**Statement concerning extension of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women to the Cayman Islands**

**By Premier Hon. Alden McLaughlin, MBE, JP, MLA**

**2 p.m., Tuesday, 8 March, 2016**

**CIGTV studio**

Good afternoon and thank you for joining us.

Today we are here to announce that the United Kingdom has confirmed that it will request that the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women be extended to the Cayman Islands.

The extension of CEDAW to Cayman is one of the measures that support this Government’s strategic broad outcome goal of “Equity and justice in a society that values the contributions of all” and it is a major human rights achievement for the Cayman Islands. It commits this and future governments to undertake a series of measures to end discrimination against women in all forms. While women in Cayman do not face many of the significant discriminatory challenges as women in other parts of the world, we do recognise that problems still remain and must be addressed. This will go a long way to meeting our manifesto pledge of recognising, valuing and honouring the role of women in our society.

The important role that women have played, and continue to play, in creating a modern Cayman is significant. This is why in 2009 the People Progressives Movement Government dedicated the monument “Aspiration” in Heroes Square as a tribute to the work and struggles of women of Cayman and to the future generations of women to come.

In our Strategic Policy Statement for the 2015/16 Financial Year I promised this country on the floor of the Legislative Assembly that this Government would continue to work toward the extension of CEDAW, promote gender equality and provide awareness of the Gender Equality Law and CEDAW through training and communications. This is another box this Government can tick of things it promised and has delivered.

The extension of CEDAW is but one of several accomplishments of this Government, which seek to improve the lives of our people. The Gender Equality Bill 2011, which was supported and passed unanimously in the Legislative Assembly on 14 September, 2011, took effect on 31 January, 2012. It is on that law that CEDAW finds its strength in the Cayman Islands.

 Another of Government’s accomplishments in improving the lives of our people is the new minimum wage law, which came into effect on 1 March and seeks to address for the first time the inequity of very low wages in Cayman. And, as we know, often women are the most impacted by low wages. This Government has also reduced various taxes designed to help lower the costs of goods and services purchased locally as well as the cost of electricity. The latter alone will leave some $17 million annually in the pockets of individuals, families and businesses. All told, as the most recent statistics from the Economics and Statistics Office have shown, cost of living declined by at least 2.9 per cent in 2015. And our economic strategy of supporting business and building of needed infrastructure has helped drive Cayman unemployment down from a high of 10.5 per cent in 2012 to 6.2 per cent in 2015. We are looking to lower this more. As women often manage the household budget, and indeed at times may be the main breadwinner of the household, these accomplishments are ones that positively impact women.

I must commend Minister Hon. Tara Rivers and her team for their work on this achievement, which has been 12 years in the making with the last formal request for extension sent to the United Kingdom in December 2013.

I come from a line of very strong women who worked in the community at a time when most women stayed home. My paternal grandmother, Ethel Connor, was a school teacher. My maternal grandmother, Lizzy Bodden, worked as a seamstress and on her own raised two children after her husband died when my mother was five years old.

My mother, Althea, worked as a dispenser, nurse, pharmacist and sometimes doctor for 36 years at the Government hospital. It was really the only job she ever had. I know from her experiences the difficulties and discrimination that women in the workplace encountered.

I said earlier that being given the CEDAW extension was 12 years in the making, but to be honest, the efforts began way back in 1995 when the late Mrs. Edna Moyle and Mrs. Berna Thompson, both members of the Legislative Assembly, first brought a private members motion to the House for the Government to give early consideration to the establishment of an office for women’s affairs. In reality, that was the genesis of the development of this issue of women’s affairs, rights and issues forming part of a subject within a ministry. Other female champions of human rights for women when they served in the Legislative Assembly have been the Speaker of the House Hon. Juliana O’Connor-Connolly, Ms Lucille Seymour, Ms Heather Bodden, Ms Annie Huldah Bodden, Ms Ester Ebanks, former Speaker Ms Mary Lawrence, National Hero Ms Sybil Ione McLaughlin, Ms Evelyn Wood and Ms Sybil Joyce Hylton.

Minister Rivers, you join good company in your consistent championing of this cause for the women of the Cayman Islands.

With that I will close and turn the programme over to the Minister who will provide more information on CEDAW and what it means for the Cayman Islands.

Thank you.

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