



**REPORT ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE *CONVENTION ON
THE ELIMINATION OF ALL FORMS OF DISCRIMINATION
AGAINST WOMEN (CEDAW) AND ITS OPTIONAL PROTOCOL
IN THE AMERICAS***

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INTRODUCTION

At the last annual meeting of the Network of Women Parliamentarians of the Americas held in Quito, Ecuador in May 2006, I was designated as rapporteur with a mandate to report on the implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and its Optional Protocol in the Americas.

This report is based on those submitted to the CEDAW Committee by the countries of our continent, on other alternative reports submitted by non-governmental organizations specialized in women's issues, and on the relevant provisions of constitutional and other fundamental legal instruments of certain countries.

It includes interesting examples of legislative measures adopted by countries of the Americas in the fields covered by the Convention. This should not be interpreted to mean that other countries have not adopted such measures. I simply wish to call your attention to a few cases that are representative of what could be described as experiments—some successful, others less so—in the implementation of CEDAW in the Americas.

This report looks at

- how CEDAW implementation has been progressing in a few countries of our continent;
- the issues involved; and
- the problems encountered.

I hope it will serve as a reference document so that women parliamentarians within our network can keep abreast of the commitments made and progress achieved in our various countries regarding gender equality and respect for women's fundamental rights.

Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)

Adopted on December 18, 1979 by the General Assembly of the United Nations (UN), the Convention is considered to be an international bill of rights for women. It is also known as the treaty on women's fundamental rights and is, for the time being, the main international instrument for advancing gender equality and eliminating discrimination against women.

By accepting the Convention, States commit themselves to undertaking a series of measures to end discrimination against women in all forms, including

- incorporating the principle of gender equality into their legal systems;
- abolishing all discriminatory laws and adopting laws prohibiting discrimination against women;
- establishing tribunals and other public institutions to ensure the effective protection of women against discrimination; and
- ensuring the elimination of all acts of discrimination against women by individuals, organizations or enterprises.

The Convention is the only human rights treaty that affirms the reproductive rights of women and recognizes that culture and tradition are at the root of the present power structure and are influential forces shaping gender roles and family relations. It affirms women's rights to acquire, change or retain their nationality and the nationality of their children.

States Parties also agree to take appropriate measures against all forms of trafficking in women and exploitation of women.

Countries that have ratified or acceded to the Convention are legally bound to put its provisions into practice. They are also committed to submitting national reports, at least once every four years, on the measures they have taken to comply with their treaty obligations.

All of the 35 countries of our continent have ratified the Convention except the United States of America.

Optional Protocol

The General Assembly of the UN adopted the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women on October 6, 1999, at its 54th session. The Protocol, a treaty appended to the Convention, creates two procedures that complement the international framework for protecting women's rights and provides individual women and groups of women with international remedies when national resources do not effectively guarantee their right to non-discrimination.

Until the adoption of the Optional Protocol, the lack of application and enforcement mechanisms had made the Convention less effective than other international instruments for the protection of human rights.

The Optional Protocol has been signed by 18 countries and ratified by 14 of the signatories.

Thanks to the strong political will of the government, the widespread mobilization of women's groups, and awareness-raising efforts in all sectors of society, my country, Argentina, witnessed the long-awaited ratification of the Optional Protocol in November 2006, under Act 26171.

The passage of this law confirmed the country's stance in favour of strengthening the international human rights protection system.

Adding an enforcement mechanism to the Convention makes some kind of international reporting a quasi obligation. By ratifying the Protocol, a State Party undertakes to report on its progress in enforcing the Convention and shows the international community and members of its own society that it is willing to fight gender-based discrimination.

The Protocol defends women's rights in specific situations.

It promotes democracy through the creation of mechanisms for citizen participation.

The Protocol came into force on December 22, 2000.

The signature and ratification of the Optional Protocol are a means of measuring the strength of a country's political will to fully implement the Convention.

Reports to the CEDAW Committee

Established in 1982, the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women is made up of 23 experts on women's issues from around the world. It monitors women's progress in the countries that are party to the Convention.

The Committee considers the country reports submitted to it by the States Parties. Each country report is presented to the Committee by representatives of the government concerned and outlines the measures it has adopted to advance the status of women. After discussions with the officials responsible for a report, the Committee may make comments and request further information. It may also make recommendations on any matter that has an impact on the status of women and that, in its opinion, deserves further attention from the State Party.

