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FIPA Executive Committee members seek to strengthen ties with the OAS during the General Assembly

Mission accomplished at OAS

Members of the Executive Committee of FIPA, together with three members of the Canadian section, participated in the 37th session of the General Assembly of the Organization of American States in Panama City, Panama.

They were there to strengthen ties between the OAS and parliaments of the Americas, to identify new cooperation mechanisms that include legislators and to seek status for FIPA enabling the organisation to attend meetings of the OAS and inter-American summits as a special observer.

During three days of intense activity from June 3 to 5, Members of Parliament James Bezan (Canada) and Stanford Callender (Trinidad and Tobago), and Senator Ricardo García Cervantes (Mexico), all members of FIPA's Executive Committee, spoke with the heads of the Canadian, Costa Rican, Guyanese, Mexican and Trinidadian delegations and with the Secretary General of the OAS, José Miguel Insulza. They also visited the Panamanian legislature and met with various members of the Panamanian National

Assembly, including the Speaker, Elías Castillo. At the end of each meeting the FIPA representatives delivered a statement summarizing possible initiatives to promote cooperation between FIPA and the OAS, which had been approved during the last Executive Committee meeting, in Brasilia, Brazil.

allow legislators to participate formally. Nevertheless, the subject of stronger relations with parliaments is frequently discussed at the OAS. As part of a recent resolution to promote and strengthen democracy, for example, the General Assembly recommended supporting the legislatures of member states

program to train newly elected parliamentarians which will be offered in Guatemala once the legislative elections have been held.

At the invitation of the OAS Secretary General, members of the Executive Committee will visit Washington in the coming months to establish ways in which the two organizations can cooperate more effectively in the future – a significant advance considering that promoting greater cooperation between parliamentarians and the OAS was the main objective of the mission.

Photo: FIPA



With the Panama Canal as it's backdrop the OAS encourages regional discussion.

Every year the OAS General Assembly brings together foreign ministers from 34 countries in the Americas, with this year's meeting focusing on the theme of "energy for sustainable development."

Currently, OAS General Assembly sessions do not

allow legislators to participate formally. Nevertheless, the subject of stronger relations with parliaments is frequently discussed at the OAS. As part of a recent resolution to promote and strengthen democracy, for example, the General Assembly recommended supporting the legislatures of member states

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Brazilian law will increase employment

At the Fifth Plenary Assembly in Bogotá, Colombia, last November, FIPA legislators proposed a series of measures encouraging their members to pass anti-poverty legislation. One such initiative has already been passed by the Brazilian Parliament.

Different strokes for different folks. In this spirit, the Brazilian National Congress approved a law last December that provides for special treatment for micro and small businesses – those with sales under R\$ 2.4 million (US\$1.1 million). The new law simplifies the red tape required to register new companies, reduces tax by 15% to 45%, simplifies tax payment procedures, and allows small companies to join together in purchasing and sales consortiums and to take part in bidding for official procurements under R\$ 80 thousand.

The law was discussed by representatives of civil society and government, and the Brazilian parliament created a special group to examine the issue – from the preliminary debates to the regulation process (yet to be completed). Deputy Luiz Carlos Hauly, FIPA President, was in charge of the negotiations which lasted two years and culminated in this law. He enthusiastically notes that micro and small businesses generate 98% of the jobs on the labour market and represent 20% of Brazil's Gross Domestic Product.

In the medium term, the introduction of this law is expected to encourage one million people now active in the informal economy to register as companies and thus generate 2 million jobs. These numbers will lead to a complete change in the Brazilian tax system, since small businesses will begin to influence our society's wealth creation and income distribution processes, thus reducing poverty in accordance with the goals



As small and micro enterprises generate the majority of employment a new law seeks to incorporate them to the formal market.

established by the United Nations Organization and the commitment made by FIPA member countries.

Positive Numbers

As a country nearly the size of a continent, Brazil has great social, cultural and economic differences among its states. Rio Grande do Norte, one of the poorest states, experienced a positive balance among closings, openings and reactivations of micro

businesses, actions directly linked to the acceptance of the General Law on Micro and Small Businesses by the business community.

In gaining total acceptance and implementation of the law by the industrial, commercial and service sectors in their various economic activities, partnership with SEBRAE (the Brazilian Micro and Small Business Support Service) has

submitted documents containing 100,000 signatures supporting the Law.

