

VOICES

NATIONAL WOMEN'S COMMISSION

Gender Equality, Equity & Women's Empowerment in Belize



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ABOUT US

The National Women's Commission (NWC) since its inception in 1982 has served as a strategic advisory body to the Government under the Ministry of Human Development, Social Transformation, and Poverty Alleviation with responsibility for women's empowerment and gender issues and to advocate for the fulfilment of the standards, principles and goals embodied within the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the National Gender Policy and other relevant policies.

UPCOMING EVENTS

What:

- Launch of GBV Referral for Frontline Responders
- Male Advocate Coalition Network Training of Trainers
- Evaluation of National Gender Policy and Gender-based Violence Action Plan

When: January 2021

Where: Virtual Events

From the Commission's Desk

by Cynthia Williams

It is with great pleasure that the National Women's Commission introduces its quarterly Newsletter, *Voices*. As the policy advisory body for issues of gender equality, equity, and women's empowerment, it was important that we find a way to keep our partners and stakeholders abreast of the many interventions being implemented. Especially in these times where our personal interactions have basically been shattered by the COVID-19 pandemic, it is crucial that we provide a synopsis of the work that is carried out to support development in Belize. Often, the work of policymakers is not as obvious, nor does it manifest itself as readily as direct services offered to persons. But this does not mean that all actions are focused only on higher-level making decision-makers. As a coordinating entity, the National Women's Commission implements its work using a holistic approach addressing individual, community, and national levels, recognizing that these levels are interconnected.

Through the many actions, it undertakes, the National Women's Commission endeavors to give voice to the many issues women and men face in relation to gender equality and inequity. Statistics note that women continue to be disproportionately affected by gender inequality and inequity which means we **MUST** ensure that their voices are heard.

Our mandate is to ensure that policies across our country align not only with international conventions such as CEDAW, BEIJING, and SDGs but to also support national development across sectors. It important that synergies are identified if we are to ensure that we persons human rights and dignity are respected and that these serve to build goodwill. The National Women's Commission recognizes that economic, environmental, and social challenges are interdependent, complex, and ever-changing. We hope you enjoy the first installment of *Voices*.



Launch of Spotlight Initiative in Belize

by Sitnah Blease

Women and girls are disproportionately subjected to violence, including femicide, sexual violence, intimate partner violence, trafficking, and harmful practices. Globally, violence against women and girls is one of the most prevalent human rights violations in the world where 1 in every 3 women has suffered from violence in her life; and out of 10 women, 6 are killed by their partners or family members. As a result, organizations such as the European Union and the United Nations launched the Spotlight Initiative, a global, multi-year initiative to eliminate all forms of violence against women and girls (VAWG).

The Spotlight Initiative which launched in Belize on August 19, 2020, seeks to contribute to ending family violence by strengthening policy and legislations that will guarantee increased protection of women and girls, building the capacity of state and non-state actors to respond to family violence, expanding the range of services available, and addressing social norms and behaviors that promote violence against women and girls.

As one of the national counterparts for the Spotlight Initiative, the National Women's Commission aims to end violence against women and girls by ensuring continuity of services and providing a state-response to GBV in the context of the COVID-19 emergency. Three main activities have started which include the definition of an Essential Services Package for women and girls who face violence in Belize; the development and adaptation of a Gender Equality Seal in Belize and the Evaluation of the National gender Policy and Gender-based Violence Action Plan.



Did You Know?

Almost an equal proportion of men and women (1 in 20 or approx. 5%) believes a husband is justified in hitting or beating his wife. (Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey 2015-2016)

COVID-19 Gender-Based Violence Response

by Sitnah Blease

The struggle victims and survivors face during “normal” times worsen during emergencies such as the COVID-19 pandemic. Social distancing and other strategies to curb the spread of the virus may significantly impact the provision of essential protective services for women and girls who experience or are at risk of experiencing gender-based violence (GBV), making it essential for safe spaces and shelters to continue providing safe housing without placing their staff at risk.

As a result, the National Women’s Commission (NWC) handing over a donation of supplies and equipment in accordance with provisions of the Work Plan being implemented with funding from UNFPA and Spotlight Initiative. Items included an assortment of cleaning and sanitizing supplies to two shelters that provide emergency housing for victims and survivors of GBV. The donation was handed over by the Executive Director, Cynthia Williams, to Mary Open Doors and Haven House representatives. Additionally, Mary Open Doors received needed bedroom supplies to expand its service delivery and both shelters will also be receiving personal protective equipment (PPE) later this month. Other safehouses also received supplies that were handed over to the Women’s Department to assist victims in having access to basic household and hygienic supplies.