Reservations to CEDAW

In accordance with the contractual principle of international law, States may make reservations with respect to the Convention to avoid inconsistencies with their own national laws. Article 28 of the Convention permits ratification subject to reservations, provided the reservations are not incompatible with the object and purpose of the Convention. In the Committee's view, article 2 is central to the objects and purpose of the Convention. The States Parties that ratify the Convention do so because they agree that discrimination against women in all its forms should be condemned and that it is their duty to apply the strategies set out in of article 2, subparagraphs (a) to (g), to eliminate discrimination.

Neither traditional, religious or cultural practice nor incompatible domestic laws and policies can justify violations of the Convention.

The Committee has also stated that reservations to article 16 lodged for national, traditional, religious or cultural reasons are incompatible with the Convention and therefore impermissible and should be reviewed and modified or removed.

A few States have withdrawn their reservations and thus shown they are truly determined to more fully apply the Convention. Many reservations remain, however, mainly for religious, traditional and cultural reasons.

Some States have entered reservations to article 2 although their national constitutions or laws prohibit discrimination, so that there is an inherent conflict between the State's constitution and its reservation with respect to the Convention.

Chile is a case in point. When the Chilean government signed the Convention in 1980, it stated that it was doing so despite the fact that certain provisions of the Convention were not entirely compatible with its legislation. At the same time, it reported that it was creating a Commission for the Study and Reform of the Civil Code charged with, among other things, amending those provisions that were not fully consistent with the terms of the Convention.

In two of its general recommendations and in its statement on reservations, the Committee has called on the States to re-examine the reservations they have expressed with respect to the principles of the Convention, which impose limitations on full compliance.

Many States Parties, including Brazil, Canada and Jamaica, have responded by re-examining and partly or wholly withdrawing their reservations. Removal or modification of reservations, particularly to articles 2 and 16, indicate a State Party's determination to remove all barriers to women's full equality and its commitment to ensuring that women are able to participate fully in all aspects of public life without fear of discrimination or re-primination.

Reservations in the Americas

The governments of Argentina, the Bahamas, Brazil, El Salvador, Jamaica and Cuba have stated that they do not consider themselves to be bound by article 29, subparagraph 1, of the Convention.

Subparagraph 1 provides that any dispute between two or more States Parties concerning the interpretation or application of the Convention that is not settled by negotiation must be submitted to arbitration and, if necessary, referred to the International Court of Justice. The Republic of Cuba has expressed the opinion that any dispute between States Parties should be resolved by direct negotiations through diplomatic channels.

Measures Adopted by the Countries on Our Continent to Implement the Convention

Principle of Gender Equality

Canada: Canada respects and protects its citizens' fundamental rights. The principle of gender equality and the express prohibition of all forms of gender-based discrimination are embodied in law.

Cuba: The absolute equality of men and women within the family is explicitly entrenched in the Constitution and in the Family Code, which came into force in 1975 and establishes the new legal standards governing family relations in Cuba.

The principle according to which all citizens are equal inspires the political will of the Cuban government and the Cuban people, and serves as the conceptual basis of a legal system whose precepts and standards are expressly aimed at eliminating all forms of discrimination or inequality in Cuba. Community and social groups work in the same vein. These groups bring together people from various sectors of society and their priority is supporting and helping the disadvantaged—children, women, the elderly, the sick and the handicapped.

The Cuban legal system is structured to guarantee that all citizens, women included, will be able to exercise their rights equally.

Brazil: Brazil entrenched the principle of legal equality of men and women in its Constitution as it did the principle of equality within the family, thus establishing that both partners in a marriage have the same rights and duties.

Constitutions and Laws Advancing the Status of Women

Canada: The Canadian Human Rights Act was adopted in 1977. Its main purpose is to ensure equality of opportunity and freedom from discrimination in institutions under federal jurisdiction. The Act also created the Canadian Human Rights Commission, which has been in operation since 1978.

Argentina: Argentina's National Constitution enshrines the principle that all inhabitants of the country are equal before the law and enjoy equal access to employment, with no other conditions than having the necessary qualifications, and affirms the right of all to work and to engage in any lawful business.

The Employment Contract Act prohibits all forms of gender-based discrimination among workers, establishes the principle of equal treatment and prohibits any form of discrimination against women based on gender or civil status in collective agreements or employment-related contracts.

