

Draft Statement delivered by Ms. Adriana George-Sharpe, on behalf of the Government of Trinidad and Tobago, on the National Progress Report on the Implementation of the Montevideo Consensus on Population and Development, at the Third Session of the Regional Conference on Population and Development, Lima, Peru, 7-9th August, 2018

Madam Chair

Trinidad and Tobago is honoured to participate in the *Third Session of the Regional Conference on Population and Development*. We are indeed grateful for this opportunity to share with other member states the progress that Trinidad and Tobago has made since 2013 when we joined the regional community in adopting the Montevideo Consensus on Population and Development and made a collective commitment to eliminate social, economic and gender inequalities and secure the sexual and reproductive rights of all, among other issues.

In keeping with this collective commitment, the Government of Trinidad and Tobago has aligned its national development strategy, **Vision 2030**, to the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals which has provided a unique opportunity for the Government and people of my country to augment implementation of the Montevideo Consensus. These key documents outline overlapping development interventions which are also articulated in the Montevideo Consensus. Thus, the successful implementation of these development agendas will inherently facilitate the implementation of the Montevideo Consensus.

However, the Government of Trinidad and Tobago is cognizant of the need to make Vision 2030 and, by extension the Consensus more relevant to the day-to-day lives of every citizen. In order to do so conditions must exist that allow all persons, regardless of race or gender, to lead healthy and productive lives in dignity.

In this regard, the Government has undertaken a number of initiatives to create a society in which the basic needs of all people, especially women and children, are met and that each individual is given an opportunity to make a meaningful contribution to national development.

Since the adoption of the Consensus in 2013, Trinidad and Tobago with support from our development partners such as the UNFPA, Civil Society Organizations and other stakeholders, has made tremendous progress under the six thematic areas. some of which I will now highlight.

Under the thematic area of **Rights, Needs Responsibilities and Requirements of Girls, Boys, Adolescents and Youth:**

- a National Child Policy was developed and a National Child Registry was established
- the Children’s Authority was established in 2015. It is a specialized agency with the responsibility for the care and protection of children, especially those who are at risk or have been victims of abuse or neglect. The Authority advocates for the rights of children, and encourages and support them to enjoy their childhood. The organization’s overarching objective is to utilize child friendly and progressive solutions to address children’s issues and rehabilitate them so that their full potential is realized.
- the development of a new National Youth Policy is in progress. The policy seeks to ensure that every youth has a place , a plan and a purpose by addressing issues of education and training, employment, gender relations and health
- universal access to Early Childhood Care and Education was achieved
- the participation rate in tertiary education increased from 42% in 2010 to 65% in 2015
- curriculum expansion at primary level – religious education, HFLE, values, character and citizenship education.
- ratification of the UN Convention on Rights of Persons with Disabilities in 2015,
- in 2017 the Marriage Act was amended to remove all options for marriage of persons under 18,
- “Youth Connect” mobile app developed to enable young persons 18 – 25 access to SRH care,
- an Adolescent Health Strategy is being developed, as part of the wider Maternal, Child and Adolescent Strategy,
- in 2014, the Juvenile Court Project was launched; the project seeks to strengthen the capacity of the Judiciary to deal with children matters using a rehabilitative, restorative and less retributive approach. The Juvenile Court was completed in 2017 and officially opened in March 2018.

Under the thematic area of **Ageing, Social Protection and Socioeconomic Challenges:**

- a National Ageing Policy was developed that seeks to create an environment which would facilitate the meaningful participation and involvement of older persons in society.
- the government established two palliative care centres in the public sector under the NW Regional Health Authority and the SW Regional Health Authority
- emergency shelters are being equipped to meet the needs of the elderly of T&T,
- National Insurance contributions were increased to strengthen the level of support given to retirees,

With regards to **Universal Access to Sexual and Reproductive Health Services:**

- A draft Sexual and Reproductive Health Policy was developed
- Public health institutions have commenced implementation of the Charter of (Patient's) Rights that stipulates the approach to patient care by the country's public health institutions
- The National Workplace Policy on HIV and AIDS was revised
- The country recorded a decrease in the Maternal Mortality Rate from 42.5 per 100,000 births in 2014 to 27.5 per 100,000 births in 2016. Recently, the Ministry of Health reported zero maternal deaths for the first half of 2018, an achievement that was made possible through the support of PAHO and the various technical and medical staff across the health sector
- the Ministry of Health in 2014 launched a Men's Health Programme
- the Directorate of Women's Health was established in 2017. Some of the initiatives being undertaken include the establishment of a milk bank in the country, the expansion of medical screening of new-born babies, improved care at women's health units, the introduction of additional respectful maternity care initiatives, HPV cervical screening and a higher quality of care and accountability in the health sector.
- expansion of the programme 'Prevention of Mother-to-Child Transmission' to include syphilis and Hepatitis.