If you are experiencing violence or know of someone who needs safe housing, contact the Women’s Department at 227-7397 for additional information. Or if you are in danger and require urgent and immediate attention, call 911 / 0-800-A-WAY-OUT or Text/Whatsapp 672-9628.



National Women's Commission and the Belize Police Department Launch New Gender-Based Violence Hotline

by Sitnah Blease

The National Women's Commission with funding from the Spotlight Initiative and technical support from UNFPA, launched the second 0-800 Gender-based Violence hotline on Wednesday, July 15, 2020, at the Eastern Division Police Department on Queen Street, Belize City.

Studies have shown that in times of crisis, acts of gender-based violence directed towards women and children escalate. The National Women's Commission along with its partners have done their best in ensuring that victims have quick and efficient access to reporting services. This important community-based protection system becomes more effective when protecting everyone experiencing gender-based violence, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic.

With victims already having access to a BTL toll-free hotline, an additional hotline and a Smart mobile phone were implemented to provide toll-free access to persons with Smart numbers, further expanding their access in requesting assistance by sending text messages via SMS or WhatsApp. This component can impact access by persons with disabilities who can only use mobile devices or those persons who cannot make a call due to the danger they may find themselves in. Both landlines and mobile phones will be manned by the Domestic Violence Unit at the Queen Street Police Station.

Lastly, if you are experiencing gender-based violence and need police assistance, please call 0-800-A-WAY-OUT or send a text or a WhatsApp message to the number 672-9628 to request urgent attention. For more information on other available services, please contact the Women's Department at 227-7397.



Initiated by the European Union and the United Nations:



Data For All

by Eleanor Murillo

Data For All is a platform of loosely-coupled open-source software tools for the monitoring of the SDGs. DFA manages reliable and timely data for program planning, service delivery, transparency, and accountability. DFA endorses the concept that public socio-economic human development data should be freely available to everyone to use and republish as they wish, without restriction from copyright, patents, or other mechanisms of control.



CAPTURE



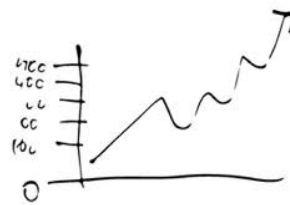
SURVEY



MANAGE



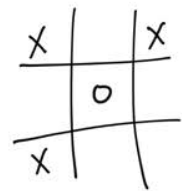
DATA ENTRY



ANALYZE



DASHBOARD BUILDER



STRATEGIZE



MONITORING

The National Women's Commission is presently working on its Indicator Framework for the National Gender Policy and the National Gender-based Violence Action Plan in alignment with the International Commitments that Belize has signed on to. After the validation of the indicator framework, the collection and compiling of data, then the NWC will be able to continue the process of completing its Dashboard.

Gender-Based Violence Referral Pathway

by Sitnah Blease

Were you aware that sexual and gender-based violence is a hidden consequence of the Corona Virus Pandemic?

