

Newsletter of the Network of Women Parliamentarians of the Americas



MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

Dear colleagues:

In the context of the 12th General Assembly of the Parliamentary Confederation of the Americas (COPA) and the 11th Annual Meeting of the Network of Women Parliamentarians of the Americas, held in Brazil in October 2013, I had the pleasure of being re-elected as President for the period from 2013 to 2015. I want to sincerely thank the women parliamentarians of the Americas for the trust you have placed in me to continue to head up the Network for another two years.

And so I would like to invite you to reaffirm your commitment to the consolidation of COPA and the Network of Women Parliamentarians as a dynamic, relevant international organization that is prepared to take on the challenges facing the Americas.

We must continue to build collaborative relationships with various international organizations and strengthen the cooperation agreement recently signed with the Inter-American Commission of Women (CIM) of the Organization of American States (OAS).

It is our responsibility to continue to work so that the Network can continue to expand within COPA, the Americas and internationally. We must also increase the influence of our organization and encourage more participation by women parliamentarians in the region.



We should be proud that the Network is now an indispensable vehicle for promoting the views and concerns of women parliamentarians in the Americas. The work the Network has accomplished in recent years would not have been possible without everyone's sustained efforts. The road ahead is long and we will continue to face many challenges, but I know we will continue to strengthen our organization so that we can offer women a better future.

Diva Hadamira Gastélum

Senator of the Republic of the United Mexican States

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Opening of the XII General Assembly of COPA
and XI Annual Meeting of the Network of Women
Parliamentarians of the Americas
Brasília, Brazil, October 14, 2013

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Secretariat of Women Parliamentarians of the
Americas of COPA

1050, rue des Parlementaires
Édifice André-Laurendeau, 4^e étage
Québec (Québec) G1A 1A3 CANADA
Telephone: 1 418 644-2888
Fax : 1 418 643-1865

The Network will continue to study topics of strategic interest to women parliamentarians. We will focus on the dissemination of topics that promote the improvement of the status of women in the Americas and on activities directed toward the strategic positioning of our organization.

NEWS FROM THE NETWORK OF WOMEN PARLIAMENTARIANS

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MEETING OF THE NETWORK Brasília, October 13, 2013

The Executive Committee of the Network held its meeting in conjunction with COPA's General Assembly and the 11th Annual Meeting of the Network of Women Parliamentarians of the Americas (Brasília, Brazil, October 13 to 16, 2013). In attendance were members from Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Costa Rica, Cuba, Québec (Canada) and Mexico.

During the meeting, held at the UNALE's head office, attendees were provided information about the main goal of the Second Consultation with Women Parliamentarians and the signing of a cooperation agreement between the Network and the Inter-American Commission of Women (CIM) of the Organization of American States (OAS).

Applications from candidates for the Executive Committee 2013–2015 were also examined. The objective to stimulate the participation of women parliamentarians was achieved, since all the vacant representative positions were filled.

Finally, the members decided to amend the Statutes to allow the re-election of the President of the Network. They came to a consensus that the term of office of the President may be renewed once only, for the 2013–2015 mandate, and that the Vice-President cannot be re-elected. The amendment was approved the next day during the 11th Annual Meeting.



Executive Committee Meeting of the Network
of Women Parliamentarians of the Americas
Brasília, October 13, 2013



Members of the Executive Committee of the Network
of Women Parliamentarians of the Americas

NEWS FROM COSTA RICA

On February 2nd, 57 deputies were elected at the Costa Rican Legislative Assembly for the next four years, of which only 18 are women, representing 31.6% of the total. This represents a decline compared to the results of the last legislative elections of 2006 and 2010, when 22 women were elected (38.6%).

ANNUAL MEETING Brasília, October 14, 2013

The Second Consultation with Women Parliamentarians of the Americas took place on October 14, 2013. It began with the signing of a cooperation agreement between the Network and the Inter-American Commission of Women (CIM), whose objective to enhance cooperation between the two organizations towards advancing the legislative agenda for women's human rights and empowering women parliamentarians for more effective participation in the legislative bodies of the Americas.

