



*Government of Bermuda*  
**Ministry of Youth, Social Development and Seniors**

## **MINISTERIAL STATEMENT**

by

**The Hon. Tinée Furbert, JP, MP**  
**Minister of Youth, Social Development and Seniors**

**International Women's Day 2024**

**Friday, 8<sup>th</sup> March 2024**

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**Mr. Speaker,**

It is an honour to rise this morning as Minister responsible for gender affairs to acknowledge today, which is being celebrated globally as International Women's Day. This day is significant as it provides an opportunity to recognize and celebrate the cultural, economic, political and social accomplishments of women worldwide.

**Mr. Speaker,**

The Ministry of Youth, Social Development and Seniors embraces the 2024 theme for International Women's Day - #InspireInclusion! We celebrate all women in all of their diversities. We celebrate those women who came before us, those who stand beside us now and those who will come after.

**Mr. Speaker,**

History tells us that International Women's Day dates back to the year 1908 when fifteen thousand working women in the United States unified under the National Women's Trade Union League and other groups to protest against low wages, lack of protective legislation, and harsh working conditions. The very next day, National Women's Day was announced to honour the female protestors, and subsequently, in 1911 the day went global as International Women's day.

**Mr. Speaker,**

More than one hundred years later we continue to recognize International Women's Day which is a testament to the significance of women in society and the impactful contributions that we make. We celebrate those women who came before us both internationally and locally and we celebrate those women who currently stand with us to build on the steel foundation laid by women trailblazers globally.

**Mr. Speaker,**

This year the United Nations 68<sup>th</sup> Commission on the Status of Women which will be held in New York City from March 10<sup>th</sup> to 22<sup>nd</sup>, has set the theme: *'Accelerating the achievement of gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls by addressing poverty and strengthening institutions and financing with a gender perspective'*. From this overarching theme, the United Nations has deemed the focus of their International Women's Day to be **"Invest in Women: Accelerate Progress"**.

**Mr. Speaker,**

During the past year, the Ministry of Youth, Social Development and Seniors has taken intentional action in its initiatives to invest in women and to accelerate their progress. Last week I informed this Honourable House of the ongoing work that is being undertaken by the Ministry in collaboration with UN Women and the UNDP Multi-Country office in Jamaica to progress the UN's sustainable development goals joint programme **'Building Back Equal'**. The principal vision for this joint programme is to invest in Bermuda's micro, small and medium-sized (MSMEs) women entrepreneurial businesses in agriculture, cultural and creative industries to empower and equip them for new growth opportunities.

**Mr. Speaker,**

The Ministry is grateful to the team at the Bermuda Economic Development Corporation (BEDC) under the leadership of Executive Director, Ms. Erica Smith, who is supporting the Ministry with the investment in women entrepreneurs through the Building Back Equal joint programme. This year, in partnership with BEDC and through the Building Back Equal programme, an Accelerator programme designed specifically for women entrepreneurs will be implemented. This investment in our MSME women entrepreneurial businesses will help position them so that at the end

of the Accelerator programme they can confidently pitch their business products to broader market investors. This directly aligns with the United Nations International Women's Day theme: **“Invest in Women: Accelerate Progress”**.

**Mr. Speaker,**

Let me now acknowledge some of the activities that have taken place this week in recognition of International Women's Day, 2024.

- **On Wednesday, March 6<sup>th</sup>**, a wellness walk was held which promoted the collective commitment of women taking care of themselves and each other. I had the pleasure of opening this event and participating in the walk along with Her Excellency, Rena Lalgie, the Head of the Public Service, Mrs. Cherie Whitter; and women public officers. **Mr. Speaker**, it was great camaraderie walking with women who work at all levels across the public service. The atmosphere was both inspiring and inclusive.
- **On Thursday, March 7<sup>th</sup>**, I held a lunch 'table talk' session with seven young female members of Future Leaders and Youth Parliamentarians. The 'table talk' was highly engaging as our young women leaders expressed their views on various hot topics that included recruiting, retaining and developing female talent, women's economic empowerment – gender equality, supporting women and girls into leadership, decision-making and business, and helping women and girls make informed decisions about their health and sexual reproduction rights.
- **Today Friday, March 8<sup>th</sup>, Her Excellency, Ms. Rena Lalgie, Governor of Bermuda** and Bermuda's first woman Governor who proceeded 145 men that held the role up until her appointment, is providing all women with an encouraging and inspiring message in support of International Women's Day.
- **Also, today Friday, March 8<sup>th</sup>** the International Women's Day Public Service Planning Committee is hosting a virtual panel discussion: *“Paving the First Path”*, this afternoon. Ministries and Departments have been encouraged to host office watch parties during the lunch window to stream the panel discussion and send in questions to be answered live. This approach promotes the inclusion of as many women across the public service as possible. **Mr. Speaker**, the panelists participating in the discussion are: -

- **Cherie-lynn Whitter, Head of Public Service**, the first woman to be appointed as Head of the Public Service.
- **Cindy Clarke, Director of Public Prosecutions**, the first Bermudian woman to hold the post of Head Prosecutor, Department of Public Prosecutions.
- **Tami Ray, Senior Ferry Pilot** the first woman to hold this post at the Department of Marine and Ports Services
- **Keeva Joell-Benjamin, Commissioner of Corrections**, the first woman to be appointed Commissioner, Department of Corrections.

**Mr. Speaker**, the panel discussion will challenge and inspire female public officers to take on leadership roles across the public service.

**Mr. Speaker**,

This morning I attended the Women’s Resource Centre’s inspiring breakfast reception at the City Hall, Earl Cameron Theatre. This networking breakfast provided a platform for women from all sectors of our community to reconnect and meet new women. **Mr. Speaker**, this was followed by a “TEDx” style presentation featuring three young women:

- Hazel Clark, Director of Global Sales and Business Development at Bermuda Tourism Authority;
- Kristin White, Writer, entrepreneur and community activist; and
- Tiffany Paynter, Executive Director of OUT Bermuda, poet and educator.

**Mr. Speaker**,

This afternoon the BPSU Women’s Committee is holding an information session to celebrate women and inspire inclusion. I am humbled to have been invited as a guest speaker at this year’s event, of which the theme is “*Inspiring Leadership in Women Today and Beyond*”. The audience will consist of women, and public and private high school students. I aim to inspire them by talking about my experiences and my perspective on life.

**Mr. Speaker**,

I remind my Honourable Colleagues and the public that women are the engine that drives the public service; private and third-sector organizations; households; and our community. We must support our women as they contribute so much of themselves to make Bermuda a more inclusive place.

**Mr. Speaker,**

Although International Women's Day is centred around celebrating women and girls, we must not forget the role our men and boys play to ensure equality. Their roles are essential in ensuring women and girls are included and respected in all spheres of our society. As a community, we must continue to take strides towards **#InspireInclusion** for our women and girls.

**Mr. Speaker,**

In closing, I take this opportunity to wish all women within our community and globally a Happy International Women's Day, and I encourage them to **#InspireInclusion** as making a difference must start with us.

**Thank you, Mr. Speaker!**