

STATEMENT

COMMEMORATION OF THE INTERNATIONAL DAY FOR THE ELIMINATION OF VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

& LAUNCH OF THE 16 DAYS OF ACTIVISM AGAINST GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

I am honored to address the nation today - November 25th as St. Vincent and the Grenadines along with the international community commemorates the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women, and the 16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence that concludes on December 10th – Human Rights Day. This period is an occasion for governmental organizations, international organizations and non-governmental organizations to raise public awareness of violence against women. It also reaffirms my government's commitment to ending violence against women which is the most pervasive breach of human rights worldwide.

It is estimated that more than a third of women worldwide have experienced either physical or sexual violence at some point in their lives. Violence against women includes domestic and sexual violence, rape, human trafficking, sexual harassment, cyber-bullying, among others. At the heart of all these forms are gender inequality and discrimination, which violates the fundamental human rights of women and girls.

The theme for this year's 16 Days campaign against gender-based violence is ***"Orange the World: fund, respond, prevent, collect!"*** which is aligned with the United Nations Political Engagement Strategy, and the UNiTE campaign that calls for global action to increase awareness, galvanise advocacy efforts, and share knowledge and innovations especially as the world is impacted by the current health crisis.

When the World Health Organisation (WHO) declared the COVID-19 outbreak a global pandemic on March 11, 2020, violence against women and girls, particularly domestic violence had escalated worldwide. The pandemic can increase multiple

forms of gender-based violence especially physical, psychological, sexual and economic forms of domestic violence fueled by household economic and food insecurity and confined living conditions. Comparative data on reported cases of domestic violence from the police for the period January to June 2020 suggested a slight increase of 0.03% compared to the same period in 2019.

The COVID-19 pandemic is not only a health issue, but one that can reverse decades of progress in poverty reduction and gender equality, and which will change the course and rate of our country's growth and development. In times of crisis such as an outbreak, women and girls may be at higher risk of Intimate Partner Violence and other forms of domestic violence due to increased tensions in the household. Therefore, the need for targeted and elaborate allocation of scarce resources becomes pertinent, and gender-responsive policy-making will allow the government to reduce the cost of persisting inequalities and move towards a more sustainable developmental path.

As part of the 16 days campaign, activities would be undertaken to heighten and galvanize awareness about Gender-Based Violence particularly around child abuse, domestic violence and sexual violence. Some activities include a two-day training workshop with volunteer advocates and key service providers in Hotline Counselling, as the ministry is in the process of establishing Child Abuse and Crisis Hotlines. These hotlines would encourage victims and the general public to safely report and receive guidance. The campaign would run on all social media platform in light of the current COVID-19 protocol and guidelines.

My government pledges to address violence against women and girls by continuing the public education and capacity building on gender-based violence and the support services available to victims and survivors, such as the Antiviolence Campaign in communities, Victims Support Programme, and the soon to be launched Child Abuse and Crisis Hotlines. We also commit to the full enforcement of the various laws, policies and programmes that would prevent these serious infractions of the law, and punish and rehabilitate perpetrators of gender-based violence.

However, much more need to be done for us to truly eliminate this scourge that is considered to be the most pervasive human rights violation that is further exacerbated by COVID-19! Speak out and show the courage to say it is not OK!

As the Minister with responsibility for gender affairs, I fully endorse this awareness campaign in ending Gender-Based Violence in St. Vincent and the Grenadines.

I thank you!