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The Girl Child and Boys in the Caribbean: Progress and Challenges

In compliance with its multi-year work programme for 2007-2009, the Commission on the Status of Women has agreed that the priority theme for the 2007 fifty-first session of the Commission will be “The elimination of all forms of discrimination and violence against the girl child”. In addition, it was agreed that progress will be evaluated in the implementation of the agreed conclusions from the forty-eighth session of the Commission on “The role of men and boys in achieving gender equality”.

This is in keeping with the United Nations mandate that the work of the Commission should contribute to advancing the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the outcome of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly.

This issue of *Gender Dialogue* focuses attention on the status of the girl child in the Caribbean and examines the ongoing progress and challenges in fulfilment of international mandates such as the Beijing Platform for Action, the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), the Millennium Development Goals and other relevant commitments.


The Girl Child and Boys in the Caribbean *The Caribbean Situation*

In the Caribbean subregion young girl children and adolescents are exposed to a wide range of risks which impacts on their development. These include risks associated with their physical and mental health, including their sexual and reproductive health; as well as risks relative to their economic circumstances including employment opportunities and access to financial resources; and risks related to their social circumstances, including housing and social welfare risks.

Very often these problems are interrelated and may seem insurmountable as these young girls make the transition from childhood to adulthood. Young women continue to be at risk despite the progress made in recent decades to improve their life circumstances, for example, more young women are taking advantage of the available educational opportunities and in many respects are surpassing their male counterparts in terms of educational achievements.

However, this progress belies the problems that continue to confront the girl child and young women. These include increased risks in the area of health – for contracting Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STDs), HIV/AIDS, cervical cancer and more recently it has been discovered that they are also at risk for increased drug abuse, which impacts their health, and for heart disease.

They are also more at risk for gender-based violence, including rape, incest, physical and sexual assault/violence. The facts will reveal that many of the young women who end up in the criminal justice system are victims of some form of abuse either within the family or externally. More often than not, the alleged perpetrator is an adult male.



The girl child faces discrimination from the very moment she is born, and in some cases girls become the victims of gender norms and stereotypes while still in the womb. In addition, the girl child is often subjected to harmful practices such as female infanticide and prenatal sex selection, which results in the elimination of girls from the world at the earliest possible stages, perpetuating son preference and discrimination against girls within the family, schools, and society as a whole.

The girl child is also subjected to other discriminatory practices such as early marriage, including child marriage, violence, sexual exploitation, sexual abuse, female genital mutilation, as well as general discrimination in food allocation and other practices related to health and well-being, which subject girls to disproportionate challenges to their individual and social development and which impact on their entire life cycle.

The Convention on the Rights of the Child

The Convention on the Rights of the Child was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 1989. All Caribbean countries have ratified the CRC thereby committing themselves to the “Bill of Rights” for children.

The CRC sets out agreed international human rights standards to which all nations must aspire and contains a comprehensive list of human rights norms relating to children. The CRC includes child-related provisions of other human rights treaties such as the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). For example, discrimination against girls is one aspect of the CEDAW, as well as the obligation to ensure that measures are taken to reduce female dropout rates in schools. These provisions are reinforced by more recent international agreements such as the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the Millennium Declaration and Development Goals.

The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (PFA) was among the first documents to specifically and comprehensively address the rights of the girl child. The partial existence of a legal and policy framework establishing the rights of the girl child, and the global and national efforts made to promote and protect those rights constitute a good beginning. As with many of the other critical areas in the Beijing PFA, however, much remains to be done in terms of implementing the “actions to be taken,” which were intended to ensure that girls are raised in an environment of equality and tolerance, free from the discrimination that currently hinders their physical, educational, social, economic and political development.

The CRC is geared towards the protection of the rights of the child from physical/mental abuse; maltreatment or exploitation; and provides them with the right to access health care, including mental, emotional, cognitive, social and cultural development, to enable them to enjoy their human rights to facilitate their participation in society as outlined in the Convention.

Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC)



Monitoring children's rights

The Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC) is the body of independent experts that monitors implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child by its State parties. It also monitors implementation of two optional protocols to the Convention, on involvement of children in armed conflict and on sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography.

All States parties are obliged to submit regular reports to the Committee on how the rights are being implemented. States must report initially two years after acceding to the Convention and then every five years. The Committee examines each report and addresses its concerns and recommendations to the State party in the form of “concluding observations”.

Progress and Reporting on the CRC in the Caribbean

States which are Parties to the CRC are mandated to submit through the Secretary-General of the UN, periodic reports on efforts made to meet their obligations under the Convention (Article 44.2) for consideration by the Committee on the Rights of the Child (the Committee). Under the provisions of the Convention, State Parties are expected to make reports available to the public in their own countries.

A number of Caribbean States have submitted initial and second reports for consideration by the Committee. Following are edited excerpts from the concluding remarks of the Committee on the Rights of the Child with respect to reporting from Caribbean State Parties, which provides a synopsis of actions taken to address issues relative to improving the status of children. Highlights of the many challenges facing Caribbean States in meeting their obligations in the implementation of the CRC are also visible from these extracts.

Barbados

The Committee considered the initial report of the Government of Barbados in May 1999 and welcomed the establishment in September 1998 of the National Committee for Monitoring the Rights of the Child, which is intended to monitor the implementation of the Convention. It welcomes the mandate of the National Committee to carry out a thorough review of legislation, with a view to ensuring its conformity with the principles and provisions of the Convention.