During the first panel of the Consultation, "Priorities for the legislative agenda for women's rights and gender equality in the Americas", Françoise Roth, from the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, presented the recommendations of the CEDAW Committee, and Marta Martinez, CIM specialist, presented the MESECVI legislative recommendations regarding violence against women.

During the second panel, "Initiatives to guarantee human rights for women and gender equality in the parliaments of the Americas", participants had the opportunity to attend presentations by various experts: Beatriz Paredes Rangel, Ambassadors of Mexico to Brazil; Elcione Barbalho, Special Prosecutor for Women's Affairs of the Chamber of Deputies of the Brazilian Parliament; Vera Soares, Secretariat for Women's Policies of the Government of Brazil; Jô Moraes, Member and Coordinator of the Women's Parliamentary Bank of the Chamber of Deputies of the Brazilian Parliament; Irune Aguirrezabal, Regional Advisor at UN-Women; José Mendes Bota, General Rapporteur on Violence against Women at the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe and Political Coordinator of the Parliamentary Network "Women Free from Violence"; Nina Madsen, Centro Feminista de Estudos e Assessoria (CFEMEA, Brasil).

The parliamentarians also participated in a group discussion on the priorities to be established in advancing the legislative agenda on a number of fronts, in particular with regard to the eradication of violence against women and the protection of women's sexual and

reproductive rights.

Participants attending the 11th Annual Meeting of the Network came from Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Costa Rica, Cuba, Québec, Haiti, Jamaica, Surinam and México. During the meeting, Ileana Brenes, Deputy from Costa Rica, Alicia Gutiérrez, Deputy from Santa Fe, Argentina, and Marie Bouillé, Québec MNA, presented their respective parts of the report on the theme "Poverty, pay equity and the economic empowerment of women." This was the first Network report to be made by three rapporteurs from different geographical regions. Mireya Zamora, Deputy

from Costa Rica, presented her report, "Water, the environment and the status of women." Two resolutions on those themes were also adopted.

The President of the Network, Diva Gastélum, gave all the participants a compilation of treaties, norms and international jurisprudence about women's rights entitled "Women's Rights".

The 11th Annual Meeting ended with the re-election of Senator Diva Gastélum Bajo as President of the Network of Women Parliamentarians of the Americas for the 2013–2015 term.



Second Consultation of Parliamentarians of Americas



Signing a Partnership Agreement
between the Network and CIM

INTERPARLIAMENTARY SEMINAR ON THE 20TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE BEIJING DECLARATION AND PLATFORM FOR ACTION

Québec, January 21 and 22, 2014

The Seminar brought together some 70 participants, including women parliamentarians from the Assemblée parlementaire de la Francophonie (APF), the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA) and the Parliamentary Confederation of the Americas (COPA). As members of the Network, were present, Diva Gastélum Bajo, president of the Network, accompanied by Rachel Marques, Deputy of the State of Ceará, Brazil, and Marie Bouillé, Member of the National Assembly of Québec.

The Seminar launched a process of reflection by women parliamentarians on their assessment of the implementation of the Platform for Action 20 years after its adoption and aimed to mobilize participants for the 59th session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) in March 2015.

In her opening speech, Ms. Gastélum called for the effective implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action. She also highlighted the importance of mobilizing women parliamentary networks and encouraging discussion to continue the push for legislation that advances gender rights. In the same vein, during the Seminar, she presented the General Law on the Access of Women to a Life Free From Violence, which she co-sponsored in Mexico.

At the end of the Seminar, the women parliamentarians adopted a Declaration renewing their commitment to continuing efforts, within their respective parliaments, to further the accelerated, full and effective implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action to the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action.

The participants invited the networks of women parliamentarians to mobilize their members to actively participate in the review of progress made in the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, which will be concluded at the 59th session of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women in March 2015 and called for the mobilization of all parliamentarians in anticipation of national and regional progress reviews.