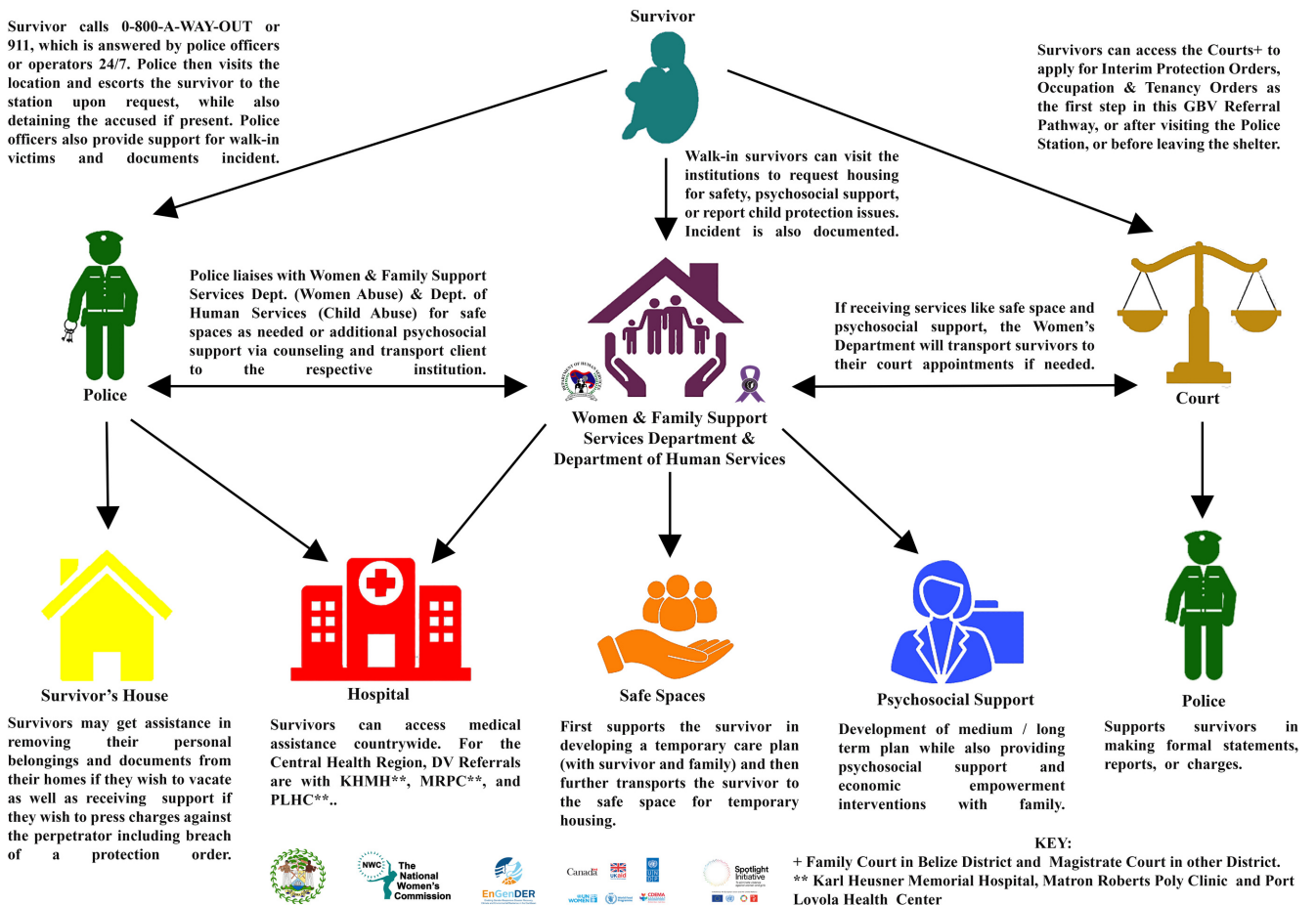
It has been proven that in times of crises and emergencies, the number of gender-based violence cases increases primarily among women and children. As a result, the National Women’s Commission with funding from the Spotlight Initiative established an awareness campaign through the Gender-Based Violence Referral Pathway, which focuses on highlighting the various services available to victims of GBV during the Covid-19 Pandemic.

These services are accessible by visiting the Women and Family Support Services Department & Department of Human Services, the Health Systems and the Courts, as well as Calling the GBV Toll-Free Hotline at 0-800-A-WAY-OUT or Text/WhatsApp 672-9628 to request urgent attention.

Did You Know?

In our own country, since 2016 over 2000 cases of domestic violence have been reported annually. However, While these numbers are alarmingly high, many victims in Belize and every other country in the world are living in fear and not reporting their experiences.

Gender-based Violence Referral Pathway



The National Women's Commission Partners with Belize Crime Observatory

By *Sitnah Blease*

Gender Perspective in Information Management Process

To assist and train organizations in their analyzation and compilation of data using a gendered-approach, the Ministry of National Security, through the Belize Crime Observatory and with support from UNDP's InfoSegura Project and the National Women's Commission, hosted a virtual one-month course from August until September of 2020, which focused on promoting the application of the gender perspective to information management, for improved decision-making on matters about public safety and citizen security.

The course consisted of both theory and practical components and also focused on sensitizing participants on gender equality through reflecting on their personal experiences and observations. at the workplace, which invoked a sense of analytical thinking.

