

Hon. Boyce elected Presiding Officer for Caribbean Women

Minister of Health and Human Services, the Hon. Dr. Lillian Boyce, has been elected Presiding Officer of the Economic Commission for Latin America and Caribbean to represent women in the English-speaking Caribbean for the next three years.

She was elected by her peers, during the 10th Regional Conference on Women in Latin America and the Caribbean, which was held in Ecuador, South America, between August 6 and 9. Hon. Boyce led the Turks and Caicos delegation which included Director of Gender Affairs, Mrs. Rita Gardiner and Mrs. Luceille Wilson, consultant for the Domestic Violence Training in preparation for the Crisis Center.

Jamaica was chosen as the runner-up, in the event that Hon. Boyce cannot attend meetings.

“I am humbled by the opportunity to be chosen on behalf of the women and people of the Turks and Caicos Islands, to represent the women of the English-speaking Caribbean at such an important and distinguished level,” she told The SUN. “I will endeavour to do my best to ensure that the Turks and Caicos Islands continue to be a prime example when it comes to women’s participation and women’s empowerment. As a matter of fact, I think it is fair to say that women of this country are actively involved in all important areas of our country and this is something that can certainly be emulated across the Caribbean and Latin America.”

At the meeting in Ecuador, members of the English Speaking Caribbean met and discussed their displeasure of the proceeding of the meeting, where it was noticeable that the Caribbean didn’t have many speakers on the panel. There were two moderators from the English speaking Caribbean including the Turks and Caicos Islands in the person of Hon. Boyce and the Executive Director from the Bureau in Jamaica.

Hon. Boyce made a strong and powerful contribution to the conference which was attended by hundreds of women from Latin America and the Caribbean.

She noted that the conference was an eye-opener in many respects, adding that there is no doubt that women in the Latin America and Caribbean region are at the crossroads.

She said: “Unfortunately, however, it seems as though we are at the crossroads heading in different directions, and that the women in Latin America and the Caribbean are really separated by more than the ocean and the sea. There is a great imbalance, a level of disunity and some obvious misperceptions as it relates to the women of the Caribbean.”

She noted that it was quite ironic that the conference was debating and talking about political participation and gender parity in the decision making process, when in fact, it was not practicing what it is preaching?

She continued: “Are Caribbean women being allowed to fairly and adequately participate in the decision making process at this level? Are our voices being heard? Is our contribution being recognized? Are our achievements being accurately recorded and reflected at this level? In my view, the answer to all of the above is a resounding no!”

Hon. Boyce told the gathering that the time has come for organizations such as ECLAC to re-examine themselves and re-focus how they treat and view Caribbean women.

“I am sure I speak for the rest of my Caribbean sisters when I say that we are not at all pleased about the image that is being projected about Caribbean women to this conference, to the Latin American region and indeed the rest of the world. Caribbean women have made significant progress over the years in all aspects of life, in every sector and at every level. A true analysis of the facts would reflect that throughout the Caribbean, women are dominating at almost every level, except perhaps for the area of elective politics.”

And even then, she said, as a region, the Caribbean can boast of having the most female leaders per capita, with three female prime ministers and one president, in the persons of Portia Simpson of Jamaica, Dame Eugenia Charles, former Prime Minister of Dominica, Jennifer Smith, former Prime Minister of Bermuda, and Janet Jagan, a former President of Guyana.

Hon. Boyce added: “These women, and the many others who are serving as ministers and in senior positions of government, embody and represent the remarkable progress that females are making in the political process in the Caribbean. In addition, several institutions, departments, businesses and organizations in the Caribbean are being headed by women. The Governors General of Antigua and St. Lucia are women, the deputy prime minister of Barbados is a woman, the chief justice of The Bahamas is a woman, the Attorney General of The Bahamas is a woman, the speaker of the Cayman Islands is a woman and she is here at this conference, the deputy governor of the Turks and Caicos Islands is a woman, and the list goes on.”

What is more encouraging, she said, is that young females throughout the region, from the primary school to the university level and beyond, are continuing this proud tradition of dominance, so that that they too, will be part of the decision-making process.

She continued: “It is somewhat sad, however, that we don’t hear enough about these monumental achievements when we come to these conferences. And so, I am saying to regional organizations who are supposed to have the interests of women at heart and who are responsible for highlighting the collective achievements of women in the region, is that the time has come for you to stop treating Caribbean women like poor cousins. Help us to promote and celebrate the many significant achievements of Caribbean women. For the reality of the situation is that in many respects and in most instances, we the women of the Caribbean are miles ahead of women in other parts of the world.”

The Minister of Health and Human Services told the conference that The Black Woman, and especially, the Caribbean Black Woman, has emerged as perhaps the most powerful force in the world today.

“We have had to overcome tremendous odds to arrive at where we are today. Oh yes, we still have much more to achieve and a long way to go. But we cannot sit back and let the legacy of the Caribbean Black woman go unnoticed and unrecorded. If we do so, we will be doing a great injustice to our young people and the next generation of women. As women, we are doing our part, but we expect and demand that certain organizations and institutions that have the power to do so, will assist us in achieving our goals. The perception must never go forth, that Caribbean women are under-achievers, or that they are second class citizens.”

The Regional Conference on Women in Latin America and the Caribbean is a subsidiary organ of ECLAC and is convened every three years in compliance with the mandates contained in the Regional Plan of Action for the Integration of Women into Latin American Economic and Social Development.

In agreement with governments, it determines regional and sub regional needs for technical assistance; puts forward recommendations to governments and to ECLAC based on studies carried out by the Secretariat on the most feasible way of implementing the agreements made by the UN Regional Conferences; revises and appraises periodically the activities of ECLAC and the other UN bodies and provides a forum for the exchange of information to facilitate mutual coordination and support for programmes designed to promote gender mainstreaming and the integration of women into the economic and social development process at various levels and permit the countries in the region to share best practices.