Act 24476 on retirement without contributions and Act 25994 on early retirement are steps in the right direction as close to 90% of those who stand to benefit from these laws are women.

The adoption of legislation by the National Congress and of orders in council, resolutions and other instruments by the National Executive Authority has had direct and indirect impacts on the condition and status of women in the country. The Sexual Health and Responsible Procreation Act, the Sexual Education Act, the Humanized Childbirth Act, the Vocational and Technical Education Act and the National Education Act are but a few examples.

Brazil: The Federal Constitution of 1988 introduced the principle of legal equality between men and women and established the principle of equality within the family cell, with the man and the woman enjoying the same rights and assuming the same duties.

The Brazilian Civil Code—the legal instrument that sets the standard in civil matters in the Republic of Brazil or, more specifically, Act 10406 of 2002—breaks with the heritage of discrimination women bore under the Code of 1916.

Paraguay: The National Constitution of 1992 entrenches the principle that all inhabitants of the Republic are equal in dignity and rights, prohibits all forms of discrimination and explicitly recognizes women and men as civil, political, social, economic and cultural equals.

Act 1 of 1992, whose object was a partial reform of the Civil Code, provides that married spouses have equal rights and responsibilities in regards to the family and the children, the conjugal domicile, engaging in an economic activity and choosing the family's surname and the order of the children's surnames. It also stipulates that the spouses are equals regarding the management and disposition of property.

Uruguay: The Uruguayan Constitution of 1967, as amended by referendum in 1989, 1994, 1996 and 2004, asserts that all persons are equal before the law and recognizes no differences between individuals other than their talents and virtues (section 8).

Although the current Constitution still does not explicitly set forth the principle of gender equality, it is nonetheless an improvement over previous constitutions, which referred to "men" rather than "persons".

Act 10783 of 1946 deals with women's civil rights.

Act 16045 of 1989 on labour standards prohibits all discrimination based on gender affecting the right to equal treatment and equal opportunities, regardless of the sector of activity.

Chile: The Political Constitution of 1980, as it reads since the constitutional reform of 1999, refers explicitly to the status of women, thus contributing to their recognition as victims who must be protected. The Constitution decrees that all are born equal before the law, that there are no privileged individuals or classes, that there are no slaves, and that anyone who sets foot on Chilean soil is considered free. Men and women are equal before the law. Anyone can invoke the Constitution if the rights or freedoms it guarantees are threatened or infringed.

Cuba: The principle of the absolute equality of men and women within the family is expressly set out in the Constitution and in the Family Code, which formulates new legal standards governing relationships within the family in Cuba.

The Cuban Penal Code contains a number of measures aimed at protecting women. It also prescribes penalties for anyone who discriminates or favours or encourages discrimination against others based on gender, sexual orientation, race, colour or national or regional origin, whether through offensive comments or attitudes or through actions intended to deprive them of the enjoyment of their rights to equality under the Constitution or to prevent them from exercising those rights.

Cuban national legislation is gender-sensitive in that its goal has been and continues to be to recognize the different needs, strategic interests and practices of Cuban women and men, and to encourage fair and equitable relations between men and women within both the family and society.

Honduras: The Constitution of 1982 of the Republic of Honduras defines discrimination in terms of its different forms.

In 2000, the Equal Opportunities for Women Act consolidated efforts to promote equity.

In 2005, the provisions of the Honduran Penal Code relating to sexual offences were extensively revised.

Policies Relating to Gender Equality

Canada: The mandate of the Canadian Human Rights Commission is to raise awareness of the importance of human rights among Canadians, encourage them to put the principles of equality into practice, provide them with a mechanism for resolving individual complaints and help remove obstacles to equality as regards employment and access to services. The Canadian Human Rights Act is based on the principle that all individuals should have an equal opportunity to live a life free of discrimination. It aims to prevent unequal treatment on the grounds of age, gender or race or any other grounds it specifies. Any difference in treatment is considered to be discriminatory and is prohibited. The Act also prohibits discrimination within organizations under federal jurisdiction. The provinces and territories have similar standards that also prohibit discrimination in the areas under their jurisdiction.

Status of Women Canada is the federal agency responsible for defending women's rights and administering the Act. Its mission is to promote gender equality and bring about women's full participation in the economic, social, cultural and political life of Canada. The organization focuses on three areas: improving women's financial independence and well-being; eradicating systemic violence against women and children; and promoting women's rights.

