



**VI Annual Meeting
of the Network of Women Parliamentarians of the Americas**

**2005–2006 ACTIVITY REPORT
FOR THE PERIOD OF MAY 7, 2005, TO MAY 30, 2006**

**Presented by Ms. Aparecida Gama
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**Quito, Ecuador
May 30, 2006**

1. Presentation

As president of the Network of Women Parliamentarians of the Americas, it is my pleasure to submit this report, which presents the Network's main achievements during my term from May 7, 2005, to May 30, 2006.

This seventh year of the Network of Women Parliamentarians of the Americas was marked by consolidation. After giving the Network a flexible and efficient operating structure, we continued to successfully implement regular Network activities this year: Executive Committee meetings, the Annual Meeting, development of the annual theme, and followup on past themes. These activities have helped us strengthen our reputation as a pivotal discussion forum for women parliamentarians of the Americas.

At our Annual Meeting in May 2005, we determined our main theme and designated our rapporteur. Throughout 2005–2006, we worked continuously on the theme of implementation in the Americas of the *United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women* (CEDAW) and its Optional Protocol. This included production of an article presenting CEDAW, a document databank, and a status report; distribution of a questionnaire on implementation in the Americas; creation of a workshop; and presentation of the main report.

We also took advantage of opportunities at Executive Committee meetings to hold activities on themes of interest to members of our Network (interparliamentary forum and conferences). These activities helped promote the Network with women parliamentarians and other civil society groups.

The representatives of the Network's Executive Committee make an excellent team of ambassadors. Through their work within their respective interparliamentary assemblies or organizations, the Network has continued its regional development and proposed a number of initiatives. The commitment and availability of the Executive Committee members give us great hope for the improvement of the status of women in the Americas, and I would like to sincerely thank them for their dedication.

The Network also enjoys the support of the Secretariat staff in carrying out its activities. The Secretariat is hosted by the Québec National Assembly, the Network's founding assembly. I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude to the Québec National Assembly for its remarkable support, which also contributes to progress for the women of the Americas.

2. Network of Women Parliamentarians of the Americas 2005–2006 Activity Report

2.1 Followup to the Network's 5th Annual Meeting

The minutes of the 5th Annual Meeting held on May 7, 2005, in Foz do Iguaçu, Brazil, the recommendation adopted on the impact of migration on women in the Americas, and other documents related to this meeting have been made available on our website. These documents have also been sent to all members of the Network Executive Committee and the Parliamentary Confederation of the Americas (COPA).

2.2 Network president's visit to the Québec National Assembly

September 15–16, 2005 – Quebec, Canada

I had the opportunity to visit the Québec National Assembly on September 15 and 16. On this occasion, the president of the National Assembly reiterated his institution's support for the Network of Women Parliamentarians of the Americas as host of the Network Secretariat.

During my visit, I was able to meet with a number of people, including the Executive Committee representative of the founding assembly, Secretariat host Ms. Fatima Houada-Pepin, and representatives of the Québec Section of COPA. These meetings were an opportunity to discuss the Network's orientations and priorities for 2005–2006.

My meetings with the Québec minister of families, seniors, and the status of women and the president of Conseil du Statut de la Femme du Québec were an opportunity to discuss our common challenges connected to the status of women, to learn about Québec's initiatives in the field, and to spread the word about our Network.

Lastly, this visit was an opportunity to discuss how the Secretariat carries out its assigned duties.

2.3 Network Executive Committee meeting

October 5, 2005 – Rio de Janeiro, Brazil

The first Network Executive Committee meeting for the 2005–2006 term was held in my own legislative assembly on October 5, 2005. This meeting gave us an opportunity to discuss activities for the coming year and adopt the *2005–2006 Network Activity Plan*.

We also adopted a resolution in support of the people of the Republic of El Salvador, which had suffered two natural disasters, asking for particular attention to Salvadoran women, who are often hit harder by these events.

