



**Interview: Guadalupe Valdez**

Guadalupe Valdez, member of the Board of Directors of ParlAmericas, is involved in issues concerning the Group of Women Parliamentarians.

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**Message from the Outgoing Director General**

Gina Hill, the Director General of ParlAmericas, reflects on her experience leading the organization in its achievements over the last 3½ years.

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**Budget Oversight Workshop a Success**

Productive discussions emerged at our latest workshop gathering 24 parliamentarians and six Auditors General from the Caribbean.

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### **About ParlAmericas**

The next Board of Directors meeting will take place March 20–21, 2014, in Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic.

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### **Resource Centre**

This section features a selection of recent studies and articles about issues of interest to parliamentarians of the Americas.

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## **FULL ARTICLES**

## Interview with Parliamentarian Guadalupe Valdez

As ParlAmericas prepares for its 33rd Board of Directors meeting in Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic, we take the opportunity to speak with Guadalupe Valdez San Pedro, Member of the Chamber of Deputies of the Dominican Republic.

Following the 10th Plenary Assembly of ParlAmericas, Ms. Valdez was designated by her chamber to serve on the Board of Directors. She has participated in various ParlAmericas events and is involved in issues concerning the Group of Women Parliamentarians, including women's rights and food security.

### **Why do you feel it is important to take part in the activities of ParlAmericas?**

It is a space to share experiences and knowledge on topics of interest to the legislative realm, public policy, and civil society relations.

### **What are the pressing issues on the legislative agenda this year in the Dominican Republic? How will parliamentarians of your country benefit from dialoguing with other parliamentarians of the Americas?**

Every year, together with civil society organizations, we propose a list of initiatives to prioritize on the legislative agenda. Among these, there is important legislation for guaranteeing rights (Law on Food Sovereignty and Food and Nutrition Security for the Right to Food; Law on Housing, Habitat, and Human Settlements; Water Law of the Dominican Republic).

Also, laws that improve the quality of democracy (Law on Political Parties; Organic Law on Auditing and Oversight). Others are related to a more solidarity-based and sustainable economy (Law on the Solidarity-Based Economy Sector; Law on the Reform and Modernization of National Cooperation; Law on Agrarian Reform and Rural Development; Law on Climate Change of the Dominican Republic; Law on Payment for Environmental Services).

Dialogue with other parliamentarians enriches the debates and legislative practices, and allows us to exchange on topics of interest for our countries and our people.

### **As we approach International Women's Day, what do you consider the most important conversations that should be held regarding women's rights in the region?**

The right of women over their bodies. But it is also necessary to deepen political participation, not only regarding elected positions and key positions of political and institutional influence, but also internally within political parties.

In addition, promoting greater economic participation, from fair compensation for equal work, to promoting women's entrepreneurship and access to business management opportunities.

### **As regional coordinator of the Parliamentary Front Against Hunger in Latin America and the Caribbean, what do you consider the potential synergies between the Front and ParlAmericas?**

For the Parliamentary Front Against Hunger in Latin America and the Caribbean, the link with ParlAmericas is an opportunity to promote the commitment of legislators in the region to the fight against hunger, poverty, and for the Right to Food.

Spaces are generated for dialogue about the importance of laws on food and nutrition security, as well as the role of parliamentarians in passing budgets and public policy oversight.

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## Message from Gina Hill, the Outgoing Director General of ParlAmericas

### **What have been the most rewarding aspects and memorable moments for you as Director General?**

The moment we signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Organization of American States was a particularly significant accomplishment; it was the result of many years of talks and engagement. ParlAmericas is now firmly situated to carry out joint activities and contribute to regional strategy and dialogue alongside a major hemispheric player.

I also remember, vividly and fondly, observing countless moments of real engagement among parliamentarians from vastly different countries. It is truly remarkable to witness the connection when people share their experiences one-to-one, and the empowerment they gain from recognizing the similarities they share despite some obvious differences.

### **What are the major accomplishments of the organization over the last 3½ years under your leadership?**

In 2011 we underwent a major rebranding—we were previously known as the Inter-Parliamentary Forum of the Americas, or FIPA for the acronym in Spanish. We carried out a very smooth transition to a new name, new logo, new website, and an entirely renewed presence in the region. As ParlAmericas, we are more easily recognizable throughout the Americas as a network that fosters hemispheric dialogue.