Intervention of the President of the Network during the Seminar



Official photo of participants, Interparliamentary Seminar



Interparliamentary Seminar, Québec

Upcoming Events

- ✓ OECD High Level Global Forum on Public Governance, Women's Leadership in Public Life: Fostering Diversity for Inclusive Growth.
→ **2-4 April, 2014, Paris**
- ✓ Annual session of the Executive Board of UN-Women.
→ **17-19 June, 2014, New York**
- ✓ Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, Fifty-eighth session.
→ **30 June - 18 July, 2014, Geneva**
- ✓ Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, pre-sessional working group, Sixtieth session.
→ **21 - 25 July, 2014, Geneva**
- ✓ Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, Fifty-ninth session.
→ **20 October - 7 November, 2014, Geneva**
- ✓ "Reinforcing the Actions of Women in Politics on all Five Continents".
→ **24-27 November, 2014, Brasília and Rio de Janeiro**



EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE OF THE NETWORK 2013-2015



Presidenta / President / Presidente / Présidente
Sra. Diva Hadamira Gastélum Bajo, Senadora
Cámara de Senadores de la Unión de los Estados Unidos Mexicanos



Cono Sur / Southern Cone / Cone Sul / Cône Sud
Maria Ines Pandeló Cerqueira, Deputada
Assembléia Legislativa do Estado do Rio de Janeiro, Brasil



Vicepresidenta / Vice-President / Vice-Présidente / Vice-Présidente
Sra. Maria Conceição Vieira Santos, Deputada
Assembléia Legislativa do Estado de Sergipe, Brasil



Región Andina / Andean Region / Região Andina / Région andine
Segundina Flores Solamayo, Diputada
Cámara de Diputados de la Asamblea Legislativa del Estado Plurinacional de Bolivia

REPRESENTANTES REGIONALES / REGIONAL REPRESENTATIVES REPRESENTANTES REGIONAIS / REPRÉSENTANTES RÉGIONALES



América Central / Central America / América Central / Amérique centrale
Sra. Mireya Zamora Alvarado, Diputada
Asamblea Legislativa de la República de Costa Rica



América del Norte / North America / América do Norte / Amérique du Nord
Hilda Flores Escalera, Senadora
Cámara de Senadores de la Unión de los Estados Unidos Mexicanos



Parlamentos regionales y organizaciones interparlamentarias / Regional Parliaments and Interparliamentary Organizations / Parlamentos regionais e organizações interparlamentares / Parlements régionaux et organisations interparlementaires

Rachel Marques, Deputada
União Nacional dos Legisladores e Legislativos Estaduais (UNALE)



El Caribe / Caribbean / O Caribe / Antilles
Aixa Hevia González, Diputada
Asamblea Nacional del Poder Popular de Cuba



Asamblea fundadora de la Red y sede de la Secretaría / Founding Assembly of the Network and host institution of the Secretariat / Assembléia fundadora da Rede e sede da Secretaria / Assemblée fondatrice du Réseau et hôte du Secrétariat

Sra. Marie Bouillé, Députée
Assemblée nationale du Québec



Cono Sur / Southern Cone / Cone Sul / Cône Sud
Alicia Verónica Gutiérrez, Diputada
Cámara de Diputados de la Provincia de Santa Fe, Argentina

MEMBER'S CONTRIBUTIONS



DIVA HADAMIRA GASTÉLUM
Senator
Republic of the United Mexican States

EQUALITY IN MEXICO'S PRIVATE SECTOR

Despite advances made regarding women's access to education, employment and management positions, Mexico still ranks 89th out of 135 countries, according to the Gender Inequality Index.

"It is important to ensure that businesses innovate by introducing women's leadership structures in order to open up new business opportunities and consolidate the position of women in the private sector."

The theme of gender equality is almost always examined from the perspective of what governments, businesses or society can do to reduce the gap separating men and women. Rarely is the focus on what women can—and must—do to change mentalities.

As reported by Mexico's National Institute of Statistics and Geography, 1.5 out of 10 upper management positions are held by women. To raise women's participation rate, some businesses have restructured their work model to facilitate access to such jobs.

In Mexico, there are a few businesses, most often foreign, that offer leadership certification for women in management positions, offer on-the-job training internships or provide advice, workshops and courses on gender equality to heighten managers' awareness of the role of women in their organization. This indicates that, even though improvement is slow as regards access to management positions, certain businesses show a clear willingness to change.

