

Thirteenth Commonwealth Women's Affairs Ministers Meeting (13WAMM)

Equality Toward a Common Future

Nassau, The Bahamas, 21-23 August 2023

WAMM(23)7c

OUTCOMES STATEMENT

1. The 13th Commonwealth Women's Affairs Ministers Meeting (13WAMM) was held in Nassau, The Bahamas, from 21 to 23 August 2023. Delegations from 26 member countries attended the meeting. The Prime Minister of The Bahamas, Hon. Philip Davis KC addressed the opening ceremony.¹
2. The meeting was chaired by the Hon. Obediah Wilchcombe MP, Minister of Social Services and Urban Development, The Bahamas, under the theme 'Equality Toward a Common Future'. The first session was addressed by the Right Hon. Patricia Scotland, KC, Secretary-General of the Commonwealth and the Hon. Aisha Jumwa, Cabinet Secretary, Ministry of Public Service, Gender and Affirmative Action, Kenya as the outgoing Chair of WAMM.
3. The 13th WAMM took place four years after the 12th Women's Affairs Ministers Meeting (12WAMM) in 2019 in Nairobi, Kenya. During this time, the world has been profoundly affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, the accelerating impact of climate change, economic turmoil and political polarisation. These events have had a major impact on gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls globally. Ministers reflected on these developments and shared progress and initiatives from their countries designed to strengthen gender equality and the empowerment of all* women and girls.
4. Ministers welcomed and endorsed the *Report from Senior Officials* on 21 August 2023 and the recommendations in the *Report of the Civil Society Roundtable Critical Conversation* held virtually on 1 August 2023.
5. Ministers welcomed the 2022 Commonwealth Heads of Government Communiqué adopting the *Commonwealth Declaration on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment* submitted by the 12WAMM. Ministers also noted with appreciation that Heads renewed their commitment to the Commonwealth's fundamental political values of democracy, gender equality and inclusive development as set out in the Commonwealth Charter.
6. Ministers reviewed the progress of gender equality and women's empowerment in the Commonwealth and endorsed the approach set out in the *Roadmap in support of the Commonwealth Declaration on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment 2022-2030*. The Roadmap shapes the Commonwealth's biannual reporting on gender equality and women's empowerment to Heads of Government and the process by which member countries would review and provide input into its development.
7. Ministers also discussed the Commonwealth priorities for gender equality and women's and girls' empowerment in the context of gender and climate change, women's economic empowerment, women in leadership, and ending violence against women and girls. Ministers noted the importance of gender equality and the inclusion of persons with disabilities.
8. Climate change is key among the challenges of our times, with many Commonwealth countries experiencing its impacts in the form of frequent droughts, heatwaves, floodings, hurricanes, extreme rainfall and sea level rise. Evidence collated by the

¹ Refer to the Record of Meeting

United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC)² has shown that the impacts of climate change are amplified by other factors, including gender inequalities, to disproportionately disadvantage women and girls. Studies have highlighted how climate related hazards often lead to negative impacts for women and girls, particularly those in vulnerable situations.³ Cognisant of these challenges Ministers discussed the urgent need for gender responsive climate action and the urgent need to invest more in women and girls as agents of transformative action on climate change.

