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Legislators and the economic, social, political and gender implications of prospective trade agreements

## Far more than trade

*Hosted by the Canadian section of FIPA, the First Trade Knowledge Workshop for Parliamentarians was held in Ottawa, March 18<sup>th</sup>-20<sup>th</sup>. Delegates from eight countries of the Americas attended the workshop to expand their technical knowledge on the topic of trade. We asked a representative from each country what they got out of the workshop and here's what they had to say:*

According to Bolivian Congresswoman Elsa Guevara, the workshop provided an opportunity to reflect on the role of parliament and its importance, "in terms of controlling public expenditure, and not just as a mechanism for approving economic projects, but also a mechanism for maintaining control over federal spending and holding the government to account."

For Colombian Congresswoman Nancy Patricia Gutiérrez Castañeda the workshop was "a very useful tool for participants." "The role of the Congress in trade agreements is much clearer when seen in light of the experiences and lessons learned during the workshop," she added.

Dominican Member of Parliament Mr. Norris Charles described the workshop as "very relevant, timely and meaningful;" noting that trade agreements

should not only include governments, but that "Parliament itself must be informed, involved; the consultation process must be held not only with parliamentarians but also with the general public... I will inform my fellow parliamentarians and the people in my constituency of their role in the negotiation process of these trade agreements," he added.

trade agreements entered into with developed and developing countries, and to realize how via trade we can work to alleviate poverty."

"The workshop has been very helpful for me," agreed Mr. Charles Learmond, Member of Parliament of Jamaica, "as I really didn't know about the intricacies of trade." Following the workshop Mr. Learmond indicated he would return to

interesting" because "it made us stop to think about what we do as parliamentarians to hold our governments accountable. It also provided the opportunity to reflect on how far or how near we are from our constituents."

"I believe all the delegates from across the Americas including Canada had an opportunity to learn more about trade agreements, the relationship between trade and our economies and of course how this is going to affect all the people in our countries," summarized Member of Parliament James Bezan, Chairman of the Canadian Section of FIPA, "I am sure we all walk away as better parliamentarians."

For more information on the workshop visit [www.e-fipa.org](http://www.e-fipa.org)



Photo: FIPA

Legislators attending the Trade Knowledge Workshop in Ottawa, Canada.

Salvadorian Congresswoman Ingrid Berta Bendix noted that she would share her new knowledge with her caucus, commenting that what she learnt during the workshop "would be extremely useful for us, as in El Salvador there is much development in the area of free trade."

For Senator Edmonde Suplice Beauzile of Haiti, the importance accorded to the workshop lies in the fact that "it helped us understand the

Jamaica to "share my ideas with my colleagues and to consult regularly with my constituents because they themselves need to know about trade."

"Even though I do not subscribe to the opinion that free trade is a means of extricating our countries from under-development," said Mexican Congressman Salvador Ruiz Sánchez, he emphasized that the workshop was "extremely

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# Advancing women's rights: the Bolivian experience

The challenge of enabling women to exercise their full rights as citizens demands a redoubled effort from society as a whole to relearn and reassess new types of relationships that make gender equality possible in the wielding of power.

Traversing economic and political barriers requires an investment in human capital. This investment will give states the opportunity to undertake human development that will reduce the gender gap.

According to the National Population and Housing Census, there were 4,150,475 women in Bolivia in 2001. The poverty in which women live is reflected in the high levels of violence — seven out of 10 women suffer some form of violence, be it political, family, psychological or physical — and in their low level of political involvement.

Female illiteracy in Bolivia is 19.35 % and male illiteracy, 6.94% . These figures climb in rural areas, where female illiteracy is 37.91% compared with 14.42% among men.