A study carried out by Wal-Mart in Mexico offers an initial diagnosis of the causes impeding women's professional advancement. It identified five factors that keep women from advancing in the workplace: unfair recruitment processes, the lack of training on women's issues, non-flexible work schedules, a deep-rooted

chauvinist culture and upper management's insensitivity to women's needs.

In light of these findings, Wal-Mart decided to implement four strategies: attract talented women; train, retain and promote women; focus on inclusion; and support women through courses, workshops and external certification programs. In 2011, 51% of the personnel hired by Walmart in Mexico were women.

Another example of change is Xerox Mexico, which has managed to transform its all-male board of directors into a gender-balanced one where women make up 50% of the members. In a similar fashion, General Motors Mexico has been able to increase women's participation in its upper management by 30% and focus on training in sectors that have been less attractive to women, such as engineering.

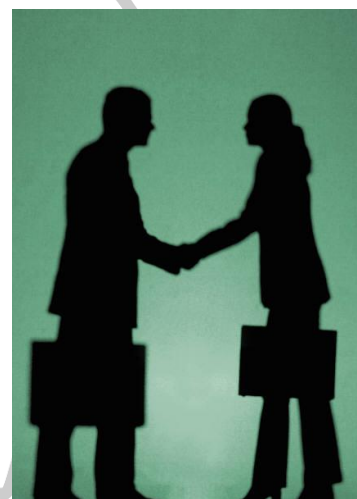
In a survey of 4,800 enterprises carried out by Manpower Mexico, 60% of respondents stated that 20% of their management positions are held by women and 47% said they had implemented gender equality policies. Seventy percent of respondents confirmed that they had seen an increase in productivity since women had been admitted to management positions.

I could go on and quote other examples where the status of women has been reinforced in the private sector, but I am convinced that one of the remaining adjustments to be made by the business community is the introduction of flexible work arrangements and measures that would allow women to continue assuming their roles as mothers.

In Mexico and elsewhere in the world, reaching a precise quota of women in the private sector remains controversial, with some believing such a measure to be necessary and others thinking it would be counterproductive. Nonetheless, we must not dismiss evidence showing that gender diversity improves business results.

It is important to ensure that businesses innovate by introducing women's leadership structures in order to open up new business opportunities and consolidate the position of women in the private sector. Our desire as women is to take advantage of these opportunities, and although there is still a long way to go and many hurdles to overcome, it is our duty to rise to the challenge.

Original text in spanish





MARIE BOUILLÉ

Member of the National
Assembly of Québec

INTERPARLIAMENTARY SEMINAR ON THE 20TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE BEIJING DECLARATION AND PLATFORM FOR ACTION

At the invitation of the National Assembly of Québec, an Interparliamentary Seminar was held in Québec City on January 21 and 22, 2014, as a lead-up to the 20th Anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. The approximately 70 women participants were parliamentarians from the Assemblée parlementaire de la Francophonie (APF), executive committee members from the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA) and the Parliamentary Confederation of the Americas (COPA), and members of the U.S. National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL).

The goal of the Seminar was to reaffirm the important role women have to play in monitoring the implementation of the Platform for Action. An assessment of the Platform was also initiated, in anticipation of the 59th Session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women, scheduled for March 2015.

After a representative of UN Women had outlined the contents of the Platform, the parliamentarians were made aware of the situation as it now stands and informed of the reviews that have been carried out to date. They then took part in three workshops dealing with themes of great concern to all participating organizations: violence against women, the economic empowerment of women, and women's access to political and economic decision-making processes.

Each workshop featured one expert and two parliamentarians. In each case, the speakers drew attention to a number of deplorable facts in relation to the three themes. They noted, for instance, that violence against women is a violation of human rights which entails enormous human, social and economic costs, in addition to constituting an obstacle to the development of our societies. They also reiterated the need to stress the value of women's economic role and its positive impact on society as a whole. Finally, they pointed out that women are still largely under-represented in executive and management positions of public and private enterprises as well as in elected assemblies, political parties, unions and public administrations.

They also gave examples of initiatives undertaken in their respective countries to counter these realities, such as Mexico's *General Law on Women's Access to a Life Free of Violence* and Québec's *Pay Equity Act*.

