



# **SAINT LUCIA**

## **STATEMENT BY**

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and Gender Relations**

**TO THE  
THIRTY-FIFTH SESSION OF THE UNITED NATIONS COMMITTEE  
ON THE  
ELIMINATION OF DISCRIMINATION AGAINST WOMEN**

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(Check against delivery)

Chairperson,



Even prior to acceding to the CEDAW Convention, St Lucia had had a place at the primary school for every child of that age; however, up until 2005, only a fraction of the number of students of secondary schools age were able to obtain a place because the number of school places at that level was well short of what was needed.

In keeping with its promise to the people of St Lucia, the government will, at the commencement of the 2006 – 2007 academic year, realize the goal of universal secondary education. It means that every child who is a secondary school age will be guaranteed a place.

In St Lucia the trend has been for girls to out perform their male counterparts at all levels of the education system. This phenomenon is of grave concern to the policy makers; but while efforts are being made to help the boys to improve every encouragement is being given to the girls to continue to excel. Our tertiary institutions show higher registration of females than males.

The secondary school curriculum is broad based and there are no restrictions as to the subjects male and female students may select. Increasingly, girls are pursuing non-traditional subjects areas such as Small Engines; Woods, Technical Drawing and Electricity among others. They have equal access to all training opportunities as their male counterparts.

In 2001 a comprehensive Health and Family Life Curriculum was introduced at both the primary and secondary school levels. The objective of this innovative educational tool was to address in a professional, non-threatening and confidential manner, the issues which young people face in growing up, in order to foster the development of wholesome attitudes and behaviours.

Provision is made for the appointment of counselors at all secondary schools while the primary schools will access the services of the District Counselor based at the Education District office.

## **Article 11 – Employment**

In honouring its commitment to protecting the rights of workers, the government passed the Equality of Opportunity and Treatment in Employment and Occupation Act which came into force on April 2000. This Act is intended to protect workers from discriminatory practices in the workplace. The significant thing about this Act is that it speaks to gender related grounds for discrimination and thus protects the rights of the working woman. This Act revokes the law (the Agricultural Worker Minimum Wage Order 1972 No. 12; amended in 1979 No. 56) which gave women working in the agricultural sector lower wages than men for the same work.



The Ministry of Health through its Bureau of Health Promotion has trained a number of health care professionals and is offering voluntary counseling and testing (VTC) services island -wide. Anti-retroviral treatment is available free of cost to expectant HIV positive women to prevent infection of the unborn child.

Reproductive health is included as one of the eight health priority areas outlined in the Strategic Plan of the Ministry of Health for the period 2005 – 2010. No doubt, this will redound to the well needed improvements in health and reproductive services.

Women now have easy access to contraceptives and a range of contraceptive devices are available at the health centres and at the St Lucia Planned Parenthood Association. Many of these services are free but sometimes a nominal fee is charged. The morning after pill also is available from the St Lucia Planned Parenthood Association. Girls above the age of fifteen (15) do not require parental consent to obtain contraceptive.

Abortion on demand is not available in St Lucia however, the Criminal Code which came into effect in January 2005 permits abortion but only under certain conditions.

## **Violence Against Women**

The government of St Lucia recognizes that the effective management of this critical social problem requires a strategic and multifaceted approach involving government and civil society including faith-based organizations. This is predicated on the fact that gender is a powerful influence on the behaviour of men and women towards each other and in the family community and society.

The underlying factor which makes women and girls so vulnerable to acts of violence is the difference in status accorded to men and women in that the masculine gender is associated with control, power and headship, while the feminine gender is associated with subordination and subjection. Faith based organizations play a significant role in perpetuating such attitudes.

In its effort to address such prevailing attitudes, the Ministry of Health, through the Division of Gender Relations has developed a three pronged approach to combating violence against women. The three main areas are:

1. public awareness, education and sensitization
2. safety and rehabilitation of victims
3. therapeutic intervention for perpetrators

In that regard the Division of Gender Relations have successfully implemented the following:

- Domestic Violence sensitization education and training for:
  - a) all ranks of the police force
  - b) members of the Judiciary
  - c) Human Resource Managers of the public and private sectors
  - d) Leaders of faith-based organization
  - e) School principals and teachers
  
- To provide safety and rehabilitation for victims of domestic violence, the Women's Support Centre was opened in October 2001. The Centre accepts women and their children who are fleeing from life threatening domestic violence situations. Presently the shelter is funded and managed entirely by government but plans are afoot to form a not-for-profit organization to oversee the affairs of the institution thus giving it more autonomy. The Centre offers a homely and secure environment to its clients and provides them with counseling services,

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In terms of legislation regarding violence against women, the Domestic Violence (Summary Proceedings) Act 1994 was passed in St Lucia. It affords victims of domestic violence protection from their abusers by granting one of three specific orders viz Protection, Occupation and Tenancy Order.