Women's participation in political issues is also threatened by other factors. According to information provided by the Vice-Ministry of Women, 43% of political harassment cases are gender-based. At the same time, hindrance of exercise

nears 23.19%. In Bolivia, deputies and senators are elected through a system of lists, with incumbents and substitutes. Substitutes can only access power if the incumbent dies or resigns. There have been cases of female incumbents and male substitutes where the woman was subjected to all manner of coercion to force her to resign in favour of the man, or where the woman was prevented from exercising

and the *Family Assistance, Family Code* and our *Political Constitution*, which directly benefit women and facilitate protection of their rights through the justice system.

In the area of political rights, we have the *Political Party, Citizens Group and Indigenous People's Law*, which obliges political parties and groups to alternate the gender of their lists of candidates for

protects all women who provide services as domestic employees, fixing their hours of work and minimum salary, and obliging employers to provide them with medical insurance and other social benefits. In the same manner, the *National Institute for Agrarian Reform (INRA) Law* has guaranteed women access to property. In the past, this right was reserved solely for men.

Photos: United Nations World Food Programme, Bolivia



Several organizations work to reduce the illiteracy rate in Bolivia. In rural areas, female illiteracy is 37.91%.

her role. This is what we call "gender-based political harassment" or "hindrance of exercise".

Over the past two decades we have made enormous strides in protecting and guaranteeing rights in the search for gender equality. Today, we have such legal tools as the *Law to Counter Family or Domestic Violence*, the *Law to Protect Victims of Sexual Offences*, the *Law to Expedite Civil Proceedings*

elected positions, giving women 30% representation. Similarly, we can rely on the *Law on the Convocation of the Constituent Assembly*, where a protective margin has been established requiring that 79 of the 255 constituents be women. Today, through inclusion of spaces in the candidates list, we now have 88 women constituent members.

In the social arena, the *Domestic Workers' Law* has been approved. This law

We have made considerable progress. What we need to do now is work on publicizing, applying and interpreting these standards to ensure women are aware of them and that those who mete out justice interpret and apply them correctly.

**By Deputy Elsa Guevara,  
Chamber of Deputies of  
Bolivia**



# The Legislature in Mexico

Photo: Mexican Senate

The Mexican State is divided into three branches: the Legislative, the Executive and the Judiciary. The Constitution establishes that Congress is vested with the Legislative Power, which is in turn divided into two Houses: the House of Representatives and the Senate. The former consists of 500 representatives, 300 of them elected by direct voting and 200 by the principle of proportional representation, the latter not being elected by direct voting but on the basis of the total amount of votes obtained in the 5 regions into which the country is divided. The House of Representatives is entirely renewed every three years.

There are 128 senators; the 31 states and the Federal District have three representatives each: two elected by a relative majority and the third by the first minority (second place). The remaining thirty-two senators are elected by proportional representation. The Senate is entirely renewed every six years.

The Constitution prevents deputies and senators from being re-elected for an immediately subsequent period; it further provides for the immunity of their opinions, and restrains them from holding any other remunerated office in the civil service. The right to a start bill of law is held by deputies, senators, the President and state congresses.

Whenever a bill or decree is approved by the House that originated it (either the Chamber of Deputies or the Senate), it is then passed on to the other Chamber for discussion. If no observations are raised it is sent to the Executive which, in the absence of any objections,



Interior of the Senate, Mexico.

publishes it immediately. If the President turns it down, the bill or decree is returned together with any observations to the Chamber where it originated, which discusses it again and, subsequently, passes it on to the other Chamber.

In the event the Chamber in charge of reviewing the bill or decree does not approve it, it returns it to the originating Chamber; if the reviewing Chamber raises any objections, the bill or decree is returned to the Chamber of origin, where only the observations are discussed, and then approved. Should the observations not be approved by the Chamber where the bill or decree originated it is returned to the Chamber in charge of the review and, if still not approved, it is once more returned and can only be taken up again in another term.

Either Chamber may start a bill, except the ones regarding public loans, taxes or contributions, which must be first discussed in the Chamber of Deputies.

Current legislation guarantees representation of both genders. With a view to increasing representation of the female gender, the Federal Code of Electoral Institutions and Procedures establishes the proportions that parties have to observe, as well as their obligation to include women in their proportional representation lists and in the lists of candidates to be appointed by relative majority.

