

**Statement by Sir Ronald Sanders, Ambassador of Antigua and Barbuda on behalf of the Delegations of the CARICOM Group at the Special Meeting of the Permanent Council on the Observation of the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women**

Monday, 22 November 2021

The CARICOM Group is pleased that the OAS, as an organization, continues to prioritize the Elimination of Violence against Women.

But much more needs to be done by individual member states to safeguard the women in our hemisphere from violence and the silent complicity against them that continues to exist.

This includes laws that are adopted but are either ignored or are discriminatory in their application.

It also includes the attitudes of religious groups which insist on a woman's obedience in an abusive marital relationship.

In reality, Mr. Chairman, despite all the platitudinous statements that are made annually in this Organization and others, violence and harmful practices against women and girls remain pervasive in every part of the world.

The statistics speak for themselves:

Almost 60% of all female victims of homicide around the world is at the hands of intimate partners or family members.

At least one of every three women around the world has been beaten, coerced into sex, or otherwise abused in her lifetime with the abuser usually someone known to her.

That means 30% of all women are known to have suffered in this way.

And that is the reported and recorded 30%; it does not take account of those women among us who suffer in silence, in fear, or in embarrassment.

Seventy-one percent of victims of human trafficking worldwide are women and girls.

Even in conditions of human suffering, women continue to be victims of violence with little regard for their continuing exposure to ill treatment by partners or family members.

For instance, the situation of refugees is especially worrying because women and girls are compelled to remain in conditions where neither laws nor regulations provide them with protection, and, indeed, they are exposed to further abuse by their guards.

Additionally, lockdowns during the COVID-19 pandemic and its social and economic impacts, have also increased the exposure of women to abusive partners and family members, while limiting their access to getting help.

The evidence of such abuse is largely anecdotal, but it is prevalent and persistent enough to warrant a study, leading to recommendations concerning how to avoid such conditions in the future.

This is a study that the Inter-American Commission on Women might consider undertaking.

Mr. Chairman, in epidemiological terms, gender-based violence qualifies as a pandemic.

We are neglecting it, without developing an appropriate response to stop its spread and infection.

Mr Chairman, we, in the CARICOM countries, are not exempt from these continuing events of violence against women, nor are we absolved from the practices within power structures that fail to defend women.

A recent study shows that, in the Caribbean, 46% of women across 5 countries, have experienced at least one form of violence – physical, sexual, economic, or emotional.

The study also shows that, Caribbean women do better than their counterparts around the world in terms of access to education and formal employment, but these conditions, while welcome, are not a reason for our governments and institutions to relax our efforts to end violence against women.

We recognize the urgency of continuing efforts to protect women, who are our mothers and grandmothers, sisters and nieces, and our wives and partners.

Of particular concern is our persistent culture of silence that surrounds abuse in homes and workplaces.

We are thankful to our international partners such as UN Women, US AID, the Government of Canada, UNDP the Inter-American Development Bank ADB for their help in bolstering the framework for protection that we have, so far, put in place.

There is much work to be done in all the member states and by this Organization and its organs, such as the Inter-American Commission of Women, but we will not do enough – and we will not act quickly enough – unless all our member states do more than this annual observation, as important as it is.

The day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women should be every day - in all that we do - until our women and girls enjoy lives without violence.

Thank you