The organization also works for the adoption of equality policies in Canada. It conducts gender-based studies and encourages the application of equality policies in the areas under federal jurisdiction. It also sponsors research which findings help include gender dimensions in all government programs and policies.

The organization plays an essential role through its efforts to increase appreciation of women's work and its support to organizations that advance equality. Status of Women Canada collaborates with other federal departments and agencies, other levels of government and the private and voluntary sectors to ensure that the principle of gender equality is respected. In addition, Status of Women Canada works with other countries and with international organizations to promote gender equality worldwide.

Honduras: The National Women's Institute is an independent social development institution that has the status of a Secretariat of State, a legal personality and the right to own property. Its mission is to frame and promote policy on the status of women and coordinate policy implementation and follow-up. The Institute also spearheads action plans to advance policy objectives and works toward women's full participation in the sustainable development process.

The Institute's governing board has approved a national policy cum equal opportunity action plan for 2002-2007.

Chile: In 2001, Chile began to integrate gender-based dimensions into two public management control instruments developed by the Budget Directorate of the Ministry of Finance, more specifically, the Grants Fund, a budgetary tool to

finance innovative measures that break with bureaucratic inertia and routine, and the Management Improvement Program, which promotes the inclusion of equal opportunity in public service regulatory procedures and the adoption of gender equity measures.

Paraguay: The Women's Secretariat is in the process of implementing the Second National Plan for Equal Opportunities for Women and Men for the period 2003 to 2007. Its objectives include promoting equal rights for women and men, a culture of equality, equal access to economic resources and employment, equity in education, full access to health services, the right to a violence-free life and equal opportunities to participate in political life.

Argentina: The National Women's Council is the government organization responsible for implementing the Convention throughout the country. The Convention was ratified under Act 23179 and given constitutional status as part of the 1994 Reform. Created under Order in Council 1426/92, as amended by Order in Council 291/95, the Council is under the direct authority of the President of Argentina (Order in Council 892/96).

The National Women's Council currently administers three programs: the Federal Women's Affairs Program; the National Women, Equity and Work Program; and the Family Strengthening and Social Capital Promotion Program (PROFAM), a national plan to empower women, provide technical assistance and raise awareness of violence against women.

Argentina has also adopted a state policy, the National Anti-Discrimination Plan, which contains measures to end all forms of discrimination based on ethnic origin, age, sexual orientation, nationality, social class, religion or political allegiance.

The creation of the Gender Equality Policy Council within the Ministry of Defence has led to substantially higher pension benefits for older women with seven children. This is an unprecedented show of openness in an area where little consideration was previously given to gender issues and that is now under the responsibility of Minister Nilda Garré.

A Women's Empowerment Centre was created last May with the support of the National Institute against Discrimination, Xenophobia and Racism. The Centre's mission is to help women who are involved in prostitution, are socially vulnerable or are victims of discrimination. The Supreme Court of Argentina has set up an Office of Domestic Violence to facilitate access to justice for women who are victims of violence.

To advance equal opportunity, the Minister of Labour broadened the powers of the Tripartite Committee for Workplace Equity and Equal Employment Opportunities across the country, thus giving rise to the creation of provincial tripartite committees.

Efforts to promote a culture of equity and inclusiveness include the creation of the Juana Azurduy Program for the Strengthening of the Rights and

Participation of Women by the Minister of Social Development in July 2006. The goal of this program is to develop tools for raising awareness of women's issues among the public and among government actors in the various Argentine states.

Parliamentary action is being taken in the National Senate to ensure that a bill sponsored by Senator Perceval to create a National Women's Council becomes law and that it will no longer be possible to revise the Council's mandate following a change in government. The goal is to give the Council permanent status and make it eligible for appropriations. The Senate also established, by unanimous vote, a parliamentary group known as the Women's Bank.

Education

Canada: Close to half of Canadian women have a high school education.

In 2001, around 15% of Canadian women over 15 years of age had a university education, 17% held a diploma or other qualification, 8% had completed vocational training and 11% had a postsecondary education of some type.

Cuba: Cuba's education system is open to all free of charge and gives special attention to at-risk groups such as students with physical or mental disabilities. More than half of Cuba's skilled workers are women as a result of facilitated access to technical education and skills training. Women have easy access to the education system even in rural areas.

Sex-Role Stereotypes

In a number of countries of the Americas and even in countries that have ratified the Protocol, values and intergender relations are still dictated by persistent, self-perpetuating sex-role stereotypes that are rooted in tradition.

Employment

Canada: In Canada, the increase in women's participation in the workforce is among the most important social changes of the last few decades. Considerably more women engage in paid work, yet most unpaid work is still done by women. The number of women in certain areas of professional activity has increased substantially in recent years, as has the number of women in executive positions.

Nonetheless, in general, Canadian women still earn less than men.

Honduras: In the Honduras, most women—70% of the active female labour force—are self-employed or employed by private individuals. They work long, hard days.

Paraguay: The National Constitution of 1992 gives all workers equal rights, prohibits discrimination, protects maternity and affords special protection to workers with disabilities. The Labour Code, assented to in 1993 and amended

in 1995, entrenches the principle that women and men have the same rights and responsibilities. It protects pregnant workers and nursing mothers and nullifies clauses that give women lower wages or assign women to insalubrious or dangerous work on gender-biased grounds.

Cuba: On the economic front, the legal standards enacted to advance women's rights assert women's right to work and explicitly guarantee working women in both rural and urban areas the right to equal pay for work of equal value, paid breaks, maternity leave, social security measures and ready access to any occupation. Other legislation aims to provide women with maximum protection in light of their dual role as mothers and workers. Women account for more than half of the country's skilled workforce, thanks to facilitated access to technical education and skills training.

Reproductive Health and Family Planning

Laws and policies recently adopted in Bolivia, Brazil and Peru recognize the right to reproductive health and the right to family planning as fundamental rights.

Argentina, Chile and Uruguay have ratified Convention 156 of the International Labour Organisation (ILO) on Workers with Family Responsibilities. The Convention recognizes the need to develop services and measures to facilitate work/family balance irrespective of gender.

Argentina: In October 2002, Argentina adopted Act 25673 to establish the National Sexual Health and Responsible Procreation Program and, in 2003, Order in Council 1282 was made under that Act. Other pieces of legislation worth noting include Act 26130 on contraceptive surgical procedures, tubal ligation and vasectomy and Act 26150 on the National Sexual Education Program.

Brazil, Chile, Costa Rica, Ecuador and Paraguay have introduced parental leave for childbirth or to care for a child with a severe disability although, in actual fact, very few take advantage of the program.

Chile: Act 20047, which entrenches the right to parental leave in the Code, was enacted on August 24, 2005 and published in Chile's Official Gazette on September 2 of the same year.

Cuba: Given women's sexual and reproductive rights, women may legally decide for themselves whether and when they will have children. Abortion is not penalized under the law. Women have access to in-hospital abortions free of charge to ensure the procedures are performed under safe conditions by specialized personnel. Abortion is penalized only when performed in conditions not compliant with the law. The media and the national health and education systems nonetheless engage in systematic education efforts to encourage responsible sexual relations and raise awareness of the physical and psychological risks involved in abortions and sexually transmitted diseases. In 2003, Cuba passed Executive Order 234 on maternity leave, which allows the

new parents of a child to share the leave period. The purpose of this measure is to provide conditions conducive to the full development of the child. The new legislation also extends postnatal leave until the child is one year old.

Mexico: Mexico offers a complete education, health and nutrition program.

Honduras: In Honduras, sexual education is a matter of national interest and must be consistent with the principles set out in the country's Constitution, which expressly provides that the curriculum in the national education system must be secular. Given the constitutional order, which rests on a secular State, the Government is bound to guarantee access to objective, scientific and responsible sexual education that is free of gender or religious bias.

Political Participation

In 1991, Argentina passed the Quota Act, which requires that women candidates account for a minimum of 30% of all candidates in any election. The Act also requires that women candidates be presented in winnable constituencies.

Ten other countries have followed suit and enacted laws making it a requirement for political parties to include a minimum percentage of women candidates in their candidate lists. The minimum percentage varies, depending on the country, between 20% and 40%. Columbia has also set a 30% minimum for female representation in high-level executive positions in the public administration.

Costa Rica, which has a longstanding democratic tradition, requires that at least 40% of all candidates be women, while countries that show varying levels of democratic development such as Brazil, the Dominican Republic and Peru, have set their respective minimums at 30%, 25% and 25%. The minimum is lower, at 20%, in Paraguay, which has an authoritarian past.

