmark piece of legislation was the **Maternity Leave Act (1979)** which provides for paid maternity leave for women.

6. Although women are now experiencing greater academic mobility and are entering the labour force in greater numbers in recent years, they are still earning significantly less than men. A 2013 ILO report on Women in Business and Management, found that Jamaica had the highest proportion of women managers ahead of males, globally at 59.3%. Still yet, women in Jamaica earn 60 per cent of their male counterparts' comparable compensation according to the Global Gender Gap Report 2015.

7. It is patently clear therefore, that on their own, legislation and policies do not bring about the empowerment for women and girls. What is also required is proactive implementation of these laws and policies, and we need to reinforce social and cultural programmes that promote gender equality and socialise our people from childhood to recognise men and women as equals.

8. The situation of domestic workers in Jamaica, the vast majority of who are women, was given a boost when Jamaica ratified ILO Convention C 189, also known as the Domestic Workers Convention. The deposit of the instrument of ratification was announced by our Prime Minister in these very halls in September 2016, when he emphatically declared “Mr. Secretary-General, I am a feminist too.”
9. In addition, under the amended CARICOM Free Movement of Skilled Persons Act, trained Household Workers are able to travel freely within the CARICOM region, and are therefore able to capitalise on employment opportunities beyond our borders.
10. At the same time, our Parliament has established a Joint Select Committee to consider ways to address women’s under-representation in Parliament, local authorities and other positions of leadership. The aim is to identify specific practical measures to correct the systematic gender inequalities which result in women’s under-representation in these areas.
11. We are also seeking to address cultural barriers that prevent women from entering decision making and management positions and to remove discriminatory practices in order to promote proportional representation for women in principal positions.
12. Governments can play a lead role by either incentivizing economic players who meet pre-determined targets or disadvantaging those who fall below established minimums. For example, in qualifying for contracts

or other procurement services, bonus points could be awarded to bidders compliant with gender policy regulations.

13. Similarly, efforts can be undertaken to raise further awareness in the broader population to address lingering discrimination and inequalities. National gender bureaux have an indispensable role to play in monitoring trends and also reporting achievements and challenges.
14. One of our issues which I hope we have an opportunity to discuss today involves the societal norms and mores surrounding masculinity and its link to gender based violence. I can attest to the fact that there are males in our society who feel threatened as a result of the educational and professional advancement of women, which manifests in incidents of physical, psychological and emotional abuse. The policy responses required to address this situation are more complex and long term in nature than those related to legislative and regulatory action.
15. We believe that this will entail the development of programmes that can sufficiently sensitise the public so that they are provided with information and tools to become champions of women's empowerment. Only then will they become more attuned to gender related impacts and exercise their political and economic power to drive change, based on a demand for accountability and fair treatment.
16. In Jamaica, we will continue to provide support to women's organisations to enhance their capacity and the skills of their members

to be advocates for change, and to continue to play an active role in implementation of gender related policies and programmes.

17. The *He for She* campaign is also an excellent mechanism for bringing men and boys into the efforts to address gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls. Jamaica launched our local *He for She* campaign in 2016 and we are elated that the legendary Usain Bolt signed on to the campaign, as well as a raft of leading entertainers and officials. If we keep pushing these goals, we stand a great chance of impacting attitudes and advancing empowerment.

18. This kind of multi-pronged approach is essential to ensuring the economic empowerment of women. We must develop and implement effective and appropriate policies and legislation; we must address social and cultural norms and patterns of behaviour; we must be proactive in driving change; and we must empower and involve all stakeholders in our continued efforts to promote equality and the empowerment of women and girls.

19. I thank you for your kind attention.