9. Ministers committed to a collaborative Commonwealth community effort around gender responsive climate action. They recognise the urgent need for gender-responsive policies, capacity building, collection of disaggregated data, financing, knowledge sharing and peer learning. Ministers appreciated the continuing efforts of the Commonwealth Climate Finance Access Hub in mobilising finance for gender mainstreaming. Ministers noted the need to work together with the global community on climate action to address increased vulnerabilities of women and girls, including women and girls with disabilities, from climate change. They requested the Secretariat to support gender mainstreaming towards an inclusive Loss and Damage Fund through engagement at COP28.⁴
10. Over 1.3 billion people, nearly 16 per cent of the global population, experience a significant disability and this number is increasing.⁵ Not only are women and girls disproportionately represented, with a disability prevalence rate of approximately 19 per cent vs 12 per cent for men⁶, but they also face multiple barriers that may result in a lower economic and social status; increased risk of gender-based violence and abuse, including sexual violence; gender-based discriminatory practices; and limited access to education, health services, including sexual and reproductive health services, information, services, justice, as well as civic and political participation. Ministers acknowledged that these are barriers to the full realisation of the rights of all* women and girls with disabilities. Ministers welcomed the recommendations made for gender equality and inclusion of persons with disabilities highlighting the importance of the collection of disaggregated disability data and the adoption of a disability mainstreaming approach. Ministers appreciated the valuable work of the Commonwealth Disabled People's Forum. Ministers also noted the importance of access to health services, education, skills development, vocational training and meaningful participation in political decision-making processes for persons with disabilities.⁷
11. Ministers noted that women-owned small and medium sized enterprises account for 35 per cent of the global GDP.⁸ According to the World Trade Organisation (WTO), only 15 per cent of women owned businesses participate in international trade, and in 2022 women were only able to access 2 per cent of the venture capital funds available globally.⁹ A study conducted by ITC SheTrades on the gender responsiveness of trade agreements in the Commonwealth countries shows that only 35 per cent of them have

² UNFCC, 2022. Dimensions and examples of the gender-differentiated impacts of climate change, the role of women as agents of change and opportunities for women. Report to the SB meetings. Bonn.

³ UNFCCC NDC Synthesis Report 2022, Para 167

⁴ Refer to WAMM(23)3a

⁵ World Health Organization, [Global report on health equity for persons with disabilities](#), (2022)

⁶ World Health Organization and World Bank, World Report on Disability (Geneva, 2011), pp 27-28.

⁷ Refer to WAMM(23)4a

⁸ [Gender Responsive Procurement \(ungm.org\)](#)

⁹ https://www.ey.com/en_uk/global-trade/why-the-gender-gap-in-international-trade-needs-to-close-faster

gender-implicit provisions and about 40 per cent make no explicit reference to gender.¹⁰ Furthermore, only 1 per cent of the USD 11 trillion spent annually on public procurement is awarded to women-owned businesses.¹¹ Yet, women's full inclusion in the workforce is predicted to add USD 28 trillion to the global Gross Domestic Product (GDP) by 2025.¹²

12. Ministers acknowledged the challenges faced by women-owned small and medium sized enterprises and the need to enhance their participation in international trade and trade negotiations as a means to redistribute opportunities for economic growth in member countries. Ministers also emphasised the need to collect sex-disaggregated data to develop gender-responsive trade policies. Ministers committed to strengthening women's economic empowerment by enabling gender responsive public procurement as a tool to promote gender equality. Ministers further committed to removing barriers faced by women to enable their effective participation in the global economy.¹³
13. Ministers noted that women's decision-making in the political, public and private sectors is essential to achieving gender equality and therefore critical for realising the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which has at its heart the 17 SDGs. Ministers further noted the need to increase the number of women in leadership, particularly at senior levels across the Commonwealth. In addition, Ministers acknowledged that enhancing women's capacity and removing barriers will create opportunities for them to formulate and implement gender-responsive policies, programmes, services and other measures geared towards the advancement of gender equality which benefits the whole of society. Furthermore, Ministers underscored the need for sharing best practices to help increase women's representation and build systems of inclusion and gender mainstreaming.
14. Ministers recognised that despite high-level political support and concerted efforts to eradicate all forms of violence against women and girls (VAWG), rates of VAWG remain persistently high. Levels of sexual and/or physical VAWG remains at about one in three women, this affects 736 million women worldwide.¹⁴ In just one year, 45,000 women and girls lost their lives at the hands of their partners and family members.¹⁵ Commonwealth research has found that inadequate action on prevention and ending of VAWG can cost between 4.6 per cent and 5.5 per cent of national GDP^{16, 17} with the global cost of VAWG estimated to be USD 1.5 trillion.¹⁸ Ministers highlighted the impact of VAWG on victims/survivors, families, households, communities and economies, and

¹⁰ Brodsky Ally, Jasmine Lim and William Reinsch 'Women and Trade - How trade Agreements can level the gender playing field' (2021, Centre for Strategic and International Studies).