However, concerns were raised with respect to the lack of attention to reviewing existing national legislation with respect to its conformity with the provisions of the Convention. The Committee noted *that inconsistencies remain, especially with regard to the definition of the child, the acceptability of certain forms of physical abuse, and in the area of juvenile justice.*

The problems faced by girls and boys were also noted with concern, particularly the *growing gender bias faced by boys as shown in, among other areas, academic underachievement by boys and difficulties in placing boys for adoption. At the same time the rate of girls who attempt or commit suicide is particularly high.* The Committee recommended that efforts be increased to address *discrimination arising from the inappropriate socialization of boys and girls into inappropriate gender roles and the resulting determination of social attitudes concerning children based on gender.*

St. Vincent and the Grenadines

In June 2002 the Committee considered the initial report of the Government of St. Vincent and the Grenadines, and commended actions such as the decision to abolish the death penalty for all persons below age 18; the establishment of a family court under the Domestic Violence Act of 1995 to deal specifically and speedily with cases of domestic violence; and the programme to strengthen parental skills and empower the family.

The lack of a clearly defined and comprehensive child rights policy and plan of action for implementation of the Convention, and the absence of an effective independent mechanism to receive and act upon complaints of child rights violations, including complaints from children, were among concerns raised by the Committee.

The fact that many children born out of wedlock do not know the identity of their father, because of societal pressures that cause mothers to be reluctant to file a paternity action, resulted in a recommendation for actions be taken to facilitate and support the activities (including paternity procedures) of the Department of Family Services to contribute to the full implementation of the rights of children to know their parents.

Trinidad and Tobago

In January 2006, the Committee on the Rights of the Child considered the second periodic report of the Government of Trinidad and Tobago and raised concerns relative to *data collection; resource allocation for children; abuse, ill-treatment and domestic violence; corporal punishment; alternative care; reproductive health; education; street children; child labour; and administration of juvenile justice.*

The Committee welcomed the new Children's Authority Act (No. 64 of 2000) and the reciprocal provisions made with other Commonwealth territories to extend the Maintenance Orders (Enforcement) Act to ensure better provision of child maintenance by absent fathers. However, it remains concerned that the Children's Authority Act was not yet in force, that recovery of maintenance is not always effectively enforced, especially when one or both parents live abroad.

Concern was also raised with respect to the absence of a national independent *mechanism with a specific mandate to regularly monitor and evaluate progress in the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child.*

Progress and Reporting on the CRC in the Caribbean (cont.)

<p>Grenada</p>	<p>In January 2000, the Committee considered the initial report of the Government of Grenada and welcomed the establishment of the National Coalition on the Rights of the Child, which has responsibility for the coordination, monitoring and evaluation of the implementation of the principles and provisions of the Convention. Other positive developments for which the Government received commendation were the <i>establishment of a school nutrition programme for children enrolled at the pre-school and primary school levels, and the textbook programme established to help children from economically disadvantaged families to enhance their educational opportunities.</i></p> <p>The Committee also welcomed the <i>establishment of the Programme for Adolescent Mothers which offers educational programmes, skills-training and child-care services to pregnant teenagers and teenage mothers who are no longer in the school system, and the introduction of Health and Family Life Education in the primary school curriculum.</i></p> <p>The Committee also noted the intention of the State party to include a child abuse register as a part of the social and economic survey which was scheduled to commence January 2000.</p> <p><i>While acknowledging the difficulties that girls continue to face in many areas, the Committee noted its concern about the situation of boys, particularly as regards their generally “low self-esteem” and academic underachievement in comparison to that of girls. Concerns were also raised with respect to the Criminal Code which does not provide boys the same legal protection against sexual abuse and exploitation as girls. The Code refers to the protection of the “female child” only. Recommendations were made for the amendment of this legislation to ensure that boys are provided equal and adequate protection against sexual abuse and exploitation.</i></p>
<p>St Kitts and Nevis</p>	<p>The Committee also considered the initial report of the Government of St Kitts and Nevis in May 1999 and noted the recent efforts undertaken by the State party in the field of law reform, <i>particularly the enactment of the Probation and Child Welfare Board Act (1994) which provides for the establishment of a Board to monitor the rights of all children; ensure the care, protection and maintenance of children within the family environment; and make provisions with respect to the fostering and adoption of children.</i></p> <p>The Government was commended for its initiatives within the school environment. In this regard, the Committee noted the <i>establishment of a school nutrition programme for children enrolled at the primary school level; the provision of school uniforms for children whose parents are not able to afford them; the efforts to ensure 100 per cent placement at the secondary level; and the recently established policy that allows for the readmission of teenage mothers into the regular school system.</i></p> <p>In relation to primary health-care services, the Government was commended for its achievement of 100 per cent immunization as well as relatively low malnutrition and infant and maternal mortality rates.</p>
<p>Jamaica</p>	<p>In May 2003, the Committee considered the second periodic of the Government of Jamaica and commended the establishment of the Child Support Unit in 1995; the Office of the Special Envoy for Children in 1997; the National Strategic Plan for HIV/AIDS/STI, and the establishment of a special unit in the Ministry of Education for children with disabilities.</p> <p>The establishment of JAMSTATS, a database collecting disaggregated data and using several child rights indicators on the basis of child information in collaboration with the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), was also commended. The Government was encouraged to strengthen this data collection system, with regard to important health indicators such as infant, under-five and maternal mortality rates, ensuring the timeliness and reliability of both quantitative and qualitative data and application of this data in the formulation of policies and programmes for the effective implementation of the Convention.</p>
<p>Suriname</p>	<p>The Committee considered the initial report of the Government of Suriname in May 2000 and noted with concern the health situation of children, especially those living in the interior. The allocation of appropriate resources and the development of comprehensive policies and programmes to improve the health situation of children, especially those living in the interior, were among the many recommendations of the Committee. These recommendations were aimed at facilitating greater access to primary health services and reducing the incidence of maternal, child and infant mortality, including the prevention and combating of malnutrition, especially among vulnerable and disadvantaged groups of children.</p> <p>In addition, recommendations were made for increased access to safe drinking water and sanitation and reductions in the incidence of malaria, especially in rural areas, and the conduct of a study on suicides and accidents involving children with the view to understanding their nature and scope and implementing appropriate preventative policies and measures.</p>

The age of majority

Throughout the Caribbean, there is a great deal of diversity with respect to the age of majority relative to marriage with parental consent which varies from as low as 12 years to 16 years; criminal responsibility, which ranges from as low as 7 years to the age of 12 years; and consent for sexual consent, which ranges from as low as 13 to 16 years of age. Further, in some States the cut-off age for compulsory education varies from 12 to 16 years, while the minimum age for full-time employment ranges from as low as 12 years to 16 years.

The Committee on the Rights of the Child, in its concluding remarks, has repeatedly raised concerns with respect to the diverse and often conflicting domestic legislation regarding different minimum ages and definitions of the child according to purpose, sex and religion in the Caribbean subregion. For example, in Trinidad and Tobago a child as a person under the age of 14 years, and while there is a Children's (Amendment) Act of 2000 which raised the age of majority to 18 years, this Act is yet to be proclaimed.

Similar concerns were expressed for Barbados where the Minors Act sets the age of majority at 18 years of age, while other legislation appears to set many limits on the levels of protection available for children over 16 years of age. The Protection of Children Act, 1990, offers protection from exploitation in pornography to all children under 18, but the Sexual Offences Act, 1992, offers no special protection to children over the age of 16 and only limited protection to those between 14 and 16 years of age. Children over sixteen years of age also appear to receive limited protection in legislation regulating the prevention of cruelty to children.

With respect to Suriname, the Committee was concerned at the low legal minimum age for marriage of girls - 15 years under the Civil Code and 13 years under the Asian Marriage Act. In this regard, the concern pertained to the practice of early and forced marriages which affects mostly girls, particularly those living in the interior. The Committee also expressed concern about the low legal minimum age for marriage of boys (15 years) under the Asian Marriage Act, as well as the disparity between the ages for boys and girls. Further anomalies existed regarding the fact that education was compulsory for children between the ages of 7 and 12 years, however, the legal minimum age for employment is 14 years.

St. Kitts and Nevis on the other hand did not have legislation defining the legal age of attainment of majority, and the CRC Committee expressed deep concern regarding the low legal age for criminal responsibility (8 years), as well as the fact that the Prevention of Cruelty and Protection of Juveniles Clause of the Juvenile Act did not provide special protection for children between the ages of 16 to 18 years.

In all cases where the national standard was found to be below the minimum, the Committee recommended that States take steps to review legislation to increase the level of protection accorded to all children under eighteen years of age especially laws relating to the legal ages for marriage, to bring them into conformity with the provisions of the Convention, and to eliminate discrimination. In addition, the Committee recommended the implementation of appropriate policies and programmes to raise awareness about the harmful effects of early and forced marriages, particularly on girls in compliance with the Convention.

Selected Age Stipulations in Caribbean

Country	Age Used to Define Child Abuse	Age of Sexual Consent	Minimum age of Marriage
Antigua & Barbuda	18	16	18
Bahamas	18	16	13/15/18
Barbados	16	16	16/18
Belize	18	16	14
Dominica		16	16/18
Grenada	16	16	
Guyana	18	13	16/18
Haiti			18
Jamaica	18	16	16/18
St Lucia		16	
St Kitts & Nevis	16	16	16
St Vincent & Grenadines	16	14/15	15/16
Suriname		13/15/18	13/15/18
Trinidad & Tobago	18	14/16	12/14/16

Source: UNICEF, *The Convention on the Rights of the Child, fifteen years later, the Caribbean*, UNICEF, Regional Office for Latin America and the Caribbean, 2005.

Corporal Punishment

The majority of Caribbean States have legislation allowing for the corporal punishment of children by educators, parents and caregivers. The penal laws of most States also allow for the corporal punishment of young offenders. In some jurisdictions there are restrictions on who may administer corporal punishment in educational institutions.

The retention of corporal punishment by State Parties is in direct contravention of the Convention and, given its close association with violence and abuse of children, the (CRC) Committee in tandem with the (CEDAW) Committee have been strenuous in their call for States to take necessary measures to address the escalating violence against women and the girl child.

The Committee raised its concern that legislation and policies in Barbados allow the use of flogging of children as a disciplinary measure in prisons and its use as a judicial sentence. The Committee also raised its concern regarding the report of St Vincent and the Grenadines with respect to the continued widespread use of corporal punishment in schools, in the administration of justice, in other institutions and within the family, and expressed deep concern that corporal punishment is regulated by law and used against children from an early age.

Serious concerns were also raised with respect to Antigua and Barbuda where the Corporal Punishment Act and the 1973 Education Act provide for corporal punishment, which is in clear contravention of article 19 of the Convention. The Committee expressed concern that corporal punishment is still widely practiced in the family, in schools and in other institutions.

Similar sentiments were expressed by the Committee with respect to the Grenada report where corporal punishment is still widely practiced in the country and is sanctioned because domestic legislation does not prohibit its use. While Suriname does have legislation that prohibits the use of corporal punishment in schools, it is still widely practiced, thus the Committee also raised concern regarding its continued use in schools, families and care institutions.

In all cases State parties were requested to take all appropriate measures, including of a legislative nature, *to prohibit all forms of physical and mental violence* including corporal punishment within the family, schools, the juvenile justice and alternative care systems and generally within the society. The Committee further suggested that public-awareness raising campaigns be conducted to promote positive, non-violent forms of discipline as an alternative to corporal punishment at all levels of society in a manner consistent with the human dignity of children and in conformity with the Convention.

Violence against Children in the Caribbean

One of the most worrying problems within the Caribbean is the fact that many young girls and, increasingly, young boys are being subjected to violence and sexual abuse, exposing them to reproductive health problems including unwanted pregnancy, STDs and mental health problems such as depression. Of notable significance is the fact that research has linked early sexual abuse to sexual promiscuity in adult life, including a propensity to engage in risk-taking behaviour.

But what are some of the factors influencing the progress of our young women. Again these are multi-faceted and interrelated. For example, gender inequality remains a critical factor, particularly in sexual relationships between teenaged girls and older men. Factors such as lack of power as a female, gender role expectations and social pressure to be coupled during adolescence play a critical role in these relationships. These factors are instrumental in determining the future life outcomes of young women.

Programmes to address the escalating violent abuse of both the girl child and young boys have been implemented in almost all Caribbean States. These include initiatives taken by the Government of Grenada to address the issues of child abuse and domestic violence, including the establishment of a crisis hotline for domestic violence and child abuse and the opening of an emergency shelter for battered women and their children, which were commended by the CRC Committee. Additionally, programmes to train teachers and police officers and to sensitize the media and the general public on child abuse were noted as positive achievements.

The violent environment in which Jamaican children lived and the stereotypical and discriminatory attitudes concerning the roles of women and children, including traditions of violence, sexual abuse, and neglect, were among concerns noted by the Committee. Recom-

Violence against Children in the Caribbean (cont)

mendations were made for the strengthening of efforts to address and condemn violence in society, including violence against women and children, other abuse against children particularly in the context of the family, in schools and other environments; and taking measures to ensure the rehabilitation of traumatized and victimized children. *Effective measures for the prevention of violent acts committed by the police and other State agents* were also encouraged including, *making sure that perpetrators of these violent acts are brought to justice, putting an end to the practice of impunity.*

In its consideration of the situation in Trinidad and Tobago as recently as January 2006, the Committee was concerned that only battery and assault against male children is punished under the Children's Act (chap. 11:02, section 5 (1)) and that discrimination remains in sentencing of male and female offenders for sexual offences against children. The Committee therefore recommended *that amendments be made to the Children's Act and the Sexual Offences Act in order to ensure that girls and boys are equally protected under both Acts.*

The establishment of the Domestic Violence Unit within the Gender Affairs Division and a 24-hour hotline were viewed as positive developments, however the Committee expressed serious concern: *(a) About the very high incidence of domestic violence and neglect in the State party, including sexual violence and incest; (b) That the institutions responsible for matters relating to violence against children, including the Domestic Violence Unit and the National Family Services, have not been allocated sufficient resources to effectively carry out their work; and (c) About the lack of adequate and effective complaint mechanisms for child victims of abuse and neglect.*

While, the Committee made the following recommendations in response to the second periodic report of Trinidad and Tobago, these recommendations are applicable to all Caribbean States. The recommendations are that actions be ***taken to prevent child abuse and neglect, by, inter alia:*** *(a) Carrying out public education campaigns that raise awareness of consequences of ill-treatment of children, alternative measures of discipline for children and address socio-cultural barriers that inhibit victims from seeking assistance; (b) Introducing legislation making reporting obligations mandatory for suspected cases of abuse and neglect for all professionals working for and with children, and train them in the identification, reporting and management of ill-treatment cases; (c) In addition to existing procedures, establishing effective mechanisms to receive, monitor and investigate complaints in a child sensitive manner and ensure proper prosecution of perpetrators of child abuse and neglect; and (d) Providing services for the physical and psychological recovery and social reintegration to victims of sexual and other forms of abuse, neglect, ill-treatment, violence or exploitation, and take appropriate measures to prevent the criminalization and stigmatization of victims, including through cooperation with NGOs.*

The Government of Trinidad and Tobago was congratulated for the hosting of the Regional Consultation for the Caribbean held in the context of the Secretary-General's in-depth study on the question of violence against children on 10 and 11 March 2005 and was urged to make ***use of the outcome of the regional consultation for the Caribbean held in the context of the Secretary-General's in-depth study on the question of violence against children in order to take action, in partnership with civil society, to ensure the protection of every child from all forms of physical or mental violence, and to generate momentum for concrete and, where appropriate, time-bound actions to prevent and respond to such violence and abuse.***

Notwithstanding, the policies and programmes, the violence and abuse continues on a daily basis. Much of this is captured by the communications media, however, given the hidden and taboo nature of sexual abuse, and incest in particular, it is highly likely that there is severe underreporting of this heinous crime against our girl children. More recently, Caribbean States have also been witnessing an upsurge in the sexual abuse of young boys.

Following are a few excerpts on the issue of the Girl Child, which include a selection of recent headlines from one Caribbean country with respect to child violence and abuse:

Gender and Human Rights

The Commonwealth recognises the rights of women and the protection of the girl-child as human rights.

It also calls for violence against women to be stopped and to eliminate the commercial exploitation of women and girls. There can be no equality between women and men if large numbers of women in our society still suffer daily from violence in all its forms. There should be 'zero tolerance' to such violence by one and all.



Combating Violence Against Women

The Commonwealth strategy looks not only at the national policy and laws regarding women's rights and Violence against Women but also at the need for a well-co-ordinated approach involving all the partners involved, and the development of strategic and practical programmes of action and monitoring mechanisms.

The Commonwealth model framework for an integrated approach to violence against women is adapted to the circumstances of the country concerned. It is based on the Commonwealth 'Gender Management System.' The 1999 Commonwealth Law Ministers Meeting endorsed the work by the Gender Affairs Department in this area.

The Commonwealth model integrated approach to combating violence against women incorporates an HIV/AIDS component. The Commonwealth programme on Gender Responsive Budgets allows critical analysis of resources allocated to HIV/AIDS programmes. Such HIV/AIDS programmes will prove to be highly cost effective over time and have significant direct and indirect cost savings in terms of developmental and productive capacity for countries.

Good Practices in Combating the Exploitation of Women and Children .

Another area to note is the contribution of the Secretariat and the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) to the development of Models of Laws on major issues affecting women such as Domestic Violence, Citizenship, Inheritance, Equality for Women in Employment, Equal Pay, Sexual Harassment and Sexual Offences, and Maintenance and Maintenance Orders.

Countries could use these as a practical base for further development of their laws as appropriate. Since 1988, the Commonwealth has attempted to encourage member governments to apply at the national level the various international and regional laws on human rights and areas of concern to women.

Excerpted from the Website of the Commonwealth Secretariat <http://www.thecommonwealth.org>

Child abuse in the Caribbean—From the media

35 years in prison for woman who murdered stepchildren

Saturday, March 4th 2006

A woman was yesterday sentenced to 35 years in prison for murdering her two stepchildren and burying their bodies in a cow dung heap almost 13 years ago. Following the sentence, the children's father, . . . , said he was not satisfied. "I didn't get no kind of justice. I would prefer she stay in prison and die rather that she come out here and walk in society," he said.

Child abuse in the Caribbean—From the media (cont)



'Cutlass rapist' guilty

Thursday, March 16th 2006

A ... man who used a cutlass to slice open the vagina of a 15-year-old virgin before raping her was found guilty last night by a nine-member jury and is expected to be sentenced tomorrow. *He* was also found guilty of two charges of false imprisonment, but not guilty of robbing his teenaged victim and her elder sister of \$67.

GIRL, 4, RAPED AND KILLED

Child raped, slain

Wednesday, May 17th 2006

A four-year-old girl was tortured, raped, bugged and beaten on Monday night by two people she loved but no one answered *her* screams. Wrapped in a sheet soaked in blood oozing from her private parts, she was taken to hospital. She was already dead when she got there

Gone bloody too soon

Child abuse in the Caribbean—From the media (cont)

The savage crime cut deep a nation most believed was too desensitised by the blood-letting to care

Sunday, April 2nd 2006

It was an act almost beyond comprehension. A six year old-innocent, fearless, trusting-led by the hand into a cane field to suffer a death slow and agonising. The savage crime cut deep a nation most believed was too desensitised by the blood-letting to care. But the murder of *this young boy* was just one of several in which young boys were the victims in crimes which to this day, have not been solved.

Girlhood interrupted

Grown men paying young girls for sex

Monday, May 22nd 2006

The fear of contracting HIV/AIDS is driving men to seek out children, who eventually grow up as prostitutes. They are looking for girls who are virgins as a precaution against the deadly disease, which in most cases is transmitted through sex. "Men have gone to a lesser age group since the advent of AIDS". *These* comments have come in the wake of increasing reports of children throughout the country being sexually abused.

Three years for killing one-year-old

Mom forgives stepfather

Saturday, July 29th 2006

A young mother stated that she had forgiven the man who was yesterday jailed for three years for killing her one-year-old son. However, she says she will never forget the pain he caused as a result of the loss of her baby. She also said while she believes the killer's sentence should have been heavier, she has moved on with her life. *She*, made the comments shortly after her ex common-law husband, was jailed for beating his stepchild to death four years ago.

CRY founder back in court, relative gets \$100,000 bail

Thursday, August 10th 2006

The founder of the Care and Respect for Youth (CRY) foundation,, reappeared in court yesterday charged with the abuse of a seven-year-old girl in her care. A man who is charged with indecently assaulting and beating two girls at *the* children's home ... was also brought to court.

