

Jamaica's PM message for International Women's Day

This year's commemoration of International Women's Day carries special significance, as it marks the centenary of the event. This therefore brings into sharper focus the challenges faced, obstacles overcome and achievements attained, which have characterized this 100-year journey.

Over the years, Jamaica has signaled its unwavering commitment to the advancement and upliftment of women, through the signing of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) in 1981 and the Inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment and Eradication of Violence Against Women in 2005. A raft of legislation has also been passed, in a bid to offer protection to our women. The Government of Jamaica, in an effort to widen the scope of legislative measures to address sexual offences against women, had tabled the Sexual Offences Bill, which was debated and approved in Parliament. It amalgamated the various laws that relate to rape, incest and other sexual offences; and repealed the Incest (Punishment) Act and certain provisions of the Offences Against the Person Act, to make new provisions for the prosecution of rape and other sexual offences, as well as the establishment of a Sex Offender Registry.

To further strengthen the protection of our women, a Sexual Harassment Policy is being developed; and a National Gender Policy is to be launched soon.

Despite the advancements made, regrettably, too many of our women are still afflicted by daily challenges in the homes, communities and places of work – challenges which we must consistently strive to minimize or eliminate. I want to take this opportunity to appeal to our men to “shoulder” your responsibilities and treat women with the greatest respect at all times – they are our wives, mothers, sisters and friends – treasure them!

I want to caution that as we tread this path to gender equality, do not descend into acrimonious competition with your male counterparts, but instead, opt to partner with them – as so much more can be achieved through cooperation, collaboration and cohesion – not division!

As we mark this centenary International Women's Day, let us proudly acknowledge the outstanding accomplishments of and contributions made by women not just locally, but regionally and internationally as well; oftentimes against great odds and in the face of adversity.

I also want to commend the Ministry of Youth, Sports and Culture with responsibility for Women and Gender Affairs, Bureau of Women's Affairs and non-governmental and other organizations that have worked tirelessly in pursuit of the protection and strengthening of the rights of women.

I am confident that the celebration of International Women's Day 2011 will have further reach and impact and achieve even greater success than in previous years.