The overall objectives of the course were to:

- Promote a more comprehensive understanding of the importance of gender mainstreaming
- Develop the capacity of the participants to incorporate a gender perspective in the information management processes and the organizational culture
- Demonstrate the importance of gender-sensitive information management to policy and decision making
- Promote inter-agency collaboration and information sharing to enhance the quality and accuracy of data and information

Participants of the course were expected to have strengthened their conceptual framework, and understanding of the capturing, processing, and disseminating of information with a gender perspective, while also gaining practical experience in strategically communicating information to empower decision-makers, based on the institutional context.

Violence Against Women during the Covid-19 Pandemic in Central America

In another of its partnerships, the National Women's Commission also partnered with Belize Crime Observatory under UNDP's InfoSegura project as it focused on the issue of violence against women during the Covid-19 pandemic in Central America and the Dominican Republic. The project sought to optimize and scale up good practices while also taking advantage of evidence generated in the information management processes that were reinforced in the region as a result of alerts being raised regarding the increase of violence against women due to stay-at-home orders and their lack of access to reporting services.

Thus, the need for continued information for the public would be addressed through a comprehensive public awareness campaign while using evidence generated. With Belize included, the project was fixed on informing various targeted populations (victims of domestic violence, family members, and people in their trusted environment, potential victimizer and people in his trusted environment, journalists and civil society organizations, officials responsible for citizen security and for eradicating violence against women, boys, girls, and older adults) about the channels and mechanisms available to make reports of domestic violence safely during confinement as a result of COVID 19.) The Campaign would include strategies not being used by other organization such as webinars and a song composed by a national artist.



Men Engaging Boys to Advance Gender Equality and Help Prevent Gender-Based Violence



By Sitnah Blease

To address the dynamics of gender-based violence and the issues of masculinity in our society, the National Women's Commission and Spouses of CARICOM Leaders Action Network, with funding support from the British High Commission designed and implemented a Barbershop Forum in November 2019 to further engage men and boys in Belize on the importance of prioritizing key interventions in reducing violence against women and boys while also ensuring that the key issues concerning men and boys were also being addressed.

Being divided into three sessions: Opening, Plenary, and Group Discussions, the forum's main objectives were to:

- Establish a coalition of male leaders in the community to serve as advocates
- Prioritize possible interventions while also building on knowledge and providing the resources and tools to continue championing the reduction of gender-based violence in Belize
- Identify immediate (short-term) next steps for action in 2020.

In attendance at the virtual sessions were public and private sector organizations and companies, local government, different ministries of Belize as

well as past participants from the Men's Barbershop Forum held in November 2019.

Proceeding the forum, in August 2020, the National Women's Commission and Spouses of CARICOM Leaders Action Network, (SCLAN) also hosted a virtual Introductory Consultation entitled, "Engaging Men and Boys to Advance Gender Equality and Help Prevent Gender-Based Violence."

The Virtual Consultation's main focus was to create a coalition of men to advocate for gender equality and in turn, provide an opportunity for committed participants to host and moderate district forums to engage other men and boys throughout the country.

However, as a result of the pandemic, the planned Training of Trainers will be conducted until early 2021. A series of training sessions as an introductory training phase has been held on October 28 and on November 18. In addition, on December 9, a core group of leaders was identified and invited to guide the process of coalition development. Some participants are expected to deliver training sessions (not forums) in various schools, workplaces, and communities.



The National Women's Commission launches its GBV Complaint Mechanism

By Sitnah Blease

The National Women's Commission launched its countrywide Victim's Complaint Mechanism on Monday, August 17, 2020, which enables victims of gender-based violence or advocates to register situations where minimum standards of response and care are not being met by the police, healthcare, social services, court, or any other relevant government institutions.

Gender-based violence is a prevalent occurrence, which undermines the health, dignity, security, and autonomy of its victims, yet it remains masked in a culture of silence. Annually, there are over 2,000 domestic and sexual violence reports made to the police. While reporting is an important component of eliminating gender-based violence, these reports must be met with decisive and victim-centered actions.

As a result, we encourage victims and advocates of Gender-Based Violence to utilize the Victim's Complaint Mechanism which will form the basis for actions to improve the response and ensure consistency of standards within our government institutions.

Forms are located countrywide at designated government and non-governmental organizations in all districts and can also be found on the National Women's Commission Website and Facebook page for online use.