Child looked like monster to cocaine user

Tuesday, August 22nd 2006

A man yesterday told a magistrate that he was high on cocaine when he attacked his five-week-old baby boy two weeks ago. The baby was crying and he allegedly dealt him several slaps, then lifted him bodily and slammed him on a bed.

Education is the key to breaking the cycle of abuse and violence. The need to defeat violence must be an integral component of the National agenda for development. The wastage of life and loss of human dignity brought about by violence must also be addressed. Our vision should be to make every Caribbean person aware of the effects of violence on individuals, groups, communities and society, and in so doing reduce the incidence of violence which in turn should facilitate the restoration of the family unit.

Child Labour

Issues of child labour while not of the magnitude prevalent in other regions of the world have continued to be of concern in the Caribbean subregion. The major challenge in addressing the issue of child labour is the fact that it is hidden from public view, making it seem less of a priority. United Nations agencies, such as the International Labour Organization (ILO) Subregional Officer for the Caribbean, through its Regional Child Labour Project, and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), have been working with member governments to address these issues.

According to an ILO report, *Children work because their survival and that of their families depend on it, and in some cases, because unscrupulous adults take advantage of their vulnerability.* The ILO attributes *child labour* to *weaknesses in education systems* and deeply rooted cultural and social attitudes and traditions.

The major goal of the ILO's Regional Child Labour Project is the inclusion of child labour prevention and rehabilitation into the social policy and programmes of the respective governments. Given child labour's link to poverty and education, child labour policy and programmes should ideally be linked to integrated poverty eradication programmes, as well as interventions geared to achieve Education For All. Among the project activities implemented is the conduct of a number of rapid assessment studies of the worst forms of child labour in selected Caribbean States and the development of promotional materials to raise awareness of the issue in the Caribbean.

The ILO has also been working with member States and employers' organizations to ensure that treaties on child labour such as ILO convention No. 182 on the Worst Forms of Child Labour and ILO Convention No. 138 on the Minimum Age for Employment, are adopted and applied in national legislation and programmes.

The CRC Committee has also made several recommendations to Caribbean States with respect to the issue of child labour, for example, the Committee raised its concern regarding the fact that education in Suriname was compulsory for children between the ages of 7 and 12 years, however, the legal minimum age for employment is 14 years. The Committee therefore recommended that steps be taken to raise the legal maximum age of compulsory education from 12 to at least 14 years to protect the rights of those children between the ages of 12 and 14 years.

With respect to Trinidad and Tobago the Committee, in January 2006, raised concerns that in spite of the State's ratification in April 2003 of the ILO Convention 182 on the Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labour, domestic legislation on child labour was not sufficiently enforced, and there was no specific programme in place to protect children from exploitative labour.

The Committee also expressed concern about the low minimum age for employment, which is currently set at 12, and further noted that most children work in the informal sector, to which regulatory legal provisions do not apply, including domestic labour.

In this growing informal sector in the Caribbean is an increasing number of young girls, some as young as eight years old who are working as prostitutes selling their bodies to customers for as little as TT\$5.00. The ILO has linked this growing trend to increasing poverty and describes child labour as a hidden industry and breeding ground for criminals.

UPCOMING EVENTS

CEDAW 37th Session

15 January – 2 February 2007

The following tentative list of Countries are expected to present periodic reports to the Committee: Austria, Azerbaijan, Colombia, Greece, India, Kazakhstan, Maldives, Namibia, Netherlands, Nicaragua, Peru, Poland, Suriname, Tajikistan, Vietnam

CEDAW 38th Session

14 May - 1 June 2007

The following tentative list of Countries are expected to present periodic reports to the Committee: Mauritania, Mozambique, Niger, Pakistan, Serbia, Syrian Arab Republic, Vanuatu (*preliminary list*).

26 February - 9 March 2007, New York, USA

Title: 51st Session of Commission on the Status of Women CSW

Host/Sponsor: UN Division for the Advancement of Women

The CSW was established in 1946 by the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) Resolution 11(II) with the objective of promoting the principle that men and women shall have equal rights. Originally a 15-member body, it now consists of 45 members elected by ECOSOC for a period of four years. The Commission recommends and reports to ECOSOC on the promotion of women's rights in the political, economic, civil, social and educational fields and also addresses problems affecting women that require immediate attention.

In the News

VOICES OF CARIBBEAN YOUTH

Report on the Youth Forum and on the Caribbean Regional Consultation on the UN Secretary General Study on Violence Against Children.

Trinidad and Tobago

9 – 11 March 2005

In 2001 the United Nations General Assembly requested that the Secretary General conduct a comprehensive, global study on Violence Against Children. This study, will explore forms, causes and consequences of violence against children and adolescents. Moreover the study seeks to expand dynamic key networks and processes to support and partner with member States to respond to the situation of violence against children. It is intended that the study on violence against children will be a collaborative effort amongst United Nations agencies, governments, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), academic institutions, the public at large and most critically – children and young people.