Madam Chair,

Under Priority Measure Gender Equality:

- Cabinet approved the establishment of a National Commission for Women
- T&T has a Women's Parliamentary Participation Rate of 30.0%
- women comprised 53.67% of professional and technical workers (as at Dec 2014)
- development of a gender budgeting toolkit and manual and review by Cabinet of a proposal on gender responsive budgeting
- the Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC) has issued Guidelines on Sexual Harassment in the Workplace to help prevent, punish and eradicate harassment of women
- the National Training Agency in 2014 developed standards for domestic workers to facilitate certification with the Caribbean Vocational Qualification, thus giving domestic workers a parallel standing with academic qualification
- the prohibition for single men to adopt children was lifted thereby creating equity and gender equality adoption opportunities,
- launched the Trinidad and Tobago Central Registry on Domestic Violence in April 2016 .

Under priority area **International Migration and Protection of the Human Rights of all Migrants**, some notable achievements include:

- the development of National Policy to Address Refugee and Asylum Matters (2014)
- establishment of a Refugee Unit in the Immigration Division of the Ministry of National Security
- Trafficking in Persons Act, Chapter 12:10 (2011)
- Establishment of Counter Trafficking Unit (2013)
- development of the 2017 draft Refugee and Asylum Seekers Bill
- **existence of 2 Social Security Reciprocal Agreements with CARICOM and Canada.**

With respect to priority **Territorial Inequality, Spatial Mobility and Vulnerability**

- a National Poverty Reduction Strategy is currently being developed
- partial proclamation of Section 1(2) of the Planning and Facilitation of Development Act in 2015 to replace the Town and Country Planning Act 35:01 of 1969: this will facilitate devolution of development control and local area plan making functions to the Municipal Corporations,

- Local Government reform initiatives to enhance the delivery of basic social services to all with their communities,
- access to ICTs, including high-speed or broadband Internet, in predominantly unserved and underserved areas, through 4 Star.TT,
- development of the National Environmental Policy (NEP) which will provide the basis for ensuring that the environment is managed to protect human health and yield the optimum sustainable benefits for existing and future generations,
- development of a National Disaster Relief Policy to provide relief after the impact of a hazard. The policy seeks to facilitate an integrated approach to relief management and advocates standards for implementing the rapid delivery of relief supplies to address the needs of the affected population in the aftermath of a disaster.

Madam Chair,

Even though we have much to celebrate there are, several **challenges and complex issues** which have impeded the rate of implementation. These challenges affect all 6 priority areas and generally fall into the following categories:

- **Inadequate Coverage:** exclusion of vulnerable groups from new policy instruments (e.g. the National Youth Policy does not include youth in under-represented groups),
- **Unanticipated Negative Outcomes:** conflicting legislation and/or the response of target beneficiaries to specific policy changes sometimes negate the intended benefits of the new law or policy (e.g. youth being unwilling to seek medical care due to the mandatory reporting by medical personnel of any detected sexual activity between under-aged youth, as required by the Children's Act),
- **Financial Constraints:** limited financial resources for providing the full range of services or execution of all required activities (e.g. insufficient provision of health commodities, lack of a dedicated gender focal point in each GORTT Ministry),
- **Financial Sustainability:** or financial pressures on existing systems providing benefits to target population (e.g. continued rise in the levels of public sector retirees is putting pressure on the long-term sustainability of the National Insurance System),

- **Culture:** challenges associated with obtaining consensus in a multi-cultural, diverse society with varying beliefs, norms and experiences (e.g. local response to the sex and sexuality component of the Health and Family Life education programme),
- **Institutional Arrangements:** insufficient capacity to enable Ministries and the THA to align their operations with the requirements of the Montevideo Consensus (e.g. the Ministry of Rural Development and Local Government is currently unable to address many of the priority measures under its remit),
- **Data:** inadequate data collection, analysis and management systems nullify the country's ability to plan and programme based on evidence and to track progress over time (e.g. the absence of gender-responsive budgeting makes it difficult to assess the degree of gender sensitivity in the national budget).

Madam Chair,

The Progress Report details an ambitious programme of action for addressing these challenges, moving implementation forward and achieving agreed-upon targets by 2030. Within this 12 year timeframe, several initiatives have been prioritized for attention over the short-to-medium term (i.e. 2018-2020). Actions proposed for implementation between 2018 and 2020 include, *inter alia*,:

- **adoption of the HIV and AIDS Policy and the draft SRH Policy and Action Plan**
- continued infrastructural development of schools in Tobago, including the upgrade and expansion of the two (2) Special Needs Schools
- **conduct of a baseline survey on the existence of child labour as well as hosting of stakeholder consultations to aid in the development of a Child Labour Policy.**
- **completion of the administrative arrangements in MSDFS' Division of Ageing to facilitate the Proclamation of the Homes for Older Persons Legislation, which would provide for the licensing, control and regulation of homes in Trinidad and Tobago.**
- Implementation of the recommendations of the 2016 Evaluation Report of the Senior Activity Centres Programme.

- **Establishment of at least one adolescent clinic (a youth friendly space for SRH services) in each Regional Health Authority by 2020.**
- **closer collaboration between MOH and the Attorney General's Office to modify legislation and facilitate access to SRH services among minors and other vulnerable groups by 2020,**
- **amend the Sexual Offences Act to decriminalize buggery.**

In closing I wish to restate that Trinidad and Tobago remains committed to ensuring that No one Is left behind and will continue to work with member states and other stakeholders in our pursuit to achieve sustainable development for all.

Thank you.

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