All in all, the workshops showed that while great strides have been made toward achieving the objectives of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, much work remains to be done.

To close out the proceedings, the women parliamentarians adopted a Declaration in which they pledged to continue working toward an accelerated, complete and effective implementation of the Platform for Action. Along with the other networks, the Network of Women Parliamentarians of the Americas pledged to encourage its members to play an active role in the review process regarding the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, a process that will be brought to its conclusion at the March 2015 Session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women.

"As women parliamentarians, we have a key role to play in monitoring the progress made with regard to the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action."

As women parliamentarians, we have a key role to play in monitoring the progress made with regard to the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. We must continue to promote them in our countries and regions, which means proposing concrete measures and ensuring that our legislation respects the principles and objectives of the Platform. It is incumbent on our Network to take part in this substantial international

parliamentary mobilization that will significantly contribute to strengthening gender equality, women's empowerment and the rights of women throughout the world.

Original text in french.



The President of the Network, Diva Gastéum, with
Marie Bouillé, member of the National Assembly of
Québec



GLORIA BIDEGAIN

National Deputy

National Chamber of Deputies of the Argentine Republic

ARGENTINE LEGISLATION ON JUSTICE AND HUMAN RIGHTS

The 2013 legislative session ended with a commemoration celebrating 30 years of uninterrupted democracy in our country. The National Congress has played a leading role in Argentina's institutional and political reconstruction process.

As guardian of the rule of law, the National Parliament has made significant legislative progress toward the goal of restoring the civil liberties and political, civil and social rights of citizens, which were restricted during the most tragic civilian and military dictatorship our country has ever known.

In the past decade, key laws have been passed to promote human rights and social inclusion, broaden and effectively enforce rights and strengthen the State and national sovereignty.

As a member of the Front for Victory (*Frente para la Victoria*), I have supported all initiatives to accelerate the political and social transformation process.

Among those initiatives, I would like to mention the following:

- passage of a law on the Judicial Council, which I co-drafted;
- establishment of a new regime on interlocutory measures to which the State is a party or in which it participates;
- passage of a law on democratic and egalitarian access to employment in the Judicial Branch and the Attorney General's Office;
- creation of federal courts of appeal; and
- publication of decrees and resolutions of the Supreme Court and courts of second instance.

The enactment of the Law on Compensation for Political Prisoners, which grants a pension to persons whose civil liberties were taken away during the last military regime because of their association with a political group, professional body or student organization, was of great personal, political and historical satisfaction to me. The bill that

gave rise to this law, which I was involved in co-drafting, addressed the long-standing demands of associations of former political prisoners.

On the 30th anniversary of our democracy, it is of particular significance that the Argentine State

is proposing public policies aimed at recognizing victims' rights and seeking redress for crimes against humanity committed under its de facto governments.

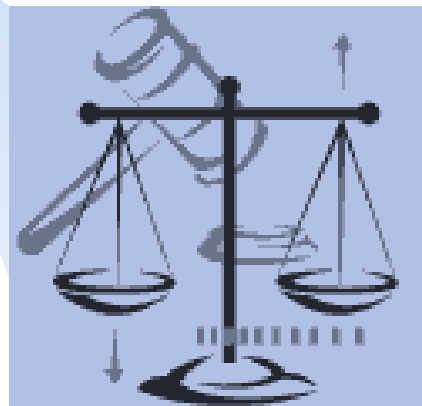
Also worthy of note is the approval of legislation that many social organizations have been demanding for years, including a law

creating a sex offender DNA database and a law guaranteeing universal access to medically assisted reproduction procedures and techniques.

Great strides have been made over the last 30 years of democratic rule; however, much still remains to be done. We have come a long way as a

society, advancing well at times but moving backwards at other times. This has made us realize that democracy is a dynamic system that can always be improved upon. It is nevertheless the best instrument we have to achieve social justice and civil liberty, eliminate inequality, promote social inclusion and strengthen popular sovereignty.

Original text in spanish.



"Great strides have been made over the last 30 years of democratic rule; however, much still remains to be done."