In response to this mandate, UNICEF held a Youth Forum on violence on 9 March 2005; a Regional Consultation for the Caribbean on the United Nations Secretary-General's Study on Violence from 10-11 March 2005, and an Xchange Youth Leadership workshop from 14-18 March 2005 all in Port-of-Spain, Trinidad. The Consultation was one of several held throughout the world as part of the United Nations Global Study on Violence Against Children. This study, will be submitted to the General Assembly in 2006, and will explore the forms, causes and impacts of violence affecting children and young people under 18 years old and, among other things, will review legal and institutional responses to Violence Against Children.

Source: UNICEF Caribbean Office Website

States Parties to CEDAW elects experts to Serve on Monitoring Committee

In June 2006, 181 of 183 States parties to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women in a secret ballot, elected 12 of the 23 experts that serve on the Committee that monitors States' compliance with the Convention, with experts from Bangladesh, Japan and Mauritius receiving the most votes.

The 12 experts, to serve in their individual capacities, would begin four-year terms on 1 January 2007, and would replace the 12 experts whose terms would expire on 31 December 2006. The experts would serve on the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, which monitors implementation of the Convention in States that had ratified or acceded to it. Under an Optional Protocol to the Convention, they would also be charged with considering complaints from individuals or groups of individuals of alleged violations of rights protected by the Convention.

In the News (cont)

Among the Committee members who will continue to serve until their terms expire on 31 December 2008 is Dr. Glenda P. Simms of Jamaica.

Source: United Nations Division for the Advancement of Women – Department of Economic and Social Affairs

The CEDAW Optional Protocol

Two Caribbean member States of ECLAC, namely St. Kitts and Nevis, which acceded to the Optional Protocol in January 2006, and Antigua and Barbuda, which acceded to the Optional Protocol on 5 June 2006, brings the total number of countries which are parties to the Optional to 79.

Other member States that have either signed or acceded to the CEDAW Optional Protocol are Belize in December 2002; the Dominican Republic which signed in March 2000 and acceded in August 2001 and Cuba which signed in March 2000. The accession to the Optional Protocol has resulted from the work implemented under the UNIFEM Advocacy Tour on the Optional Protocol which began in 2005. The Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination (CEDAW) entered into force on 22 December 2000. The Protocol provides an additional mechanism for ensuring that State parties comply with their CEDAW undertakings.

Recognising that the Optional Protocol is an important accountability mechanism, UNIFEM has been collaborating with women's organizations and national machineries for women/gender in the conduct of a regional advocacy programme on the Optional Protocol. The first component of this campaign was an Advocacy Tour of three countries by two renowned experts, Chancellor Desiree Bernard of Guyana and Professor Joycelin Massiah, former regional programme director, UNIFEM Caribbean Office, who are both well-recognised in the areas of human rights and Caribbean social development.

The main objective of this project is to bring greater visibility to and understanding of the Optional Protocol, in particular, of the importance of this international mechanism for State accountability around gender equality and non-discrimination.

Source: UNIFEM Caribbean Office - Website

What is the CEDAW Optional Protocol

Optional Protocols to human rights treaties are treaties in their own right and are open to signature, accession or ratification by countries which are party to the main treaty. The optional protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women includes:

The Communications Procedure

Gives individuals and groups of women the right to complain to the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women about violations of the Convention. this procedure is known as "[the communications procedure](#)". Under all procedures, the complaint must be in writing.

The Inquiry Procedure

It enables the Committee to conduct inquiries into grave or systematic abuse. Known as an [inquiry procedure](#), this capacity is found in article 8 of the Optional Protocol.

- The optional protocol includes an inquiry procedure, as well as a complaints procedure. An inquiry procedure enables the Committee to conduct inquiries into serious and systematic abuses of women's human rights in countries that become States parties to the Optional Protocol. It is modeled on an existing human rights inquiry procedure, article 20 of the International Convention against Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment.

Source: United Nations Division for the Advancement of Women – Department of Economic and Social Affairs

In the News (cont)

Partners to join Caribbean Broadcasters to Combat AIDS

TORONTO, 16 August 2006 - Today, the Ford Foundation and Elton John AIDS Foundation announced they would be joining the Kaiser Family Foundation in together providing US\$1 million to support the operations of the Caribbean Broadcast Media Partnership on HIV/AIDS, the region's first media-led initiative on HIV/AIDS. Kaiser, which helped initiate and create the Partnership, will also provide ongoing operational and public health expertise. The Partnership, which responds to United Nations Secretary General Kofi Annan's call-to-action to media under the Global Media AIDS Initiative (GMAI), promotes collaboration and leverages resources among media in the region with the goal of expanding AIDS programming.

The Caribbean region has the highest HIV/AIDS prevalence rate in the world outside sub-Saharan Africa. According to the latest UNAIDS statistics, AIDS is now the leading cause of death among adults in the region ages 15-44 years. Stigma and homophobia have been identified as major contributors to the spread of HIV/AIDS in the region.

"We know that the media is our most powerful tool to get out information and change attitudes," said Sir Elton John, founder of the Elton John AIDS Foundation. "I am delighted that my Foundation, in conjunction with our partners Kaiser and Ford, will work directly with Caribbean broadcasters to help educate their audiences, promote tolerance, and change the public dialogue about this epidemic."

The Caribbean Partnership includes more than 30 television and radio companies representing 22 countries from across the region as well as the United States, which have committed to making HIV/AIDS a core business priority and integrating HIV-content across all programme genres, including news, public affairs and entertainment. The seven-member steering committee made up of broadcast executives is chaired by Dr. Allyson Leacock, General Manager of the Caribbean Broadcasting Corporation (CBC), Barbados.

