

Strengthening Legal Frameworks and Public Policy: OAS Representatives Collaborate with Saint Lucia Authorities to Address Gender-Based and Sexual Violence against Migrant Women and Girls

Castries, March 26, 2024. Representatives from the Organization of American States (OAS) concluded an official visit to Saint Lucia from March 20th to 22nd dedicated to collaborating with State authorities and civil society organizations on assessing the situation of violence against women and bolstering their capacities to address gender-based violence (GBV), with particular emphasis on combatting the sexual exploitation of migrant women and girls. The visit was conducted in close cooperation with governmental authorities from the Ministry of Home Affairs and the Gender Affairs Department.

This visit forms part of a comprehensive initiative aimed at strengthening regulatory frameworks addressing sexual violence and crimes faced by migrant women and girls across the Americas, with a focus on gender, security, and human rights. The project, titled "*Contributing to the Prevention of Sexual Violence against Migrant Women and Girls in Countries of the Americas*," is jointly executed by the Follow-Up Mechanism of the Inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment, and Eradication of Violence against Women, Belém do Pará Convention (MESECVI), the Inter-American Commission of Women (CIM), and the Department of Public Security (DPS) from the OAS, with funding provided by the government of the United Kingdom.

In recent years, Saint Lucia, like other destinations, has witnessed a rise in human trafficking, where migrant women and girls are particularly vulnerable to sexual exploitation. Responding to this concerning trend, the MESECVI and the DPS implemented this project seeking to provide technical assistance to the State. The objective is to fortify legislation, develop public policies, and create instruments to prevent and attend sexual violence against migrant women and girls.

During the visit, representatives from the Technical Secretariat of the MESECVI conducted site visits to the Women Support Center and Saint Lucia's Crisis Center. Engaging in discussions with public officials and civil society representatives, they evaluated the availability of shelters for women victims of violence and the provision of free support services. The MESECVI representatives acknowledged the commendable efforts of both entities in providing quality assistance to victims of gender-based violence.

Furthermore, on Thursday, a seminar was jointly organized with the Gender Affairs Department of Saint Lucia's government to foster dialogue with technical stakeholders from government agencies and civil society organizations working with women victims of violence. The objective was to enhance their understanding of the Follow-Up Mechanism to the Belém do Pará Convention - MESECVI, emphasizing its role in providing technical assistance on GBV issues.

The workshop aims to empower States Party to the Belém do Pará Convention, such in the case of Saint Lucia, by enabling its officials to effectively monitor and evaluate its

implementation, thereby ensuring a tangible impact on women's ability to live free from violence.

On Friday March 22nd, the OAS Department of Public Security, in collaboration with St. Lucia's Home Affairs Department, organized an event to launch the "*Guidelines to Prevent Sexual Exploitation of Migrant Women and Girls in the Tourism Sector in Saint Lucia*". This document aims to prevent the occurrence of sexual exploitation, advocate for the rights of migrant women and girls, and foster sustainable solutions within the tourism landscape of Saint Lucia.

Saint Lucia's geographic location, coupled with its booming tourism industry, exacerbates the risks faced by women and migrant women, who often lack adequate legal and other sorts of protections and support networks.

The guidelines specifically target the risk factors associated with sexual exploitation of women and girls in the tourism sector, proposing strategies encompassing prevention, awareness, and training, and comprehensive victim support services. It is expected to be a valuable resource for St. Lucia's authorities in their efforts to combat sexual exploitation and human trafficking.

Both events counted on the presence of Hon. Jeremiah Norbert, Acting Minister for the Public Service, Home Affairs, Labour and Gender Affairs and Minister in the Office of the Prime Minister with responsibility for Crime Prevention and Persons with Disabilities, and drew attendance from over 50 public officials and civil society members, strengthening the collaborative efforts between the OAS and Saint Lucia's stakeholders.

These joint endeavors aim to ensure the protection and well-being of migrant women and girls while upholding their human rights, marking a pivotal step towards fostering a safer and more inclusive environment.