

**STATEMENT ON THE 100TH ANNIVERSARY OF INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S
DAY, 8 MARCH 2011**

On the 100th Anniversary of International Women's Day, Help & Shelter joins in saluting the women who have struggled and survived to achieve dignity and equality in Guyana and around the world. Help & Shelter remains concerned at the intensity of the violence against women, which continues despite the national initiatives that are in place. Help & Shelter reinforces its call to the Guyana Police Force to establish the domestic violence units to monitor and implement the GPF's strategy to deal with domestic violence. The lack of resources is not an excuse for the lives lost due to domestic violence.

The Guyana Chronicle of 5 March, 2011 reports that the President talked about men succumbing more and more to the pressure of 'feminisation' of men. These comments, which were made in a context of the launch of the Men's Affairs Bureau and seem to indicate that being feminine is a bad thing, are a cause for concern, especially since the President noted that the Men's Affairs Bureau is not meant to be anti-female. Help & Shelter's experience has shown that many of the men who are displaying the negative tendencies that the President spoke about do so to prove that they are masculine and not feminine.

The President and the Ministry of Human Services should clarify these comments as the underlying philosophy does not bode well for the relationship between men and women in Guyana.

Help & Shelter nevertheless welcomes the establishment of the Men's Affairs Bureau and wishes them all success in their endeavors to improve the lives and status of men in Guyanese society. It is however important to recognize that the problems and challenges men face should not be confused with the achievement or over-achievement of women or changing gender roles in society. The advances made by women have been the result of hard work, sheer determination and perseverance under the most difficult of circumstances. Over the past 100 years, women have heroically chartered their own course for freedom and equality, as should every group that faces marginalization, discrimination and oppression.

While there is evidence that girls and women are surpassing boys and men in many areas, this trend is not uniform by any means, even here in Guyana. The political landscape of Guyana has been dominated by men and continues to be even though representation of women as ministers of government and parliamentarians has increased. The top executives and 'captains of industry' in Guyana are also predominately male even though the glass ceiling has been pierced by a few women who are now company CEOs. In sport, males also tend to dominate, especially in the most popular fields of cricket, football and basketball, which receive the lion's share of funding. In the field of education it is a well known fact that as salaries and the status of teachers decreased and declined so did the exodus of male teachers from the primary and secondary institutions. In the context of education the President needs to clarify what he meant as reported in the Chronicle article about *boys not receiving the same standard of education as girls*. This

is an extra ordinary statement as it seems to imply that there is a systematic practice of gender discrimination against boys in Guyana's schools and educational institutions.

It is indisputable that the poorest households in Guyana still tend to be single parent households headed by women, and the poorest persons continue to be women and children. According to surveys conducted, one or two out of every three women in Guyana suffer domestic violence at the hands of their male partners. This is a good indicator of which sex continues to exert power and control through the use of violence in the context of gender relations in Guyana. We look forward to all efforts of the MAB to work with men to eliminate the growing problem of domestic violence and other forms of violence against women.

.In 1995, women constituted 51% of the world's population, did 90% of the work and yet owned only 10% of the land and less than 1% of the world's wealth. It was these statistics that fuelled and energized women to organize for their empowerment, development and emancipation from gender discrimination and invisibility. This struggle and fight for equality for all women continues and is no knee jerk response but one based on determination and commitment to resistance against oppression and inequality.

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