Launched in May, the Partnership was the outcome of a regional media leaders summit on HIV/AIDS, organized by the CBC, Caribbean Broadcasting Union and Kaiser, in support of the GMAI. Conceived by Kaiser and UNAIDS, the GMAI was launched in January 2004 at a special meeting of many of the world's top media leaders at United Nations Headquarters in New York. It seeks to mobilize the media industry globally to fight HIV/AIDS.

The announcement was made at a news conference at the XVI International AIDS Conference in Toronto by Dr. Allyson Leacock of the CBC, Dr. Jacob A. Gayle of the Ford Foundation, Scott Campbell, Executive Director, Elton John AIDS Foundation, and Matt James of Kaiser, who were joined by Sir George Alleyne, the United Nations Secretary General's Special Envoy for HIV/AIDS in Latin American and the Caribbean.

Source: Excerpts from the UNICEF Press Centre

In the News (cont)

Money keeps moms from reporting abuse

Thursday, August 24 2006

“You want me to lose my man” is the common response from mothers whose daughters complained to them about abuse by stepfathers. Mothers are least likely to report abuse to the authorities “If the man is the one providing finance for the home. It becomes even more difficult if the mother is not working, she will not let go,” said St Ann’s Hospital psychiatrist Dr Samuel Shafe while talking to the media about sexual abuse at the Diego Martin Health Centre.

He said if the perpetrator is a relative, the child could be told they want to “mash up the family.” Shafe, along with Gwen Ross of the Rape Crisis Centre, and Ann Soo-Ting of the National Family Services (NFS), were members of a panel at a seminar on sexual abuse in children for the Diego Martin and Petit Valley communities hosted by the North West Regional Health Authority at the grounds of TTPost, Diego Martin Main Road.

Soo-Ting supported what Shafe said, noting, mothers “hardly” took the initiative to report incidents. She said they were often in denial and the NFS usually got anonymous calls from a friend, neighbour or another relative.

Shafe told the media if women could see the long-term benefits of reporting abuse they would more likely report abuse. He said educated mothers were more likely to report incidents than less educated ones because most times they had jobs. Shafe said the ability of children to get over abuse depended on the support and cooperation from parents and the community. While some children are able to speak out and are prepared to go to court to support their claims, it is difficult for others to overcome the abuse and the perpetrators get away.

Shafe said, “If the family does not support the child who wants to go forward with the case, what will happen is the case would collapse because the family would put pressure on them to drop the case.” Shafe said people in the community could become hostile to victims making allegations about a “nice” neighbour although he may be a “paedophile encroaching on all children in the neighbourhood.”

Shafe said children who are abused use psychosomatic symptoms such as headaches, belly aches, chest pains to communicate to adults (parents, caregivers and teachers) to get the attention of an adult. He said, “They will not come to you and say uncle touched me. They will say I have headaches, chest pains.” He said their level of cognitive development is lower than adults and they deal with problems differently. Children can also use non-verbal communication.

Source: Trinidad and Tobago Newsday, Thursday 24 August 2006 Section A – Page 8

Girls

If women’s rights are not respected, girls are even more vulnerable; 70 per cent of all reported sexual assaults in 2004 were recorded against girls rather than women. According to self-report and population-based surveys, 17 per cent of 13 and 14 year olds in Kingston, Jamaica had experienced rape or attempted rape; the majority by adult casual acquaintances.

Approximately 33 per cent of girls in this age group experience either verbal enticements to have sex or unwanted physical contact. A Caribbean study found that 47% of adolescent girls’ sexual initiation was "forced" or "somewhat forced".

"Forced" was the term used by many Jamaican men, women and girls spoken to by Amnesty International to refer to rape. One study found that 20 per cent of 15 to 19 year olds had been forced to engage in sexual activity, and that this was more prevalent in rural areas. These forced experiences occurred within relationships as well as outside them.

In 2002, a women’s organization providing shelter for victims of violence reported an increase in the number of girls under the age of 12 who had been kidnapped and raped.

2006 Amnesty International Report on Sexual violence against women and girls in Jamaica: “just a little sex”

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The Statistics and Social Development Unit of the ECLAC Subregional Headquarters for the Caribbean has as its focus the conduct of research and analysis on the areas of women and development; population and development, (migration and teenage fertility), poverty, and other social development issues such as the conditions of vulnerable groups in the society, social reform and social policy formulation. In this regard, the ECLAC/CDCC Secretariat is responsible for assisting member States with the implementation of programmes of action coming out of international conferences such as the World Summit for Social Development (WSSD); the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD), and the Fourth World Conference on Women (Beijing Conference).



Group Picture, ECLAC Staff Members, September 2005



Gender Dialogue

GENDER DIALOGUE was created in response to calls from participants at the Third Caribbean Ministerial Meeting on Women, held in Trinidad and Tobago in October 1999, for a more systematic sharing of information and dialogue around policies and programmes for women. In addition to this call we, too, at the ECLAC/CDCC Secretariat, have felt the need for a medium through which we could routinely share our work.

The newsletter is available both in print form and at the ECLAC website. We are exploring as well, the creation of a chat room to expand the possibilities for dynamic dialogue.

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