In Bolivia, at least one third of candidates must be women. In Paraguay, the proportion is one out of five candidates. As for Mexico, where by law neither gender may represent more than 70% of a party's candidates, a party's application of this rule varies with its statutes or, in other words, with the political culture of its leaders and militants.

In countries such as Peru, Ecuador, Panama and Brazil, where the lists of candidates who hope to win seats in Parliament are open, the promotion of women candidates is left to voter discretion in that the voters determine, through their vote, who will be elected and, therefore, how many women will represent them in Parliament.

Costa Rica, in addition to having a long-standing democratic tradition and being recognized for its secularity and openness, imposes the highest quota for women candidates (40%).

Argentina: The Senate created the **Women's Bank**, a special committee on which all women senators sit, regardless of their political allegiance, and whose purpose is to lobby for the development of a new parliamentary action plan that takes gender considerations into account, with a view to encouraging legislation that upholds the principle of equal rights, equal opportunities and equal treatment for women and men. Argentina was not the first country to put in place such a committee. The closest precedent is the *Bancada femenina* or Women's Bank put in place by the Uruguayan Congress in 2005. It is made up of elected representatives and senators from all the parties. Other Latin American countries boast similar parliamentary forums. In Argentina, women parliamentarians from the various parties form a sort of women's alliance when legislation with a special interest for women, such as the Sexual Health and Responsible Procreation Act and the Act to ratify the Optional Protocol to the CEDAW Convention, comes up for consideration. Both of these pieces of legislation, when tabled, met with strong resistance from male parliamentarians, and the Catholic Church lobbied heavily to thwart their adoption. Political participation rose substantially at the time, with the result that, on October 28, 2007, a woman was elected President of the country for the very first time. The percentage of votes obtained by all the women candidates in that presidential election exceeded 72%, while women represent around 40% of the Argentine Congress.

Another commitment made by the States Parties is to suppress all forms of trafficking in women and all forms of exploitation of women through prostitution.

International Instruments

The UN Convention against Transnational Organized Crime came into force on September 29, 2003. This first international convention against organized crime is a major step forward in bringing States to counter and combat transnational organized crime.

The Convention is supplemented by three important protocols: (1) the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children; (2) the Protocol against the Smuggling of Migrants by Land, Sea and Air; and (3) the Protocol against the Illicit Manufacturing of and Trafficking in Firearms, their Parts and Components and Ammunition.

Countries must become parties to the Convention before they can become parties to any of the Protocols. Each Protocol must be signed and ratified individually.

The Convention was drafted by an international committee on which over 120 UN member countries were represented, and was adopted by the UN Millennium General Assembly in November 2000. Since May 2004, 147 States have signed the Convention and 68, including Argentina, have ratified it.

The Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children came into force on December 25, 2003. Since

May 2004, 117 States have signed the Protocol and 50 have ratified it. The purpose of the Protocol is to support international cooperation to prevent and combat trafficking in persons and improve the protection and assistance offered to trafficking victims. The Republic of Argentina signed the Protocol on December 12, 2000 and deposited the instrument on November 19, 2002.

The Protocol features key elements to strengthen international efforts, among which the following are noteworthy: a definition of trafficking of persons linked to exploitation and slavery; tools for the authorities responsible for maintaining public order, controlling national borders and exercising judiciary power; the obligation for States to penalize human trafficking and emphasis on the States' responsibility for investigating, prosecuting and punishing traffickers; appropriate penalties for those accused of running trafficking rings; better protection and support for victims and witnesses, coupled with measures to protect their privacy and ensure their safety; prevention strategies, including strategies to inform and educate victims, the authorities responsible for maintaining public order and the general public through research and awareness campaigns.

As is the case with the Convention, ratification of the Protocol obliges States to reinforce their domestic legislation and collaborate with others internationally to coordinate law enforcement with a view to combating human trafficking.

Argentina: Argentina assented to Act 26364 on the prevention and repression of trafficking in persons and on assistance to trafficking victims on April 9, 2008, and enacted the legislation on April 29, 2008.

Bill 2120/08, whose purpose is to put in place a national program to prevent trafficking in persons and provide assistance to trafficking victims, is currently before the Argentine Senate.

As we have seen, we are gradually moving closer, at both the legislative and the executive levels of government, to the objectives set out in the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and its Optional Protocol.

But we must continue to fight for legislation that will enable us to achieve full equality.

And we must all, as women, both at home and in the public arena, continue our efforts to change the cultural models we have inherited from the past.