Following this meeting, I ensured that minutes were drawn up and the adopted resolution was sent in due form to the president of the Legislative Assembly of El Salvador.

In addition, in accordance with the motions passed at this meeting, I ensured that the Secretariat sent all presidents of legislative assemblies of the Americas a letter asking that their

websites be linked to the Network website. Network Executive Committee members were notified that this request had been sent to their president. This letter also helped promote Network initiatives and the next Annual Meeting. The results of this effort are as yet highly mixed, but we remain confident that a growing number of women parliamentarians will learn about the Network and take part in its activities.

2.4 International Forum of Women Parliamentarians

October 6–7, 2005 – Rio de Janeiro, Brazil

As president of the Network of Women Parliamentarians of the Americas, I have worked with our colleague Sonia Fontes, head of the Secretariat of Women of the National Union of State Legislatures of Brazil (UNALE) and member of the Network Executive Committee, to organize an International Forum of Women Parliamentarians within the Legislative Assembly of the State of Rio de Janeiro.

This meeting attended by a number of Network Executive Committee members was held on October 6 and 7. It gave rise to productive discussion on many aspects of the status of women, including the role of women in politics; women as agents of political, economic, and social development; violence and discrimination against women; and problems tied to migration. Our discussions helped attendees raise many questions regarding the role and place of women, and seek solutions to the problems facing women of the Americas.

2.5 Network Executive Committee meeting

March 1, 2006 – Puebla, Mexico

The second Executive Committee meeting for 2005–2006 was held in the city of Puebla at *Benemérita Universidad Autónoma de Puebla*. Ms. Lucero Saldaña, senator of the Congress of Mexico and North American representative on the Network Executive Committee, took the initiative to organize a series of talks on “Human Trafficking: An International Issue.” Leading parliamentarians and specialists spoke on a key issue for members of the Network of Women Parliamentarians of the Americas. This event helped initiate a dialog between parliamentarians, specialists from nongovernmental and international organizations, and the student community.

At the Executive Committee meeting following these talks, we adopted a recommendation indicating our full opposition to human trafficking in all forms and asking that legislative, preventive, punitive, and victim rehabilitation measures be set up in the Americas.

At this meeting, we also adopted a series of amendments to our detailed Action Plan in order to identify the actions linked to certain Network objectives. We also discussed the organization of and draft agenda for our 6th Annual Meeting.

In addition, we agreed to ask the COPA president to add a talk to the program of this general meeting on gender perspectives in economic development, further to a repeated request by Network members to discuss women’s status issues not only within the Network, but also with our male parliamentarian colleagues.

2.6 13th Latin American Congress on Sexology and Sexual Education
April 19 to 22, 2006 – Salvador de Bahia, Brazil

The 13th Latin American Congress on Sexology and Sexual Education was held from April 19 to 22 in the city of Salvador, Bahia, Brazil. It was organized by the Latin American Federation of Sexology and Sexual Education (FLASSES) and the Brasília Sexology Center (CESEX) with the participation of organizations including Brazil's department of health, the Pan American Health Organization, and the United Nations Population Fund. The themes addressed included clinical sexology, new trends in sexual education, and the sociocultural aspects of sexuality.

As president of the Network of Women Parliamentarians of the Americas, I joined my colleague Sonia Fontes, member of the Legislative Assembly of the State of Bahia, Brazil and head of the Secretariat of Women of UNALE, in inviting parliamentarians from our respective organizations to take part in this event. The participation of parliamentarians from Brazil and the Americas made this year's congress unique and spurred engaging discussions on the state of public policy regarding health issues and sexual rights.

The results of this work have been grouped together in the "Bahia Declaration" and will be presented during this Network Annual Meeting.