With offices in all 26 states and the Federal District, SEBRAE encourages entrepreneurs to set up their own businesses in a rational way. Technicians provide training and guidance with respect to both the consumer market and how to seek out financial resources. They

Photos: Rodrigo Moreira, Agência Sebrae de Notícias (ASN)

been essential. The Service provides ongoing training to accountants enabling them to passing on information and improve implementation of the Law. SEBRAE had previously held public hearings in each state so that entrepreneurs could present their demands. At the ceremony launching the special commission to discuss the subject, the chairman of FIESP (São Paulo Industry Federation, an institution representing entrepreneurs in São Paulo)

also monitor developments in order to correct errors that occur in the process of building up a new company. One of the benefits seen today is the organization of small-scale production in the poorer regions.

By Ana Maria Mejía, advisor to Deputy Luiz Carlos Hauly, House of Representatives, Brazil





Women in Action

ParlAmericas Supplement 2007

Women parliamentarians write about gender equality advances in the Americas

As part of our commitment to inter-parliamentary dialogue, we present this special four page supplement looking at advances in gender equality in the Americas.

Written by women parliamentarians from North,

South, Central America and the Caribbean, each article focuses on an inspirational success story resulting from parliamentary action.

We hope the new practices, norms and legislation described here will serve as

both lesson and inspiration to parliamentarians of the Americas working to promote gender equality in our region, and we encourage you to contact us with success stories of your own.

Photo: Senate of Colombia



Cecilia López Montaña

Working together in Colombia

Given how important it is for us to support one another and learn from the experiences we have lived, I welcome the opportunity to share with you the valuable experience of the creation of a women's caucus in the Colombian parliament.

During the past legislature we were able to call together representatives and senators from the various political parties to establish a special committee for women and thus work together for gender equity, social and labour rights, and the mental, sexual and reproductive health of Colombian women, girls and teenaged girls.

Last November, that initiative led to female members of the Congress working together to submit the first major bill of law that strengthens the rights of women in Colombia and protects them against violence — not just physical violence, but also mental and social violence and violence in the workplace. We are referring to the only bill on this topic that was able to



Photo: Senate of Colombia

Members of the Colombian women's caucus during a meeting.

secure 25 signatures of members of the most diverse political parties. It will also be the first one with those characteristics that will be accepted.

It is important to be clear that that this committee was established to support and take measures to increase the participation of women in politics at all levels of the economy and society, to combat abuse and social discrimination and contribute to respect of the sexual and

reproductive rights of women, teenaged girls and girls. To that end, we will now work on a bill to amend the constitution and allow a quota law for political parties as well as a law creating a 'Standing Committee on Women' in the Colombian Congress.

It is also important to note the need for women's participation in debates about issues of importance to the future of our region, such as the free trade agreement with

the United States and the Rural Development Act.

Topics such as these demonstrate just how important it is that women participate in politics as such issues reflect the impact that women can have on the design of policies and in improving the quality of life of women. For these reasons, it is important to set aside the political leanings that separate us and join together for the improvement and drafting of public policy crafted by us in favour of our rights.

Cecilia López Montaña is a Colombian Senator and President of FIPA's Group of Women Parliamentarians of the Americas.

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Reinforcing the quota law

Since the signing of Law 13,010 in 1947, which recognized women's right to vote, no law has had such symbolic importance nor prompted such an intense debate on gender equity in politics and in decision-making processes in Argentina as Law 24,012 on the "female quota", which was signed on 6 November 1991—a law that opened the door to the approval of other similar laws in a further nine countries in Latin America.

The Argentinian law establishes that a minimum of 30% of the candidates on the closed lists of the 24 electoral districts in the country must be women, and that those women must hold positions in which they could be elected, not positions in

which there is no possibility whatsoever of being elected. Lists that do not comply with the law are rejected.

In Argentina, the Quota Law constituted a positive action that improved the visibility of women in public spaces, allowed their real integration into both legislative chambers and facilitated their access to democratically elected executive positions. However, compliance with the law was only obtained by bringing the parties before the courts.

Although in the end the parties respected and complied with the law, they mostly did so in a minimalist way, placing women in the lowest positions allowed by law and failing to integrate them into the boards of

directors of their party management bodies. For that reason, I have proposed an amendment to Law 23,298 on political parties that seeks to ensure enforcement of the female quota in the internal life of the political parties and full integration of women into their management bodies.

