



## **NETWORK OF WOMEN PARLIAMENTARIANS OF THE AMERICAS**

**Proposed Theme for 2008-2009:**

**“Changes in Women’s Participation in Politics  
1999-2009: Situation and Outlook”**

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### A. The Challenge

At the dawn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, women have overcome a number of major obstacles to the recognition of their political rights. However, gender parity in Parliament is not yet a given. Rwanda, with 48.8% of its seats occupied by women, and Cuba (43.3%) and Argentina (40%) are exceptions. According to the Inter-Parliamentary Union, in 2008, women held, on average, 18% of the seats in national parliaments. This average is slightly higher in the Americas, at 21.6%.

There is no denying that the progress made is encouraging. In 1999, female participation averaged 13.5% in the national parliaments of the world while, on this continent, it averaged 14.7%. Statistics for 2008 thus show an improvement. Nevertheless, there are still five national parliaments in the Americas where less than 10% of the seats are held by women and one parliament in which no women sit. We are therefore forced to admit that, generally speaking, in 2008, women remain a minority in the national political arena and are under-represented in higher elective offices.

The Network of Women Parliamentarians of the Americas will be celebrating its 10th anniversary in 2009. This would be the perfect occasion not only to study the changes in the participation of women in politics since 1999 and present an overview of the situation in the Americas, but also to analyze the positive experiences that have contributed to an increase in the representation of women, with a view to sharing information on the progress made since the creation of the Network in 1999 and initiating discussions on the best strategies to implement over the next decade (2009-2019). The proposed theme is particularly appropriate since it is directly related to the Network's first objective, which is to "encourage the representation and action of women in the Parliaments of the Americas". Given the scope of the challenge, we propose that the Network focus on the four following topics:

- quotas and other incentives as a temporary response to the under-representation of women in Parliament;
- the effect of the different types of electoral system on the political representation of women;
- the role of political parties as vectors of women's participation in politics;
- specific awareness-raising activities targeting young women.

Since there is a recognized link between democratic life and gender parity in politics, it is clear that creating a greater place for women in our parliamentary institutions is one of the keys to consolidating democracy. It is essential that women be represented in sufficient numbers to bring the parliaments of the Americas to broach socio-political issues from a gender perspective and include in their political agendas marginalized themes of particular interest to women. The theme we propose here provides an excellent opportunity for the Network of Women Parliamentarians to look into the conditions under which women endeavour to enter Parliament and the various means that could be contemplated to promote a greater representation of women in the parliaments of the Americas.

## B. Proposed Work Plan

We suggest that the challenge be met through the following work plan:

1. Production of a document databank on the theme and its presentation at the 8<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting of the Network of Women Parliamentarians of the Americas.
2. Organization of seminars and lectures to be held alongside next year's meetings of the Executive Committee and during the 8<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting of the Network of Women Parliamentarians of the Americas:
  - First meeting of the Executive Committee: discussion of the topic "The effect of the different types of electoral system on the political representation of women";
  - Second meeting of the Executive Committee: discussion of the topic "The role of political parties as vectors of women's participation in politics";
  - Annual meeting of the Network of Women Parliamentarians of the Americas: discussion of the topic "Quotas and other incentives as a temporary response to the under-representation of women in Parliament".
3. Adoption, within the framework of the 8<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting of the Network of Women Parliamentarians of the Americas, of a 10-year strategic plan to encourage young women to become involved in the political life of Parliament.

The contribution of all the members of the Executive Committee and other interested parliamentarians is essential to the success of this work plan.