Other major accomplishments include the first ever Strategic Plan guiding the organization's direction over a multi-year period, and the development of a financing strategy to assist in securing stable funding moving forward. We also undertook a comprehensive review of our governance systems and structures, resulting in a much more stable and coherent basis for the organization.

### **Looking ahead, what direction do you see ParlAmericas going in the future?**

It has become increasingly clear that countries can no longer act in isolation. We are all connected through any number of challenges and issues impacting our region – from energy, to environmental concerns, to the drug trade, to name a few.

The lives of citizens throughout the Americas are enriched by providing opportunities for their legislators to understand the larger hemispheric implications of any number of local and regional issues, to gain insights and ideas for addressing pressing challenges, and to build avenues of communications among peers in other countries.

ParlAmericas is well-placed to serve as both a forum for exchange and engagement, and as a vehicle to provide crucial capacity-building and opportunities for sharing best practices among parliamentarians.

### **Do you have any farewell remarks for the readers of ParlAmericas Express?**

From what I have witnessed over the past three and a half years, I have grown to believe strongly in the power of parliamentary dialogue. This is the case not only for the benefit of individual parliamentarians and their constituents, but also for providing an alternative avenue for international engagement when formal diplomatic relations between countries may be experiencing some tension.

It has been a pleasure and a privilege to work with so many dedicated and talented legislators, and those who work to support them in countless ways. I have learnt a tremendous amount about our Americas. I firmly believe that through the commitment and engagement of parliamentarians, ParlAmericas can continue to grow as a forum for strengthening capacities and contributing to hemispheric dialogue.

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## Budget Oversight Workshop a Success

ParlAmericas' latest capacity-building workshop, Strengthening Parliamentary Budget Oversight in the Caribbean - Phase 2, took place February 5–6, 2014, in Port of Spain, Trinidad and Tobago. It was attended by 24 parliamentarians and six heads of Supreme Audit Institutions (SAIs) from Caribbean countries.

Participants stressed the unique opportunity the event had created by convening parliamentarians from both government and opposition, as well as SAI heads.

At the closure of the workshop, participant and Senator of The Bahamas Cheryl Bazard stated, “It has been incredibly useful. The key is synergy with all partners, inclusive of AGs [Auditors General], SAIs and the public so that there is a greater awareness of PACs [Public Accounts Committees].”

Key outputs of the workshop included the identification of ways to strengthen PACs in small jurisdictions where the PAC rarely or never meets, as well as a discussion about how PACs can support SAI independence and the production of timely financial statements.

According to Emma Hippolyte, Minister for Commerce, Business Development, Investment and Consumer Affairs of Saint Lucia, “It is time to start a public discussion about accountability and transparency and the role of parliamentarians leading the way.”

To conclude the two-day event, parliamentarians and heads of SAIs shared key findings arising from their deliberations on moving forward to strengthen the estimates process and PACs. These will be presented in a final report that will be made available shortly on the ParlAmericas website.

In the words of Carl Greenidge, Member of Parliament and Chair of PAC in Guayana, “[I am] pleased with the extent of the contributions from colleagues which reflected both the enthusiasm as well as the value they placed on this most important issue.”

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## About ParlAmericas: Meet the Board of Directors

The Board of Directors is elected at the Plenary Assembly of ParlAmericas. It meets three times per year to set strategy and oversee functions of the organization.

The next Board meeting will take place March 20–21, 2014, in Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic. Parliamentarians representing the four sub-regions of the Americas will discuss:

- Updates from the International Secretariat
  - Proposals for the themes of the next Gathering of the Group of Women Parliamentarians and the 11th Plenary Assembly
  - The organization's work plan and budget for the coming cycle
  - Funding for the organization.
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## Resource Centre

*Please note that ParlAmericas does not necessarily endorse the views in articles profiled.*

### **Humanity Divided: Confronting Inequality in Developing Countries**

This report from the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) sheds light on the complex ways inequalities can undermine the foundations of development, as well as the holistic approach necessary to build inclusive societies.

### **Is Geography Destiny? A Primer on North American Relations**

Twenty years after NAFTA came into effect, the authors of this Wilson Center publication offer trilateral analyses taking into account the present-day contexts that have transformed approaches to North American cooperation and integration.

### **Betting on Parity: The Democratization of Political Systems in Latin America** (in Spanish)

This OAS publication provides case studies of the experiences of Ecuador, Bolivia, and Costa Rica in developing stronger democracies through women's political participation.

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