With the exception of the Quota Law and isolated cases such as the Constitution of the City of Buenos Aires and the appointment of two women to the Supreme Court of Justice, our country still lacks legislation that establishes positive actions in matters of gender for the national or provincial executive spheres and active policies that promote the participation of women in the various realms

Photo: Congress of Argentina



Alicia Tate

of public and private activity.

However, as we work to increase affirmative action legislation on an ongoing basis we begin to shape new concepts of equality, democratic legitimacy and female citizenship in Argentina.

Alicia Tate is a Deputy from Argentina

Sixteen days of activism

On November 7th, 2006, the Chamber of Deputies of the Dominican Republic approved a law declaring a national campaign entitled "16 Days of Activism Against Violence Against Women," which sprung from an initiative which I launched with my colleague, Deputy Minerva Tavárez Mirabal.

The law formalises the state's involvement in the international 16 Days of Activism campaign, started by the Center for Women's Global Leadership in 1991. The 16 Days begin on November 25th, the International Day Against Violence Against Women, and end on International Human Rights Day, December 10th, symbolically linking violence against

women to the violation of human rights.

November 25th also marks the death of the Mirabal sisters – Dominican activists assassinated in 1960 during the Trujillo regime and celebrated as symbols of feminism throughout the Americas since the 1980s. Indeed, it was in recognition of the Mirabal sisters that the United Nations chose November 25th as the International Day Against Violence Against Women.

The 16 Days of Activism campaign invites organisations and governments to work together in raising awareness about the seriousness of gender violence, which continues to be an issue in

our region. In my country, for example, 158 female homicides and 8.404 complaints of violence against women were reported between January 1st and November 25th of 2006 alone.

Beyond cementing our state's commitment to the 16 Days of Activism, this new law recommends that a commission of executive, legislative and civil society representatives be created to streamline coordination of annual campaign activities so as to maximise their effectiveness and spread the message that violence against women must end.

To date, approximately 1,700 organizations in 130 countries have participated in

Photo: FIPA



María Estela de la Cruz

the 16 Days of Action campaign. Given the seriousness of this issue I encourage you, my colleagues, to establish or support 16 Days campaigns throughout the Americas and help us bring an end to violence against women in our region.

María Estela de la Cruz is the Chair of the Gender Equality Commission in the Chamber of Deputies of the Dominican Republic.



Working for equality in business management

Photo: The Senate of Canada

In recent decades women have entered political and managerial positions in greater numbers and progress has been made in promoting gender equality.

However, women remain significantly underrepresented on boards of directors, a factor that both denies them their rightful place at decision-making levels, and prevents countless businesses from tapping into their valuable skills, perspectives and experience.

In Canada and the United States, it's estimated that only about 12% of board members are women, while the international average remains below 10%, according to the Ethical Investment Research Service.

One of the leading barriers to women acceding to directorships is the commonly held view among chief executive officers that there is a shortage of qualified women to fill those positions, even if any serious attempt to look at the facts will confirm the opposite. In Canada, for instance the recently published study *Women in the Lead* drew up a list of 550 women who met and even exceeded the qualifications for corporate directorships.

At the institutional level, other barriers include everything from a reliance on personal

networks that exclude women, to an aversion to appointing women, to systemic gender biases, to a dearth of mentoring opportunities.

Yet it is a well-established fact that diversity, when properly managed, allows for better decision-making, and that gender diversity is associated with stronger financial performance, so it makes good business sense for companies to promote greater female representation on their boards. The problem

passed requiring that state-owned and public companies have 40% female representation on their boards. Spain has also made huge strides in this regard, requiring that boards of business corporations be 40% female by 2008.

Although legislation will go a long way to bring about change, there are other methods that will help put more women into corporate boardrooms. First, women must actively create networks to mentor

Photo: FIPA



A change in legislation would put more women in directorship positions.

is determining the best means of creating the attitudinal changes that will yield this desired result - Change will not happen without pressure.

In my view, the solution begins with legislation, and we can look at a few countries for inspiration in this regard. In Norway, for instance, legislation has been

senior female managers and help them develop the skills and experience needed for board membership. Second, women must educate themselves about corporate governance and recruitment methods. And third, corporate boards must be encouraged to professionalize their appointment processes by, among other things,



Céline Hervieux-Payette

developing inventories of qualified women, to ensure greater gender diversity among their members.