3. Other activities of the president of the Network of Women Parliamentarians of the Americas

3.1 Meeting of the Group of Women Parliamentarians of the Americas – Inter-Parliamentary Forum of the Americas (FIPA)

May 20, 2005 – Brasília, Brazil

The purpose of this meeting of the Group of Women Parliamentarians of the Americas of FIPA was to examine the everyday realities of women in North, Central, and South America and, through lively discussions, to address these challenges in relation to the main priorities of women in today's world. Since the intercultural process occurs at every level of society, the objective of this meeting was to foster debate in order to promote the sharing of ideas and action plans by proposing case-specific solutions based on a broader overall vision. This collective vision led us to a better understanding of individual cases.

3.2 Meeting of Brazilian parliamentarians with university professors

July 6, 2005 – Rio de Janeiro, Brazil

During this meeting, we looked at the issue of the citizenship of women in South America, specifically the theme of freedom. Attendees discussed the definition of freedom as a means of better identifying the work that lies ahead to ensure women are treated fairly, notably with regard to their rights. We also discussed today's cultural model, which excludes women from the decision-making process beyond the domains they control, treating them in a reductive and disrespectful manner. A number of analyses were presented, notably by the professors, who offered a more factual and realistic picture of the shortcomings of today's society.

3.3 3rd International Conference on Preventing and Combating Human Trafficking

August 11 and 12, 2005 – Pernambuco, Brazil

In addition to addressing the structure and direction of the efforts being made to fight human trafficking, the main purpose of this meeting was to present prevention models based on monitoring and understanding the crime, and to discuss efforts to integrate the various defense staff training systems.¹ Following presentations by experts from the social, legal, and judiciary fields, discussions were held and new ideas proposed together with stakeholders from civil society. A number of attendees shared their own experiences, which helped generate an exchange of ideas, notably among representatives of countries that are grappling with this type of migration. Other themes were also discussed, among them identity theft and the degradation of respect for life. This meeting generally led to heightened awareness of the issue and gave institutions the responsibility to produce information and divulge it to citizens.

¹ Translator's note: In Brazil, the police force is made up of a number of independent police units. Defense staff refers to all of these forces.

The meeting also led to a new approach to the problem, as attendees concluded that simply drafting laws cannot rectify the situation or eliminate the relationships that lead to this illegal trade, which is so often tied to drug and gun trafficking. The main objective is to find solutions to these social problems that, yet again, often victimize women.

3.4 2nd Meeting of Women Deputies of the Federated States of Brazil

September 28 and 29, 2005 – Rio de Janeiro, Brazil

This meeting was held as part of the ongoing initiative to discuss the status of women and find solutions. Parliamentarians from the federated states gathered to discuss problems affecting the lives and status of women, including health, disability, quota policies, and social security.

Deliberations at the first meeting held in the state of Espírito Santo resulted in the drafting of a declaration appended to the summary of the meeting of the state of Rio de Janeiro and submitted to the federal government. Discussions on the “National Plan for Public Policies for Women” led to proposals regarding the administration of measures designed to give women an active, participatory role in the economic development in their countries.

3.5 COPA meetings – Southern Cone

November 5, 2005 – Mar del Plata, Argentina

November 29 and 30, 2005 – Asunción, Paraguay

In November, I also took part in two meetings of the Southern Cone section of COPA, first concurrent to the 4th Summit of the Americas in Mar del Plata, Argentina, then in Paraguay. The second meeting gave us an opportunity to speak about the various issues facing people in Paraguay and Uruguay, mainly women. The attendance of representatives from secretariats on the status of women from Southern Cone countries helped make this meeting a success.

3.6 Meeting on violence against women

November 10, 2005 – Rio de Janeiro, Brazil

In November 2005, I took part in a seminar on violence against women at the initiative of the Development Secretariat of the State of Rio de Janeiro.² The objective of this seminar was to disclose the results of a study on attacker and victim profiles in the State of Rio de Janeiro. We also celebrated the opening of eleven women’s assistance agencies³ and one shelter for women victims of conjugal violence.