ALICIA GUTIÉRREZ

Provincial Deputy
Santa Fe - Argentine

IN ARGENTINA, REPRODUCTION IS A FUNDAMENTAL RIGHT RECOGNIZED AND SUPPORTED BY THE STATE

In June 2013, the Congress of the Argentine Nation passed Law 26.862 on assisted human reproduction. The purpose of the law is to provide full access to medically assisted reproduction techniques and procedures.

Persons who are unable to conceive a child because of a health problem, infertility, sterility or a personal choice can go to a public health centre where they will have access to modern assisted reproduction techniques free of charge.

Before the law was adopted, a free reproductive assistance program had already been implemented in the province of Santa Fe, thanks to the creation of a Medically Assisted Human Reproduction Unit (Unidad de Reproducción Humana Médicamente Asistida) under certain resolutions of the Ministry of Health. This initiative had made it possible to approach reproductive assistance from a provincial public health perspective by offering diagnostic and infertility treatment services in public hospitals in the provincial capital of Santa Fe and in the city of Rosario.

These national and provincial political decisions demonstrate that the right to reproductive health is a component of the right to health and is protected by the State as a human right, in accordance with constitutional provisions and international commitments having constitutional value with regard to social and human rights. The decisions also contribute to the achievement of the objectives set by the World Health Organization concerning complete protection of women, to which the COPA Network of Women Parliamentarians of the Americas subscribes.

Given that positive law in force in Argentina has reaffirmed that all women are free to make their own reproductive decisions, it is important to offer them alternatives when they are confronted with obstacles that prevent them from exercising that right. Law 25.673 concerning responsible sexual and reproductive health, as well as Law 26.485 concerning offering full protection to prevent, punish and eliminate violence against women in their interpersonal relationships,

both guarantee these reproductive rights. These laws are also supported by section 19 of the Constitution, which deals with “the private actions of men”.

Enacting this law on medically assisted reproduction also satisfies the fundamental principle of human rights, that is, the right to equality, thus guaranteeing that access to this technology will be universal and no longer restricted by financial considerations.



Public policies of this nature build on scientific breakthroughs that contribute to society as a whole. However, it is important to adopt such social changes in a timely manner by giving them a legal foundation and updating the Code (Código de fondo), for we cannot remain silent with regard to the new forms that family law will take. Argentina needs to continue making sure it protects the fundamental rights of girls and boys born as a result of these modern reproduction techniques and guarantees identity and filiation rights.

Original text in spanish.



CÂMARA DOS DEPUTADOS
Procuradoria Especial da Mulher

GERSON SCHEIDWEILER
Communications Assistant
Women's Caucus Coordination

CANDYCE ROCHA
Parliamentary Assistant
Prosecutor's Office for Women's Affairs
Women's Secretariat of the Chamber of Deputies

BRAZIL'S FEDERAL PARLIAMENT SETS UP BODIES FOR THE PROMOTION OF GENDER ISSUES

Despite its small number of women legislators, Brazil has made progress in women's rights over the past few years. The first step was the creation, in 2009, of the Office of the Prosecutor for Women's Affairs of the Chamber of Deputies, whose task is to promote women's rights and investigate allegations of violence and discrimination. In July 2013, the Women's Secretariat was formed, bringing together the Office and the Women's Rights Coordination Bureau (which represents the Women's Caucus). In the federal Senate, the Office of the Special Prosecutor for Women's Affairs was created in 2013.

The new structure helps fuel parliamentary discussion of gender issues. It also enables women to attend, and speak and vote, at meetings of party leaders during which voting guidelines are defined.

This measure is one way of ensuring that the demands of Brazilian women are respected and that gender transversality is encouraged in the deliberations of Parliament.

The importance of these administrative bodies is clear: after the last election, in 2010, women held slightly more than 8% of the seats in the Chamber of Deputies and 11% in the Senate, placing Brazil 156th out of 188 countries in this regard.

The influence of the new bodies has also made itself felt in the country's judicial system. In 2013, women parliamentarians were instrumental in passing new legislation that, by making changes in the electoral process, allowed the entity responsible for organizing elections, the Electoral Tribunal, to launch radio and television ad campaigns for the promotion of gender equality and increased

participation of women in politics. This was part of the campaign "Women: Take a Stand", which mobilized a number of federal bodies.