Enlightened corporate governance and genuine democracy need to involve women at all levels to ensure that both government and business profit from the quality women bring to the table better than anyone else: leadership based on discussion, consensus, transparency and honesty.

I encourage all my FIPA colleagues to address this issue in the weeks and months ahead, to devise and implement solutions that will ensure fair representation for women on boards throughout the Americas.

Doing so will significantly improve the economic conditions and quality of life of all our fellow citizens.

Céline Hervieux-Payette is Leader of the Opposition in the Senate of Canada. She is the immediate past chair of FIPA and holds several corporate directorships.



Making women count in Antigua and Barbuda

The concept of gender equality has begun to take root in Antigua and Barbuda and seeds planted in recent years are beginning to bear fruit. In March 2004, I became the first and only woman ever to be elected to the House of Representatives in the history of my country, demonstrating a significant change in attitude towards the idea of women in power.

Indeed, since my election there has been a concerted commitment to gender equity by the new government, as more women are being recognized and elevated to the highest offices in government.

The President of the Senate, Speaker of the House, Commissioner of Police, the Ombudsman, Director General of Tourism, Director of Youth and Ambassadors to the OAS and Latin America are all women. On July 17, 2007, Antigua and Barbuda welcomed the first female Governor General, Her Excellency Louise Lake-Tack.

All these are not mere tokens but are women of substance who have demonstrated a capacity to perform at the highest levels and who possess competencies which are being channeled to serve the nation of Antigua and Barbuda.

Three more women have presented themselves to run on party tickets for the next

General Elections in Antigua and Barbuda, constitutionally due by March 2009. This is a major step for this country as women have begun to forge new pathways which are taking them from the bedroom to the boardroom.

As early as 1989, the government signed and ratified the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women, CEDAW and the Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1993. These are



Ambassador Deborah-Mae Lovell, current Chair of the OAS Permanent Council.

recognized as the two major international human rights instruments that set standards for the protection of the rights of women and children. The unwavering commitment of the government to eliminate discrimination against women was again demonstrated in April, 2006, with the

ratification of the Optional Protocol to the CEDAW Convention, making us one of only five Caribbean countries to do so.

Antigua and Barbuda is also party to the OAS Convention of Belem do Para, another major international commitment aimed at eradicating domestic violence. We now have, among other efforts, a Sexual Offences Act, a 24 hour hotline, counseling services and emergency

Photo: Juan Manuel Herrera, OAS

accommodation all managed by the Directorate of Gender Affairs.

In schools across the nation, girls continue to out-perform boys at the primary and secondary levels and more girls are going on to Universities and colleges for tertiary education. Between

Photo: Parliament of Antigua and Barbuda



Dr. Jacqui Quinn-Leandro

1995 and 2006 the Board of Education awarded 1600 University scholarships; of those 1038 were female.

This augurs well for the future since it means that more women are equipping themselves for leadership and management of civic, business and political affairs in the twin island state. Though it can be argued (and it has) that more women in the boardroom does not necessarily translate into more gender sensitive policies, programs and laws, it is important to have that critical mass walking the corridors of power and effecting changes in the society which will make an impact that redounds to the benefit of women and girls in Antigua and Barbuda society.

Dr. Jacqui Quinn-Leandro is the Minister of Labour, Public Administration and Empowerment for Antigua and Barbuda and President of the Inter-American Commission of Women (CIM) at the OAS.



Trinidad and Tobago's Parliament

Photo: Communication Unit, Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago

As a former British colony the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago has a parliamentary system patterned after the British Westminster system of parliamentary government which consists of the Head of State (Monarch or President), an executive branch made up of members of the legislature and led by the Leader of the party with the majority, the presence of opposition parties and either a bicameral or unicameral legislature. The Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago is characterized as 'bicameral'.

Members of Parliament are elected at periodic general elections and are regarded as representatives, rather than instructed delegates of their constituents. The Executive Government is accountable to, and may only expend money appropriated by, Parliament. Freedom of speech, debates and proceedings of Parliament are secured against questioning in any court or place outside of Parliament and the rights of the minority in the Chamber are protected.

The Constitution establishes that the Parliament of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago shall consist of the President, the Senate and the House of Representatives.