² Secretaria de Estado de Desenvolvimento da Baixada Fluminense e da região Metropolitana

³ Delegacias Especializadas de Atendimento à Mulher

3.7 Activity report from March to May 2006

- Opening of CIAM⁴, a social, psychological, and legal services organization for women in the state of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, who face social exclusion, violence, or discrimination
- Participation in conferences held at various religious institutions on family violence
- Participation in school conferences on the safety of women
- Seminar on the geographic distribution of violence against women
- Debate on services offered to women compared to those offered to men
- Participation in various telecasts on women in politics
- Participation in telecasts on women on TV-ALERJ, the official channel of the Legislative Assembly of the state of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil
- Visit to 12 NIAMs⁵ in the state of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil
- Involvement in legal services provided to low-income women (up to five minimum-wage salaries⁶) as well as free legal aid (these women are **not** victims of family violence)
- Initiative for generating income for women seniors
- Development of courses and workshops on preserving and restoring books and documents for young girls in vulnerable situations
- Participation in a training seminar on the fight against international human trafficking, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil
- Participation in arts workshops for women
- Participation in the meeting of the Committee for the Prevention and Fight Against the Mortality of Pregnant Women
- Participation in a citizenship fair
- Lecture on gender and work to women studying mechanics
- Lecture at the “Gender and Race” seminar as part of the public budget
- Lecture on women, gender, and education

⁴ The acronym CIAM stands for *Centro de Investigación y Atención a la Mujer* (Women’s Assistance Center).

⁵ The acronym NIAM stands for *Núcleo Integrado de Atendimento à Mulher* (Integrated Women’s Services Unit) (victims of violence).

⁶ For illustration purposes, five minimum-wage salaries in Brazil are the equivalent of approximately \$750 USD per month, based on the exchange rate in effect on May 23, 2006.

- Visit to *Instituto Gama Ação Social*⁷, which offers dance and gymnastics services, medical and dental care, and training in hairdressing, manicures, fashion modeling, crafts, IT, and more
- Lecture on the fight against the commodification of women in magazines
- Participation in a seminar on psychological harassment, the dark side of the workplace
- Participation in the seminar “Women Working Together”

4. Other activities

4.1 Production of a document databank: CEDAW and its implementation in the Americas

The Network Secretariat worked on preparing a new document databank tied to the annual theme—implementation in the Americas of the *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women* (CEDAW) and its Optional Protocol. As with previous databanks, it will index theoretical and methodological texts on the topic.

I would like to take this opportunity to mention that document databanks on each theme the Network studies are available on our website. I urge you to consult these directories and continue adding to them by sending the Network Secretariat your suggestions for documents and references and telling us of any concrete measures taken by your parliaments and governments. This is an excellent tool to better circulate information on the progress made on the status of women in the Americas. In addition, these high quality documents help promote the Network, as indicated by the growing number of websites that cite them.⁸

5. Conclusion

These activities are part of ongoing efforts to consolidate the Network of Women Parliamentarians of the Americas by placing special emphasis on promotion in order to reach more women parliamentarians, legislative assemblies, and organizations specializing in the status of women and women in the Americas. Each of us is responsible for doing our part.

The expertise we develop by delving into topics tied to women’s status and hosting forums and conferences helps strategically position the Network of Women Parliamentarians of the Americas as a source of discussion and debate, as well as concrete measures to improve the status of women locally, regionally, and throughout the Americas.

Our current main challenges are 1) Encouraging more parliamentarians to join the Network; 2) Consolidating our organization, particularly as regards institutional objectives and the issue of funding; 3) Following up on recommendations adopted by the Network by seeing to their implementation by legislative assemblies of the Americas; and 4) Carrying out the initiatives and measures proposed within the Network.

⁷ Gama Social Action Institute

⁸ A list of these websites appears in the 2005–2006 Report of the Secretariat of the Network of Women Parliamentarians of the Americas.