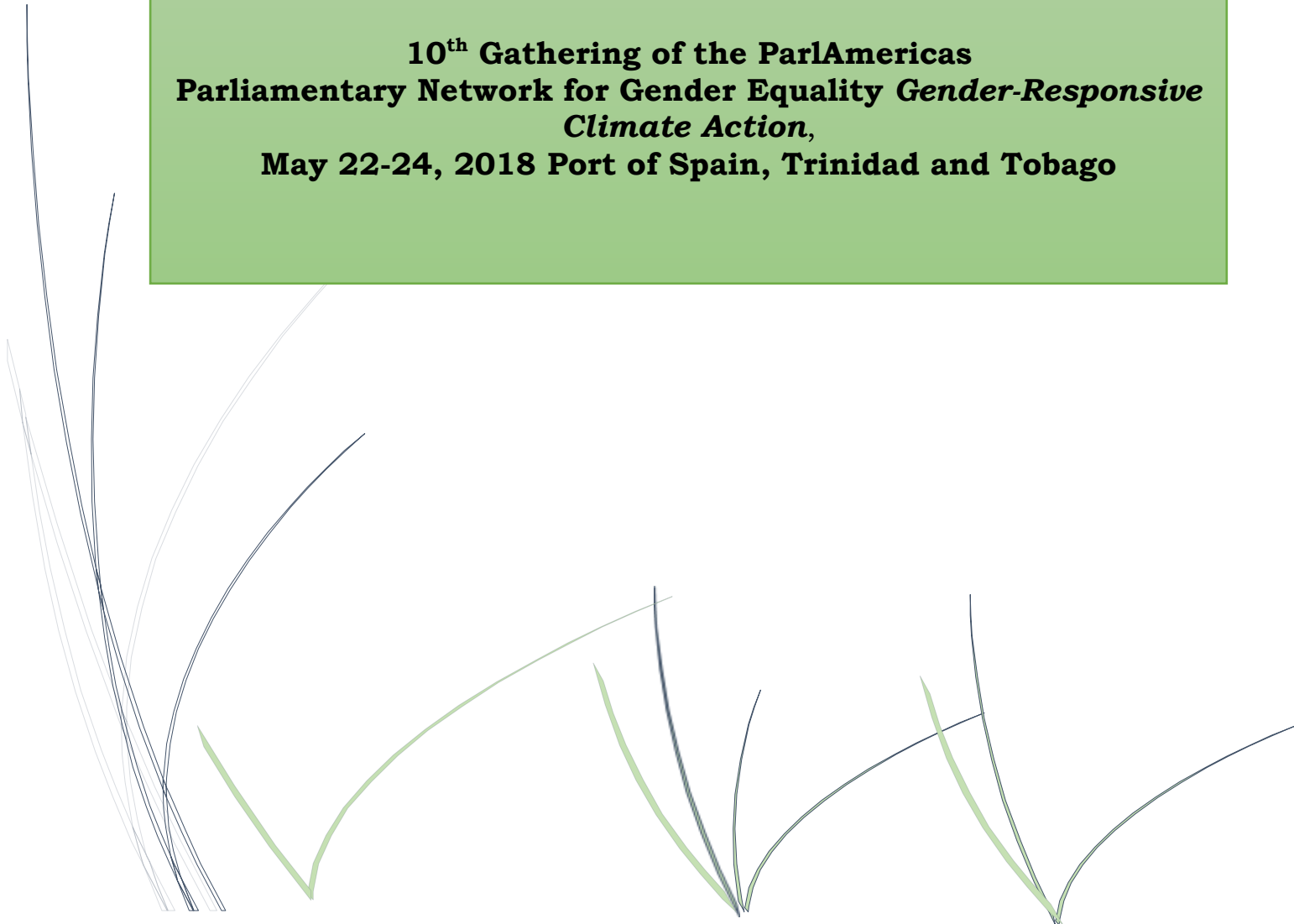




**The Honourable Bridgid Mary Annisette-George, MP
Speaker of the House of Representatives
Republic of Trinidad and Tobago**

Welcome Address

**10th Gathering of the ParlAmericas
Parliamentary Network for Gender Equality *Gender-Responsive
Climate Action*,
May 22-24, 2018 Port of Spain, Trinidad and Tobago**



