

INTERNATIONAL WOMENS DAY 2011
Dr. Hon. Jacqui Quinn-Leandro, M.P
Minister of Education, Sports, Youth and Gender Affairs
Jolly Beach Resort
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Today, the 100th year of International Women's Day is a good day. I am proud and excited to be amongst the women gathered here celebrating the successes of women in all spheres of life and committing to continue the fight for those human rights that still elude us to this very day. We are the beneficiaries of the Suffragettes who campaigned for women's right to vote.

International Women's Day is celebrated each year on March 8th. Countries across the globe recognize this as a day when homage is paid to the invaluable contribution of women in all societies. It is a day when we refuel the flame of awareness that must be kept burning in the consciousness of humanity about the painful truth of gender inequality and inequity that still exists.

I stand here today and what I am about to say is what women throughout the world are simultaneously saying. And the sad truth is; we speak for those who, in some countries and cultures are not allowed to speak for themselves. Gender inequity is not a figment of women's imagination; it is a reality. It is why there is a need for days like the International Women's Day for the past 100 years. It is why I am standing before you today as the Minister responsible for Gender Affairs. It is why there is a need for Bureaus of Gender Affairs throughout the world.

We've come a long way baby, and have reasons a-plenty to celebrate; but amidst our celebrations let us not lose sight of the fact that we still have a long way to go. Imagine that in 1907 women became members of parliament for the very first time and today, 104 years later we are still struggling with equity in parliament in this part of the world. Over one hundred years ago the door was opened for us and instead of walking in we are still just peering through the cracks and the windows. Rosa Parks moved from the back of the bus in December 1955, just around the time some of you were born and before many of us gathered here were born. Collectively we should be able to do what a single black woman did in the face of racism and the belly of segregation.

Yes, we are proud as a nation to have a female Head of State in our Governor General, women holding the offices of President of the Senate and Speaker of the House. Yes we count it as progress to have a female Ombudsman; many female judges, lawyers, Permanent Secretaries and senior civil servants. But let's really examine it; where decisions are made in the corridors of power; decisions that affect women and girls; men and boys; how many women are there making those tough decisions. We must commit to building a critical mass of women who are movers and shakers in the corridors of power.

Look, I am proud of us. The fact that we thought it important to be here means that we know the significance of today and want to be part of the commemoration. In this room are women who each time adversity came around they stared it hard in the face and sent it on its way.

Women whose strength has brought them through circumstances which should have crippled them. At these tables sit women who are on the threshold of claiming and reclaiming themselves. Women who are hoping to be inspired. Women whose stories are still unwritten. Today is going to be a good day. Today's gonna be a good, good day. Let's raise the roof today celebrating ourselves.

If we reflect on our childhood and the influences in and around our lives- I know without doubt that nine out of ten women in this room will immediately think of a woman or two. It was always "my mother says" or "my grandmother did". If you ask a married man the success of his marriage - if he's honest he will tell you that he listens to his wife. Women run things and run them well.

We cannot give away our power or small up ourselves. So if you loaned out your power I'm begging you please to take it back. If you smalling up yourself; straighten up; exhale and walk proud.

A woman's worth in the everyday pages of life cannot be debated. As mothers and teachers; sisters and friends; wives and nurturers; we are the backbones and hearts of life itself. But these are not the only roles we are naturally inclined to. Our potential as a people and nation is greater when women's contributions are sought, accepted; welcomed. What we bring to the fore outshines what we offer in the shadows. The support we provide as the foundation is multiplied tenfold as the pinnacle.

Today, as a nation of women, we raise our voices and give thanks to God Almighty for the indomitable strength with which he has laced our spirits; the resourcefulness with which he has sprinkled our resolve and the boundless, never-ending love we call our hearts.

As women we are thankful for the safe distances God has brought us. We are aware however, of the journey that lies ahead. We are cognizant of the challenges, not insurmountable, but real challenges nonetheless, that continue to greet us in our everyday lives. The challenges of a professional woman, always needing to prove her worth. The challenges of a mother raising children in a society that seems designed to work against her. The challenges of a woman both mother and professional who successfully walks the tightrope of a balancing act.

As a nation; as a people; as a Christian society there needs to be an understanding and appreciation of the invaluable worth of our women. We are the other side of the coin; the other half of the couple; the other hand that claps. Life cannot begin without us nor can it be lived without us. Today, I ask you to encourage and practice respect for yourselves as women and for our girls. Encourage and practice gender equality and equity. I ask you to let us hold hands as a complete community and work together for a better world.

Before I take leave of you I would like to say a special word of welcome to the DPP of Jamaica for so graciously consenting to travel here to share words of wisdom and empowerment with us later in the day. On behalf of the Ministry of Education, Sports, Youth and Gender Affairs, I commend you highly and applaud you in advance.

I also would like to thank all the presenters who will be sharing their powerful stories of overcoming adversity strength of purpose, resilience and self empowerment. Thank you all ladies for agreeing to share a bit of you with us.

I look forward to a fruitful, productive, engaging and most of all empowering day!

Happy International Women's day!!

Happy 100th Birthday!!

As we celebrate in unison with millions across the globe I hope the words spoken; the stories and experiences shared will stimulate us into action in our individual lives and as a community to take on whatever challenges confront us. When I look around the room I feel good. I know many of you and so I know that this room is packed like dynamite with power, ambition, potential, leadership talent and ideas. Imagine if all of that came together: We would be unstoppable! As women there is nothing we cannot do.. We **are** unstoppable if only we would begin.