The House of Representatives is comprised of the Speaker and 36 elected members representing electoral constituencies, each serving a parliamentary term that is a maximum of five-years. The number of elected members will increase to 41 during the general election scheduled for later this year.

The Senate comprises 31 Senators appointed by the President: 16 Government Senators appointed on the advice of the Prime Minister, 6 Opposition Senators appointed on the advice of the Leader of the Opposition and 9 Independent Senators appointed by the President, at his own discretion, to represent various sectors of civil society. It must be noted that the President of the Senate is elected from amongst the 16 Senators appointed on the advice of the Prime Minister. A Senator's term of office ends when Parliament, which constitutionally lasts for 5 years, is dissolved. However, a Senator's appointment can also be revoked by the President on the advice of the various leaders and on his own discretion during this period.

The Parliament is the State's paramount law-making body. Since Parliament comprises the President, the Senate and the House of Representatives, all three are involved in the law making process.

A proposal for a new law or for amendments to an existing law is known as a bill, and can be initiated in either house (except for 'money' bills which must originate in the House of Representatives). A bill must pass through several well-



The "Red House" is the seat of Parliament in the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago.

defined stages in both houses before it becomes a statute. The process begins with the introduction of a bill and ends with the granting of Assent by the President, thus uniting the three components of Parliament: The President, the Senate and the House of Representatives.

Most of the legislation that finds its ways into the statute book is generated by the Government, but individual Members may also propose legislation in the form of Private Members' Bills.

A Member can also use

various procedural mechanisms to ensure that the concerns of his constituents are discussed in Parliament, including raising matters of urgent public importance and creating private motions for debate. The public also plays a role in ensuring their interests are addressed by Parliament, using various means such as pressure groups, commentaries in the press, lobbying and petitions. Such public involvement demonstrates an active interest in the parliamentary process.

House of Representatives (2002–2007)

- ◆ 37 MPs
- ◆ 7 Women
- ◆ 30 Men
- ◆ Main parties:
 - People's National Movement 56 %
 - United National Congress 30 %
 - Congress of the People 14 %

Senate (2002–2007)

- ◆ 31 Senators:
 - 16 Government Senators
 - 6 Opposition Senators
 - 9 Independent Senators
- ◆ 12 Women
- ◆ 19 Men



FIPA Executive in Brazil

Photo: FIPA

At the invitation of FIPA Executive Committee Chair and Brazilian Congressman Luiz Carlos Hauly, members of the FIPA Executive held their 16th meeting in the capital of Brazil on June 1st.

The members, hailing from Canada, Chile, Colombia, Mexico, the Dominican Republic and Trinidad and Tobago, took advantage of their meeting on Brazilian soil to launch preparations for the Sixth Plenary Meeting.

Determined to promote closer collaboration with governments in the region, the Committee decided to make energy and sustainable development – the key focus of the OAS General Assembly in Panama – one of the three main topics at the next FIPA Plenary Meeting. Migration and human rights, and dumping and intellectual property infringements, both issues of concern in parliaments of the Americas, will also be on the agenda.



FIPA Executive Committee in Brasilia.

In addition to discussing the Plenary, the Committee members endorsed the organization of a second workshop to strengthen parliamentarians' knowledge of international trade, in light of the success of the first workshop in March 2007.

The president of the Women's Group, Colombian Senator Cecilia López Montaña, also presented plans for a conference that would bring women parliamentarians together in 2008 to discuss social inclusion.

Condemning assassination

Profoundly shocked by the assassination of 11 provincial deputies in Colombia, held hostage for the past five years by the Colombian Revolutionary Army (FARC), the FIPA Executive Committee issued a statement on July 16th, 2007, condemning the murders, which were

committed in the Valle del Cauca district this past June.

FIPA representatives called for the creation of an international commission to help the families of the victims recover their relatives' bodies, in accordance with international humanitarian law.

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-COPA meeting

Representatives of FIPA and COPA (the Parliamentary Confederation of the Americas) will meet in Quebec City, Canada, October 29th, 2007. The main goal of the meeting will be to examine "the most appropriate structures for a possible integration of the two organizations," pursuant to the resolution on the creation of a joint work group between COPA and FIPA adopted in Bogotá.

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- James Bezan, MP, Canada

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South America

- Senator Nancy Patricia Gutiérrez, Colombia
- Deputy Iván Moreira Barros, Chile

Former FIPA President

- Senator Celine 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