¹¹ Gender Responsive Procurement (ungm.org)

¹² [The Global State of Small Business during COVID-19: Gender Inequalities \(worldbank.org\)](https://www.worldbank.org/en/publication/global-state-of-small-business-during-covid-19/gender-inequalities)

¹³ Refer to WAMM(23)5c

¹⁴ World Health Organisation (2018) "Violence against women prevalence estimates"

<https://apps.who.int/iris/rest/bitstreams/1347689/retrieve>

¹⁵ United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (2022) "Gender-related killings of women and girls: Improving data to improve responses to femicide/feminicide" <https://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2022-11/Gender-related-killings-of-women-and-girls-improving-data-to-improve-responses-to-femicide-feminicide-en.pdf>

¹⁶ Commonwealth Secretariat (2018) The Economic Costs of VAWG: A Study of the Seychelles <https://www.eurospanbookstore.com/book/detail/the-economic-cost-of-violence-against-women-and-girls/?k=9781849291873>

¹⁷ Commonwealth Secretariat (2020) The Economic Costs of VAWG: A Study of Lesotho https://production-new-commonwealth-files.s3.eu-west-2.amazonaws.com/migrated/inline/The_Economic_Cost_of_Violence_Against_Women_and_Girls_UPDFper cent5B3per cent5D.pdf

¹⁸ CARE International (2018, 13) "Counting the Cost: The Price Society Pays for Violence Against Women"

the need for a harmonised, comprehensive and whole of society approach to eliminate VAWG.

15. Ministers reaffirmed their commitment to end all forms of VAWG, including child, early and forced marriage, female genital mutilation, human trafficking, and to support women and girls who have been affected. Ministers committed to strengthening legal frameworks and discussed the development and utilisation of digital tools to end VAWG. Ministers emphasised the need to include men and boys in the prevention and elimination of VAWG, and also welcomed the launch of the Secretary-General of the Commonwealth, Right Hon. Patricia Scotland KC, *For the Women in my Life* campaign to promote men and boys' engagement in building gender equity. Furthermore, Ministers also emphasised the need to promote and enhance partnerships with community leaders to address social, religious and cultural norms that hinder progress.¹⁹
16. Ministers noted with appreciation the information reports and recommendations provided on *Universal Health Coverage (UHC) and Cervical Cancer in the Commonwealth*; *Artificial Intelligence and Women's Empowerment*; and *A Gender Perspective on the Commonwealth Guiding Framework for Addressing the Rising Burden of Noncommunicable Diseases*.
17. The Host Government highlighted the progress of women in The Bahamas in the 50 years since independence and 60 years since women in The Bahamas voted for the first time. Eminent speakers reflected on the journey The Bahamas has taken in the last half century, its accomplishments and continuing efforts to address the challenges of gender inequality. Ministers made note of these achievements and congratulated The Bahamas on its efforts.
18. Ministers thanked the Government of The Bahamas for successfully hosting 13WAMM and congratulated the Chair for his stewardship of the Meeting. Ministers also thanked the Commonwealth Secretariat for its collaborative and substantive work, particularly noting the quality of the meeting papers and technical sessions.
19. The host of the 14th Commonwealth Women's Affairs Ministers Meeting will be determined following consultation with the regional grouping.
20. Ministers agreed to support the continuation of the Commonwealth Women's Affairs Ministers Action Group (CWAMAG) to help maintain the momentum.

23 August 2023
Nassau, The Bahamas

* Four countries had reservations about the word 'all' and were seeking clarification from their capitals as of 23 August 2023.

¹⁹ Refer to WAMM(23)5b