For more information on the Victim's Complaint Mechanism, visit the National Women's Commission website <https://www.nationalwomenscommissionbz.org> or Facebook page.

"WE HAVE TO PROMOTE HUMAN SOLIDARITY, AVOID INDIFFERENCE, AND PLAY A PART WITH SOCIETY IN THE SOLUTION OF THE PROBLEM OF VIOLENCE..."

Shakira

Gender-based Violence Complaint Mechanism

Have you ever reported instances of GBV and were treated unfairly by an officer when making your report at any of these organizations: Police Station, Health Care Facilities, Social Services Institutions, the Court System or any other Government Services?

If yes, you or someone you know can file your experience using the Gender-based Violence Complaint Forms, which are now available at various locations and online, to victims who have received inadequate services.

The Forms can be submitted electronically, placed inside boxes at designated offices in your district, or mailed FREE of cost at any post office.

All submitted complaints will be received by the National Women's Commission, after which you will be notified of its receipt and pending investigation.

Completed Forms will be forwarded to the respective organizations for a proper investigation to be conducted on your behalf, where you will later be advised of the outcome.

Forms and Boxes are available at the following locations

*Forms Only **Both Forms & Boxes +Free Countrywide Mailing

Corozal District

- *Corozal Community Hospital
- *Corozal Police Station
- **Corozal Diabetes Association
- **Department of Youth Services
- **Ministry of Human Development
- +Post Offices

Orange Walk District

- *Northern Regional Hospital
- *Orange Walk Police Station
- *Department of Youth Services
- **Belize Family Life Association
- **Ministry of Human Development
- *Holy Trinity Clinical Lab
- +Post Offices

Belize District

- *Eastern Division Police Station (Family Violence Unit)
- *Department of Youth Services (Belize City & **San Pedro)
- **National Women's Commission
- **Women's Department
- **Belize Family Life Association (Main Office & Clinic)
- +Post Offices

Cayo District

- *Police Station (Belmopan, San Ignacio & Benque Viejo)
- *Department of Youth Services
- **Cornerstone Foundation
- **Benque Viejo Town Council
- **Ministry of Human Development
- +Post Offices

Stann Creek District

- *Dangriga Police Station
- *Department of Youth Services
- **Dangriga Town Council
- **Belize Family Life Association
- **Ministry of Human Development
- +Post Offices

Toledo District

- *Punta Gorda Police Station
- *Department of Youth Services
- **Toledo Maya Women's Council
- **Sunshine Radio Station
- **Ministry of Human Development
- +Post Offices

#33 Cor. Regent/Dean Street

227-4284 / 227-2694

info@womenscommissionbz.org



Complaint Form

For office use only

Ref # _____

Date Revd: _____

Please use this form to tell us about your complaint so that we can help you and help improve the services in the area of gender-based violence (domestic violence, rape, sexual assault, sexual harassment, sexual abuse, and exploitation). Once you have completed this form please take it to the designated office in your district.

Personal Details of Affected Person				
Name:	Sex:	Date of Birth: DD/MM/YYYY		
Address		District:		
Phone number (s)		E-mail:		
Details of Advocate making complaint (use if you are filling this form on behalf of someone else)				
Name				
Relationship to Victim				
Address				
Phone number (s)	E-mail:			
(✓) Please tick the agency against whom the complaint is being made and indicate in which district, town, village or community, the incident happened				
Police Department	Women's Department/ Human Services	Health Facility	Magistracy	Other: _____ <small>Please specify</small>
Location:	Location:	Location:	Location:	Location:
Officer's Name and Badge #	Name of Officer	Name of Doctor, Nurse or Other:	Name of Officer:	Name of Officer:

Please provide a brief description of your complaint

Conversations with Women of Power

By Sitnah Blease

In many countries, including Belize, women and girls make up half of their country’s population. Yet they are underrepresented when it comes to leadership opportunities as a result of various ongoing factors such as gender inequality, equity, and discrimination.

