



Third Plenary Meeting

Valparaiso, Chile

April 1 to 3, 2004

Report of the Second Meeting of the Group of Women Parliamentarians of the Americas

The Group of Women Parliamentarians of the Americas met at the National Congress of Chile, host legislature of the Third Plenary Meeting of the Inter-Parliamentarian Forum of the Americas, on Friday, April 2, 2004, from 8:30 to 10:15 a.m. The meeting was chaired by Congresswoman Margarita Stolbizer of the Republic of Argentina.

The meeting was attended by the 16 delegates whose names are listed in Annex 1.

The main theme of the meeting, presented by the Chief of the Division of Women and Development of ECLAC, Ms. Sonia Montañó, was entitled "Democratic Governance: Public Policies with a Gender Perspective. The Need to Include Men and Women in Regional Development Strategies."

Representing the Minister-Director of the National Women's Service of Chile, the Head of the Department on the Legal Status of Women, Ms. Patricia Silva Meléndez, spoke on "Progress and Challenges in Policies of Equal Opportunities for Women."

1. Presentations by the Guest Speakers

Ms. Sonia Montañó (Chief of the Women and Development Unit of ECLAC) said that the return to democratic institutions in many Latin American countries means that women's development has chiefly been identified with the exercise of the fundamental rights and freedoms enshrined in constitutions. She highlighted the role of women in the return to those institutions but said that, in practice, the rules that guarantee equality for women are often not enforced, or at least not completely.

She maintained that governance in Latin America is based on political pacts that keep women from equal access to elected office, which is particularly important considering the crisis in governance affecting some Latin American countries, where economic and institutional reforms have been made without considering equity and gender parameters.

She also affirmed that without women's economic contributions, poverty would increase in Latin America by 10%. The work of women in the home offsets government shortcomings in the social area (care economy). On average, 40% of women are in the workforce and, apart from their jobs, they are responsible for most housework. She went on to explain the main aspects of pro-woman policies in Sweden, the Netherlands, and the United States.

Ms. Patricia Silva Meléndez, Head of the Department on the Legal Status of Women (SERNAM), described the main features of Chile's National Women's Service. She explained that the agency was created after the return to democracy in the country and is headed by a director with the status of Minister of State. She pointed out that SERNAM has the following main functions: to propose and coordinate public policies to combat poverty among women; to design and implement projects on public awareness of women's rights; to study domestic legislation in order to propose reforms from a gender and equity perspective; and to promote participation by women in political and social fields.

She underlined the existence of a ministerial committee on equality of opportunity as part of the ministerial management improvement program, which includes a program to improve gender management.

She pointed out that there are still great challenges remaining for SERNAM, especially regarding the wage gap between women and men, and participation by women in politics, among other issues.

2. Recommendations

After a brief discussion – given the time constraints – in which the women parliamentarians expressed their views on the main theme of the meeting, conclusions and recommendations were drawn up by the officers.

Considering that:

- 1) Statistics indicate that women account for about 50% of the population of the Americas and that approximately 35% of them participate actively in the wage-earning workforce.
- 2) Democracy is the only possible space and framework for the development of the peoples, including women, in conditions of equity and equality.
- 3) The high percentage of women who are heads of households in Latin American countries and responsible for the economic, educational and emotional support of their families, has – as a result of the lack of initial economic independence in family relationships – caused women to be more likely to fall into poverty, which in turn increases the gap between poor men and women.
- 4) In the economically active population – according to data from ECLAC – women generally have more years of schooling than men, which suggests that women are adequately prepared for playing relevant roles in the labour, economic and cultural fields, at local and national levels.
- 5) In spite of statistics from public surveys, which show that people are now more willing to vote for women candidates for public positions and trust women executives, women are under-represented in elected positions of power or responsibility and in government, financial, and economic activities.

The Group of Women Parliamentarians of FIPA recommends that the Meeting:

1. Urge the governments of the member states of FIPA to acknowledge, express and emphasize the important role played by women in the struggle for the return and maintenance of democratic institutions in the countries of the Americas, opening up spaces for power and decision-making in the different branches of government, in conditions of equity and equality.
2. Request the member states of FIPA to establish a high-level institution in each country to propose and coordinate public policies with a gender perspective; to develop communications strategies to combat discrimination against women; to propose legal reforms for the same purpose; to develop projects and programs to improve the quality of life of women and their participation in political and social life, among other measures.
3. Urge the member states of FIPA to make every effort to ensure that the domestic legal framework, which acknowledges and enshrines equality for women, is effectively enforced.
4. Urge the member states of FIPA to ratify and enforce the provisions of the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and the Optional Protocol and those of all other international treaties that pursue the same end.
5. Request the member states of FIPA to consider cultural criteria of equity and gender perspective in all institutional and economic reforms and all public policies. This would make it possible to reduce the wage gap between men and women, and introduce labour reforms that encourage and enable men to participate in family life, sharing the responsibilities inherent in it more equitably.
6. Urge the member states of FIPA and their civil societies to create the conditions necessary to increase participation by women in politics, which is indispensable for strengthening the stability of democratic institutions and governance in our countries.
7. Urge the member states of FIPA to create or further develop, where necessary, legal conditions to ensure egalitarian participation by women in elected positions. Likewise, to respect the legislation that establishes quotas of this kind, where such legislation exists.
8. Request FIPA, through the Group of Women Parliamentarians, to implement and develop a system to monitor progress in each member state regarding laws and public and private development policies related to women.
9. Request the Unit for the Promotion of Democracy of the Organization of American States (OAS) to provide technical assistance in general and, in particular, to cooperate in holding regional forums of the Group of Women Parliamentarians of FIPA to strengthen and promote women's leadership in politics and democracy.

Valparaiso, April 2, 2004

Margarita Stolbizer, Congresswoman of Argentina
Chair of the Group of Women Parliamentarians of the Americas

Ana Maria Skoknic
Secretary

3. Annex 1 – Participants

Senator Silvia Gallego	Argentina
Congresswoman Margarita Stolbizer	Argentina
Senator Sandra Husbands	Barbados
Senator Madeleine Plamondon	Canada
Senator Celine Hervieux-Payette	Canada
Congresswoman Ximena Vidal	Chile
Congresswoman Alejandra Sepúlveda	Chile
Congresswoman Juana Vallejo	Ecuador –Andean Parliament
Congresswoman Virna Ileana López	Guatemala
Congresswoman Blanca Gamez	Mexico
Senator Ana María Figueredo	Paraguay
Senator Adriana Franco de Fernández	Paraguay
Senator Ada Solalinde de Romero	Paraguay
Congresswoman Ruth Wijdenbosch	Surinam
Congresswoman Tania D' Amelio	Venezuela
Congresswoman Jhannett Madríz Sotillo	Venezuela – Andean Parliament
Ms. Elizabeth Spehar	UPD / OAS
Mr. Jorge Calderón	UPD / OAS