State reform appears to be

the principal task for this Sixtieth Legislature. This implies the modification of the Government and State regime, of the democratic and the electoral system, of federalism, the reform of the Judiciary, of the Treasury and of social guarantees. This reform will prevail in most of the discussions carried out by both Chambers.

**By Deputy Salvador Ruiz Sánchez, Chamber of Deputies of Mexico**

## Chamber of Deputies (2006–2009)

- ◆ 500 deputies
- ◆ 113 women
- ◆ 387 men
- ◆ Main parties:
  - National Action Party - PAN 41.2 %
  - Democratic Revolution Party - PRD 25.4 %
  - Institutional Revolutionary Party - PRI 12.8 %
  - Others 12.2 %

## Senate (2006–2012)

- ◆ 128 senators
- ◆ 23 women
- ◆ 105 men
- ◆ Main parties:
  - National Action Party - PAN 40.6 %
  - Institutional Revolutionary Party - PRI 25.78 %
  - Democratic Revolution Party - PRD 20.31 %
  - Others 13.28 %



# The OAS meets in Panama

"Energy for Sustainable Development" will be the main theme of the thirty-seventh regular session of the Organization of American States (OAS) General Assembly, to be held in Panama City, Panama, from June 3 to 5, 2007.

During the event 34 ministers of Foreign Affairs of the Americas will meet to advance the regional energy agenda, through the processes set forth in the Panama Declaration. According to Panama's Foreign Affairs Minister, Samuel Lewis Navarro, it is expected that the declaration will contain "realistic initiatives bringing tangible benefits to the

American nations".

The OAS gathers Heads of State of the Western Hemisphere to foster increased multilateral cooperation around democratic values, defend common interests, and address material issues related to the region and the world. This is the main multilateral forum of the region which seeks to strengthen democracy, promote human rights, and fight against shared problems such as poverty, terrorism, drugs, and corruption.

FIPA was created pursuant to a resolution adopted by the OAS General Assembly.

Source: The Organization of American States (OAS)  
[www.oas.org](http://www.oas.org)

Image: OAS



## Women legislators, let's get writing!

In celebration of International Women's Day, the president of the Group of Women Parliamentarians of the Americas, Senator Cecilia López Montaña, invites her counterparts to participate in the "Share Experiences to Inspire" project, by sending articles that will inspire other women to get involved with politics.

The goal of the project is to use the experiences of those women who already participate actively in politics to inspire, encourage and help other women to become engaged in political life. López Montaña suggested the following

themes as a starting point:

- How did I become a woman parliamentarian?
- Three recommendations I would give to a woman who is interested in participating in political life.
- Why was worth it and what did I achieve with it?

We invite those women legislators who are interested in writing an article to contact the FIPA Secretariat at: [info@e-fipa.org](mailto:info@e-fipa.org) in order to get technical details on formatting and length.

### FIPA EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

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- Deputy Luiz Carlos Hauly, Brazil

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- Senator Ricardo García Cervantes, Mexico

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- Deputy Iván Moreira Barros, Chile

#### Former FIPA President

- Senator Céline Hervieux-Payette, Canada

#### President of the Group of Women Parliamentarians of the Americas

- Senator Cecilia López Montaña, Colombia

#### Plenary Meeting Host Country

- To be confirmed

## About FIPA

The Inter-Parliamentary Forum of the Americas (FIPA) is an independent network made up of the national legislatures of the member countries of the Organization of American States (OAS) committed to promoting parliamentary participation in the inter-American system.

### FIPA Executive Committee meets in Brazil

The 16<sup>th</sup> FIPA Executive Committee Meeting will take place June 1 and 2, 2007, in Brasilia, Brazil.

Members will examine various projects in order to carry out the recommendations adopted at the 5<sup>th</sup> Plenary Meeting in Bogotá last November, and will begin arrangements for the next Plenary Meeting.

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