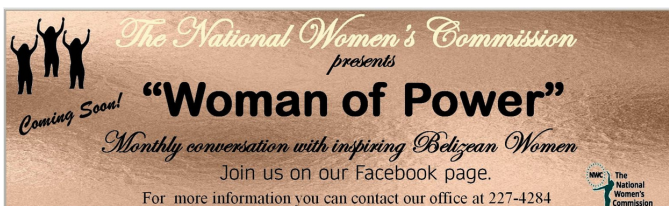
However, while much advancement has been made in these particular areas, due to the Corona Virus Pandemic, we have seen a drastic shift in the decades of progress made towards advancing and eliminating these global and pressing issues. However, women globally and in Belize continue to inspire us with their tenacity and drive to persevere and take on the responsibility of leadership roles.

Thus, the National Women’s Commission started an initiative on its Facebook Live Platform, to highlight and converse with inspiring women leaders as they share their stories and roles in furthering the development and advancement of women in leadership capacities. These conversations with women will hopefully inspire and empower Belizean women of all ages in following their dreams and believing in their true potential to be future Women Leaders in Belize.

The objective of the Women of Power conversations are::

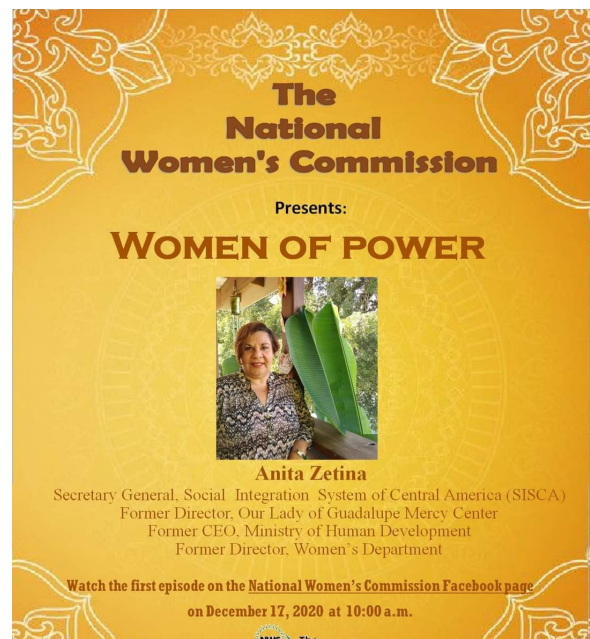
1. To highlight and converse with inspiring women leaders as they share their stories and roles in furthering the development and advancement of women in leadership capacities.
2. To highlight the various issues that women experience in their various fields such as gender inequality, equity, and discrimination etc.
3. To inspire and empower Belizean women of all ages in following their dreams and believing in their true potential to be future Women Leaders in Belize.

The themes and areas of discussion will be surrounding: Women in Government, Becoming a woman of influence – A Young Leader, Women in Education, Women in Technology, Women in the Security Forces, Women in Business, Increasing Women’s Partisan in Electoral Politics, Developing your Social Capital (influence network/sphere of influence). Due to technical difficulties, the first conversation was taped. It featured the work and experience of Ms. Anita Zetina.



“There is no limit to what we, as women, can accomplish.”

MICHELLE OBAMA,
AMERICAN WRITER AND
LAWYER



Yearly Observances for Women

By Sitnah Blease

National Outstanding Women's Awards Ceremony

Each year, The National Women's Commission along with other women agencies in Belize has been commemorating and celebrating women in the month of March.

With a calendar of activities held country-wide, the month is particularly celebrated by highlighting the work of outstanding Belizean women at the National Outstanding Women's Awards Ceremony. In addition to receiving an award from their nominating agency, each awardee is presented with a gift basket from Grace Kennedy Company Limited. The awardees are nominated by different partner organizations that play an active role in the empowerment of Belize's women. Each year the number of awardees increases.

However, in 2020, many events during Women's Month, including the National Outstanding Women's Awards Ceremony was canceled due to the Corona Virus Pandemic, however, the twenty-nine Awardees were still able to receive their gift baskets and wine from Grace Kennedy Company Limited and the US Embassy to Belize for their hard work.



16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence

The International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women and Girls is observed on October 25th of each year and marks the beginning of the 16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence which occurs from November 25 to December 10th each year.

Since 2016, the event continues to see participation from survivors, government officials, diplomatic corporations, educational institutions, civil societies, the private sector, and other stakeholders.

This year, the Launch of 16 Days of Activism along with its various activities were held virtually as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. However, this did not prohibit the myriad of activities that were held throughout Belize.

