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**INTERVENTION ON GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE (GBV)**

**ON THE OCCASION OF THE**

**FOURTH CYCLE OF THE UNIVERSAL PERIODIC REVIEW**

**OF**

**THE COMMONWEALTH OF THE BAHAMAS**

**AT THE**

**43RD SESSION OF THE UNIVERSAL PERIODIC REVIEW WORKING GROUP**

**UNITED NATIONS HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL**

**3RD MAY 2023**

**GENEVA, SWITZERLAND**

***National Strategic Plan to end GBV***

**Mr. President**, the Government continues its efforts to implement the National Strategic Plan to address Gender-Based Violence, with the most recent achievement being the implementation of the Family Island Coordination Councils (FICC) to address GBV. The purpose of the Councils are to focus on community-based partnerships to prevent GBV in our Family Island communities and to ensure that victims of GBV receive professional support and clinical services needed to recover from such situations. These Councils represent a multi-sectoral, coordinated approach to achieving an effective and integrated response to GBV while assisting in the rehabilitation of the perpetrators of abuse. This is complimented by the efforts Men’s Desk in building support for the prevention of GBV against women. The Urban Renewal Task Force Relief Unit also conducts door-to-door home visits to residents experiencing conflict or abusive relationships to problem solve and prevent the escalation of violence. The ten (10) Urban Renewal Centers throughout the country are mandated to report all incidents of GBV to the Relief Task Force Unit. The Department of Social Services provides temporary shelter for survivors of GBV, onsite counseling and accompaniment to court.

***Legislation on GBV***

**Mr. President**, after wide and careful consultation with applicable NGOs, the Government has prepared a Draft Bill to address GBV (entitled the ‘*Protection against Violence Bill, 2023’*). The Bill is to be released shortly for wide public consultation. It is intended that the Draft Bill be laid in Parliament.

**Mr. President**, generally, the Draft Bill seeks to provide for the protection of and support for victims of violence in the fulfillment of the country’s international and regional obligations. The Draft Bill establishes a central authority or Commission whose mandate expressly prescribes that it, inter alia:

* strengthen involvement in multisector stakeholders through public private partnerships to combat and respond to violence with effective policies and strategies; and
* facilitate the provision of care and support services for victims of violence through shelters, counselling services, and care and custody of affected children.

Under the Draft Bill the Commission is empowered to inter alia:

* grant funding to service providers for community programs and projects;
* provide technical assistance in program and project management and information systems to support service providers;
* consult, coordinate and cooperate with other regional and international violence-based organizations and institutions; and
* engage private healthcare facilities to provide sensitive medical examinations and treatments to victims of violence.

The Draft Bill expressly highlights the rights of victims, namely:

* the right to a duty of care by all persons who come into contact with that victim in their capacity as care and support professionals.
* the right to be informed of all rights and services available to them under the legislation;
* the right to confidentiality by any person acting in their capacity to provide care and support; and
* the right to privacy.

The Bill prescribes the procedure for the making and handling of complaints by victims and outlines the care and support services available to victims of sexual and physical abuse namely:

* medical treatments;
* safe housing and shelter for victims and children;
* psychological, medical and legal assistance;
* access to space spaces and community; and
* Readjustment programs to assist with re-assimilation into public life post violent event.

Recognizing the importance of data and information in eradicating violence especially violence which results in death, the Bill also establishes a protocol to be followed. Under the Draft Bill, a Fatality Review Team is duly empowered to investigate cases and make determinations which will ultimately enable the Commission to collect and analyze data and maintain an accurate database to create effective solutions to eradicate violence as well as report on the rate of femicide in the jurisdiction.

**Mr. President**, in the words of our Prime Minister, “*as Bahamians, we should speak with one voice when we repudiate discrimination against women and girls and denounce gender-based violence and domestic abuse – just as we should be ardent advocates for gender equality and child and family welfare. Our laws regarding gender-based violence must be aligned with our values*.”