Salutations

- **Sen. the Hon. Christine Kangaloo, President of the Senate of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago;**
- **The Honourable Camille Robinson-Regis, MP, Minister of Planning and Development;**
- **The Honourable Ayanna Webster-Roy, MP, Minister of State in the Office of the Prime Minister;**
- **The Hon. Robert Nault, Vice-President of ParlAmericas;**
- **Seantor the Hon. Mobida Jaffer, V-Chair of the Parliamentary Network on Gender Equality**
- **Ms Bridget Burns Co-Director, Women’s Environment & Development Network (WEDO) and Feature Speaker**
- **Other Government Ministers and Members of Parliament of the various jurisdictions: I recognise:**
 - **Senator the Hon. Chester A. A. Humphery, President of the Senate of the Parliament of Grenada**
 - **Senator the Hon. Senator the Hon. Jeannine Michèle Giraudy-McIntyre, President of the Senate of the Parliament of Saint Lucia**

- **Senator the Hon. Carla Barnett, Vice President of the Senate and Minister of State in the Ministry of Finance of Belize**
- **Members of the Diplomatic Corps and International Organizations**
- **Dr. Denise Tsoiafatt Angus, Presiding Officer of the Tobago House of Assembly**
- **Secretaries and Assemblymen of the Tobago House of Assembly**
- **Mayors and Representatives of Regional Corporations**
- **Senior Government Officials**
- **Non-Governmental and Civil Society Organizations**
- **Representatives of ParlAmericas**
- **Specialist Observers and Assistants**
- **Members of the Media**
- **Staff of ParlAmericas and the Office of the Parliament**
- **Ladies and Gentlemen**

Good morning!

- **Antigua and Barbuda**
- The Republic of **Argentina**
- The Commonwealth of **Bahamas**
- **Barbados**
- **Belize**
- The Plurinational State of **Bolivia**
- **Canada**
- The Republic of **Chile**
- The Republic of **Colombia**
- The Republic of **Costa Rica**
- The Republic of **Cuba**
- The Commonwealth of **Dominica**
- The **Dominican Republic**
- The Republic of **Ecuador**
- The Republic of **El Salvador**
- **Grenada**
- Republic of **Guatemala**
- The Cooperative Republic of **Guyana**
- Republic of **Haiti**
- The Republic of **Honduras**
- **Jamaica**

- The United **Mexican** States
- The Republic of **Panama**
- The Republic of **Paraguay**
- The Republic of **Peru**
- The Federation of **Saint Christopher and Nevis**
- **Saint Lucia**
- **St. Vincent and the Grenadines**
- The Republic of **Suriname**
- The Republic of **Trinidad and Tobago**
- The Bolivarian Republic of **Venezuela**

This inauguration of this 10th Gathering of the ParlAmericas Parliamentary Network for Gender Equality, themed *Gender-Responsive Climate Action* heralds two days of dedicated and targeted work by the Legislators of ParlAmericas on gender-responsive approaches to climate change.

Our theme is easily located in the context of **THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS** particularly **Goal 13 and Goal 5** respectively which harken us to take “*urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts*” and to achieve “*Gender Equality*.” This easy identification of our business over the next couple of days with the Sustainable Development Goals is in itself justification for a Gathering of Parliamentarians because **The Agenda 2030 Declaration** mandates that there is an “essential role of national parliaments through their enactment of legislation and adoption of budgets, and their role in ensuring accountability for the effective implementation” of our countries commitments.

In the collaborative publication by the United Nations Development Programme, the Global Organization of Parliamentarians Against Corruption and the Islamic Development Bank, entitled ***Parliament's Role in Implementing the Sustainable Development Goals: A Parliamentary Handbook***, Legislators are reminded almost sternly as follows:

“Members of parliament are uniquely positioned to act as an interface between the people and state institutions, and to promote and adopt people-centred policies and legislation to ensure that no one is left behind.”

But without intending in any way to diminish the importance of Agenda 2030, I wish to surmise that this Gathering has a justification of its own. While all 35 member countries of ParlAmericas are members of the Organisation of the American States which is a voluntary association, there exists among us an involuntary connection. That involuntary connection reveals a very

telling story; one of which underscores the imperative of this Gathering.