With this year's theme being, #ORANGEBELIZE: RESPOND, PREVENT, COLLECT, AND EMPOWER! Many partners, organizations, and the general public took part in engaging, participating, and advocating towards the elimination of gender-based violence in our country.

National Women's Commission Gender-Based Violence Committees

By Sitnah Blease

The National and District Gender and Gender-based Violence Committees are integrated multi-faceted, multi-sectoral response results-oriented committees who are responsible for addressing gender equality issues and all forms of gender-based violence at the national and district level and monitors the implementation of both the National Gender Policy and the National Gender-based Violence Action Plan.



National Gender & Gender-Based Violence Committee

Main Function:

- Harmonize referral and response processes among institutions
- Coordinate District implementation of the NGP and the NGBVAP through the District Committees
- Identify and respond to emerging issues in the areas of gender equality and gender-based violence



District Gender & Gender-Based Violence Committee

Main function:

- Provide leadership, accountability, and institutional coordination at the district level
- Identify gaps in services and resources at the local level, develop and implement local level strategies to address these needs
- Serve as a support group and a forum for inter-agency coordination to address challenges, coordinate resources to provide effective responses to GBV particularly in rural areas



They are comprised of organizations and not individuals who must work within the area of gender equality and gender-based violence such as Ministries (Human Development; National Security; Health; Education; Youth representative(s) (Youth arms of GBV organizations); Magistracy; Civil Society & Community Based Organizations.

“IN SPITE OF TEMPORARY VICTORIES, VIOLENCE NEVER BRINGS PERMANENT PEACE.” -MARTIN LUTHER KING JR.

Belizean Advocates Speaking Against Gender-Based Violence

When a woman is going through domestic abuse, we do not know what exactly she is going through.

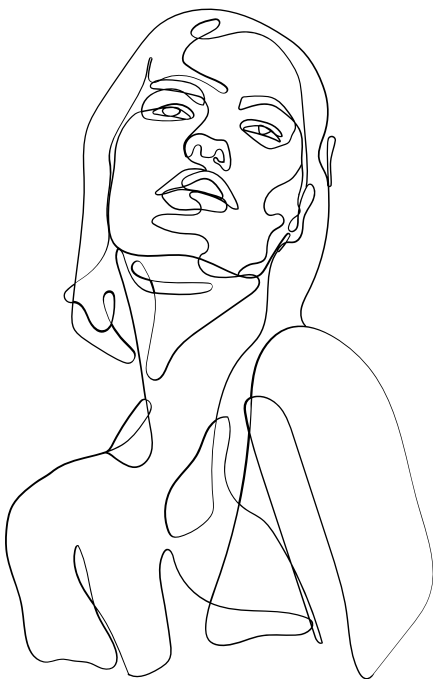
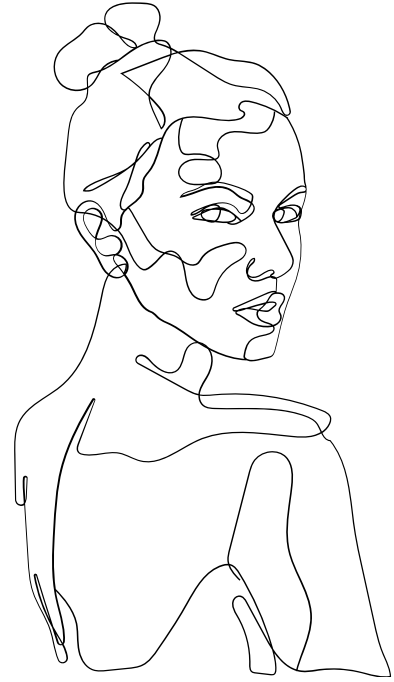
For this reason, we must not ***criticize*** or ***condemn*** these women for not reporting or taking their abusers through the court system. What we need to do is to ***establish more safe houses*** with a good support system, ***provide psychological counseling, financial support, job training, and job placement.***

These are tools that will help women feel like there is truly a way out with ***financial independence.***

This will then encourage more victims to come forward and seek the necessary help that they desire.

And as men, we too need to play a more active role in eliminating this problem.

- Chester Williams, COMPOL Belize



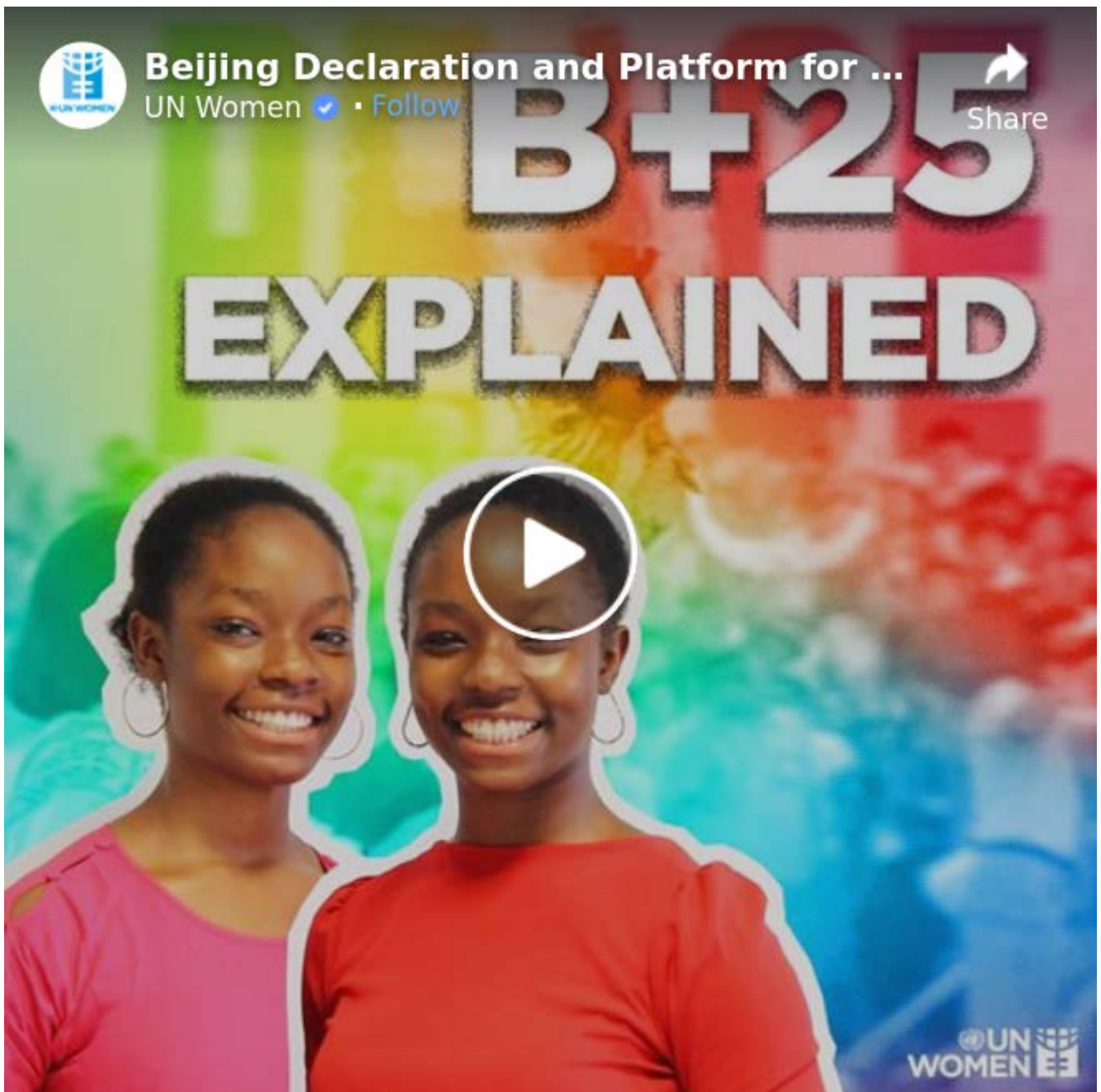
Reporting is one of the most important elements when dealing with Gender-Based Violence. But we must always remember that reporting is oftentimes a very dangerous action and a very dangerous time for victims. Their reports, their cries for help, must be met with decisive and victim-centered action. Action from all facets of society!

- Sitnah Blease, Advocate

Did You Know?

The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action is a visionary agenda for the empowerment of women. It is also one of the reference frameworks to analyze the situation of women around the world and to assess the efforts of States in support of women's empowerment.

In the video below, join Faith and Faithfulness as they share more about the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and how it supports us women.



Video: UN Women