"Increasing the number of women politicians in Brazil must be a goal pursued not only by women who have already been elected, but by the country as a whole. Brazil's ranking with respect to women's participation is shameful and does not reflect our development or the high representation of women in the workforce and in the universities", said the Prosecutor for Women's Affairs, Elcione Barbalho.

A survey conducted by the Women's Secretariat of the Chamber of Deputies showed that, after the ad campaign, the number of women affiliated with the various political parties doubled.

"Increasing the number of women politicians in Brazil must be a goal pursued not only by women who have already been elected, but by the country as a whole."

Elcione Barbalho



From November 24 to 27, 2014, in Brasília (the capital city) and Rio de Janeiro, Brazil will also hold the first International Forum for Women in Politics under the theme "Reinforcing the Actions of Women in Politics on all Five Continents". One expected outcome of this event will be a document outlining the basic guidelines to be promoted by the

participants in their respective countries, with a view to consolidating the participation of women in positions of power. For further information, visit <http://www2.camara.leg.br/a-camara/secretaria-da-mulher/forum-internacional-de-mulheres-na-politica>.

Original text in portuguese



LÍDICE DA MATA

Senator

Brazilian Socialist Party, State of Bahia, Brazil

WOMEN'S REPRESENTATION IN BRAZIL'S POLITICAL LIFE

First of all, I would like to thank the Network for inviting me to contribute to their newsletter. On the 20th anniversary of the Beijing Platform for Action, I feel it is important to underline how few women hold positions of authority. I say this on the basis of 30 years' experience in public life, and in light of the need to reform the current political system. I will therefore try to provide examples of measures designed to give women greater access to political power and to analyze what needs to be done if we are to advance in the direction of equitable representation for women.

I was the first woman to be elected senator in the State of Bahia. I initially entered politics when I was a student, becoming the first woman president of the Central Student Association, within a clandestine political party dedicated to fighting authoritarianism, ending the dictatorship, promoting amnesty for politicians and legalizing political parties. Subsequently I ran for municipal office in close collaboration with the feminist movement, which was beginning to gain strength with its public denunciations of sexist violence. Aside from serving as a municipal councillor, I was a Congress member twice (1987 and 1997) after serving two consecutive terms as State representative. Prior to this (1993 to 1996), I was the first woman to be elected mayor of Salvador, the capital city of Bahia.

As an elected representative, I was part of a small caucus that, in collaboration with the National Women's Council and the feminist movement, convinced the representatives to approve more than 80% of the proposals of the Women's Charter, a significant milestone for citizenship and democracy in Brazil. Today, the political power of the fundamentalists blocks gender-equality measures, in particular those concerning sexual and reproductive rights and women's health issues in general.

Brazil's commitment to democracy, equality and sustainable development has given rise to many initiatives, including some aimed at creating or strengthening policies concerning women, services for victims of violence, and actions to benefit women in Brazil's public bodies. The "Maria da Penha" Law (11.340/2006) is an example,

though the gap between the laws and women's everyday reality remains a wide one.

In the Senate, I became involved in gender-equality initiatives and proposed changes to Brazil's legal system. I also participated in the Joint Parliamentary Commission of Inquiry into Violence Against Women and contributed to two reports: one on the proposed amendment of the Constitution to favour equal rights for housewives and Brazilian workers, and another by the Parliamentary Commission of Inquiry into National and International Human Trafficking. At present I am heading a project entitled "The Status of Families."

A political reform project is currently being studied by the National Congress. I proposed that a hearing be held in Bahia to hear women's movements and especially to discuss the challenge of increasing the average representation of women in our Parliament from 8% to 12%. It seems essential that Brazil adopt parity as a political principle, as Argentina and Costa Rica have done, along with measures designed to ensure that electoral campaigns are financed exclusively out of public funds, that voting lists are closed and a system of gender-alternation implemented, that parties follow through on their programs and that sanctions are enforced whenever parties flout laws and principles.

Original text in portuguese