- **All of the members are in the Western Hemisphere,**
- **21 of our countries are bounded by the Caribbean Sea**
- **20 of our countries have an Atlantic Coastline**
- **21 of the 35 are situated on the same continent.**

(I must quickly interject here that if my numbers are incorrect blame my Maths and not my geography)

Through the incidence of geography our countries are inextricably linked in the context of climate and I dare postulate that a cursory glance of our collective experiences for the year 2017 alone supports this.

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen, I would prefer to shy away from the memories of the horrific devastation which many of our member countries sustained and the catastrophic losses which our citizens suffered during last year's hurricane season but in doing so

I may run the risk of being cast in the mould of *the ostrich hiding its head in the sand*.

Highlights of the climatic occurrences in 2017 will demonstrate- hurricanes came in rapid succession.

The names of Bret, Gert, Franklin, Harvey, Irma and Maria will not be lost on anyone in the audience this morning. Prior to 2017 a roll call of those names may have prompted some of us to muse over memorable encounters with friends of such names, **but now**, that very roll call conjures up painful images of destruction devastation loss and human suffering throughout the beautiful pearls of the Caribbean Island Chain.

In **Central America** the painful mosaic was no different-

- On 7 September, a magnitude 8.2 earthquake struck off the southern coast of Mexico It was one of the strongest earthquakes in the country's history, and the most powerful globally in 2017.
- Twelve days later, on 19 September, another earthquake struck, with a magnitude of 7.1. At least 44 buildings collapsed. 370 people were killed.

In **South America**

- Severe floods and landslides occurred in the North-western coast of South America.
- In Peru, a climate phenomenon known as “El Niño Costero” led to torrential rains in the first quarter of last year, and to the overflowing of numerous rivers, resulting in major flooding.
- On 1 April 2017, unusually heavy rain in the area around the city of Mocoa, in Colombia, situated in the Andes, caused several rivers to overflow, resulting in flash floods and landslides.

For our Hemisphere and particularly for, the Caribbean and Latin American members, the timing of this Gathering could not be more appropriate. According to an article entitled **Natural Disasters in Latin America: A Look Back at 2017**

“Some experts are projecting an increase in the frequency of extreme storms (Category 4 and 5) in most areas due to

continued climate change. In a study published in November 2017, a team of researchers analyzed the coastal communities in Latin America and the Caribbean at a high risk of being affected by natural disasters.”

Hold up Ladies and Gentlemen!

PLEASE DON'T FALL INTO DESPAIR!

On the positive side, one conclusion which cannot be denied is that the constituent countries of ParlAmericas have tremendous experience with treating with natural disasters and **This Gathering** presents us with the opportunity to re-think **The How** with which we must treat with the effects of climate change.

As a result of our work in ParlAmericas and in particular the platform of Gender Equality, our collective understanding of the varied, but equally, important roles and responsibilities of men and women in our societies has increased considerably.

Our learnings have instructed us that the engagement and leadership of both men and women, equally, are needed to make our response to climate change fully effective.

One size does not fit all so that gender neutrality (*even if there is in reality such a thing*) in the context of climate change and sustainable development **will not only, be inappropriate, but is and shall be ineffective, inefficient and result in a wastage of resources-** And of course shall leave if not half, very large segments of our populations, behind.

We as legislators have long recognized that gender is a cross cutting theme and therefore it is incumbent upon us in the discharge of our responsibilities to fashion accordingly our policies of

- Mitigation and risk reduction;
- Preparation response and rehabilitation; and
- Resilience and adaptation.

While no one of us can claim to have it right, we appreciate that there are learnings to be had from our individual experiences.

The constraints of time have required that we be selective in our considerations but I feel assured that the topics on our Agenda which includes:

- Centering Women in Climate Change Adaptation; and
- Gender, Health and Climate Change; shall be engaging and beneficial to us all.

To the non-legislators among us, in addition to having invited you to this Opening, we have extended an invitation to join us in **Session 1** entitled ***Approaching climate risks from a gender perspective.***

This is an opportunity to see your legislators at work in a different environment:

- Not the hurly-burly of the Plenary
- Not the cut and thrust of the probing examination of a Joint Select Committee

- But in an interactive, co-operative environment of information gathering and information sharing.

We offer this as an opportunity to learn with us and also to inform us.

I hope that you shall accept our invitation to share with us.

I wish us all every success in our exchanges over the next few days.

I thank you.