

**Statement by Sir Ronald Sanders, Ambassador of Antigua and Barbuda
at a Meeting of the Permanent Council of the OAS
on Thursday, 12th March 2020**

Mr. Chairman

The delegation of Antigua and Barbuda was pleased to participate in the drafting of the Resolution before us on “Women’s Representation and Participation in the OAS”.

We are also pleased to be among the sponsors of the Resolution.

We thank all the delegations that worked diligently to attain consensus in its final formulation.

But, Mr. Chairman, were it left to the delegation of Antigua and Barbuda alone, the Resolution before us would have been very different, and it would have been named differently.

It would have been entitled, “The failures of the OAS to ensure representation and participation of Women”.

And, it would have listed the several resolutions adopted by General Assemblies of the OAS mandating the Secretariat to remedy the many deficiencies in this Organization that have prevented women to be treated as equals.

These Resolutions were adopted by no less than ten General Assemblies of the OAS in 1999, 2001, 2002, 2004, 2005, 2006, 2007, 2008, 2009 and, most recently, in 2019.

Very specifically, the General Assembly of 2019, in Resolution: AG/RES. 2940 (XLIX-O/19), PROGRAM-BUDGET OF THE ORGANIZATION FOR 2020, in section 12, under the title, “Gender Equity and Equality Policies”, urged the Secretary-General “to continue the work of executing gender equity and equality policies in the workplace, promote access for women in a framework of parity in categories where they are currently underrepresented within the Organization and ensure accountability for their implementation”.

Previously, in June 2004, just to give one example, by Resolution AG/RES. 1977 (XXXIV-O/04), APPOINTMENT OF WOMEN TO SENIOR MANAGEMENT

POSITIONS AT THE OAS, the General Assembly had urged the Secretary General to:

- “a. Achieve by 2005 the goal of having women occupy 50 percent of posts at each grade level within the OAS organs, agencies, and entities, particularly at the P-5 grade level and above, in order to achieve gender balance at all levels in the OAS, bearing in mind the criterion of geographic distribution in professional positions;
- b. Continue to make gender equity and equality, which includes equal opportunities for men and women at all grade levels, one of the priorities in his efforts to establish a new institutional culture in the Organization.
- c. Continue his work to establish policies of gender equality in the workplace and to make each manager accountable for the application of these policies.
- d. Appoint women as representatives and special envoys to represent the Secretary General in matters relating to all areas and sectors; and
- e. Take into account the objective of gender balance and the criterion of geographic representation when filling vacancies in the OAS, especially positions of higher authority”.

Despite all these resolutions, spanning a period of 21 years, this Organization has still not fulfilled these mandates and this Permanent Council is still repeating the same urgings made by General Assemblies as far back as 1999.

A girl child born in 1999 the year of the first General Assembly mandate has grown to full adulthood at age 21 as we in this Council are still considering yet another Resolution.

Mr. Chairman, there can be no need for any more evidence of the failure of this Organization to fulfill the mandates given by General Assemblies in relation to women, and its neglect of its obligation to our women.

Today is the day when we must ask: Why?

Why this chronic and persistent failure to fulfill mandates and obligations concerning women’s representation and participation in this Organization?

There is clearly something very wrong, and it is up to member states to right that wrong.

Women's rights are human rights; they are political rights; and they are civil rights.

We cannot, with any credibility, argue for respect for human, political and civil rights, without demonstrating, within our own organization, our high regard for the rights of our women.

If this Resolution simply becomes yet another of those that I have cited and is relegated to the scrap heap of good deeds declared but ignored; of resolutions passed but dismissed; of mandates given but forgotten, then the women in this Organization would be more than justified in rising-up in resistance, and laying down their tools in protest.

Mr. Chairman, in Antigua and Barbuda, we place a high premium on the equality of women, and their right to occupy all positions of decision-making on equal terms and with equal pay.

We believe it is right that in recognition of International Women's Day, the OAS must acknowledge its neglect of our women, and move with urgency to correct it.

In this connection, my delegation expects the Resolution before this Permanent Council to be a catalyst for immediate action.

Another 21 years must not be allowed to elapse with little accomplished.

We call for unanimous adoption of this Resolution and for swift implementation of its requests with the fullest participation of the Inter-American Commission of Women which, since 1928, has been striving bravely for gender equality that is vital to the reputation of this Organization, to the Organization's place as a leader in our Hemisphere, and to this Organization's own self-respect.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman