



NETWORK OF WOMEN PARLIAMENTARIANS OF THE AMERICAS

THEMES PROPOSED FOR THE 6TH ANNUAL MEETING AT THE 5TH ANNUAL MEETING OF THE NETWORK FOZ DO IGUAÇU, BRAZIL MAY 7, 2005

I - Theme:

“Follow up the implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women and its Optional Protocol”

Description of the Convention

Adopted on December 18, 1979 by the United Nations, the *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women* (CEDAW) came into force on September 3, 1981 as an international treaty, after being ratified by 20 countries. By January 2004, some 175 states had ratified it. Among the international conventions on the protection of human rights, the Convention is the second most ratified.

The Convention is aimed at eliminating any attitude, practice, exclusion, or preference made on the basis of sex that disadvantages women and exposes them to mistreatment. It is different from other human rights treaties in that it deals specifically with the situation of women, notably in terms of civil rights and legal status, procreation, and the impact of cultural factors on relations between men and women.

It goes without saying that this Convention is a powerful tool in the hands of parliamentarians to end the diverse forms of discrimination experienced by women and promote equality, without which there can be no sustainable human development.

Rationale

As part of the next Annual Meeting of the Network of Women Parliamentarians of the Americas to be held on the 25th anniversary of CEDAW's entry into force, it seemed crucial for us to examine this convention, which now features an optional protocol to speed real equality between the sexes. Thus, the goal of our next work session would be to place CEDAW and its protocol at the heart of the Network and COPA's deliberations to ensure women's rights are taken into account throughout the Americas. The Network could then encourage heads of state and government of the Americas to ratify and implement this convention and its optional protocol if circumstance permits. Lastly, this theme would enable the Network to follow up on all

the recommendations and resolutions adopted at its various meetings, notably on those related to violence against women.

II - Theme:

“The situation of women in rural zones and aboriginal women: their problems of access to resources and services, and the impact of economic integration on their life”

Rationale

International Context

The UN Commission on the Status of Women establishes guidelines regarding the equal access of women and girls to education and the creation of an environment conducive to women’s participation in economic life. It relies on the UN and donors for support. The latter, as well as international financial institutions and regional development banks, have been asked to put in place policies that support national efforts to augment the resources available to women, particularly in rural zones.

In addition, the UN is on the verge of proposing a draft declaration on the rights of aboriginal peoples.

There are also legal instruments whose purpose is to promote the rights of aboriginals worldwide, such as Convention 169 of the International Labour Organization (ILO) on indigenous and tribal peoples, which has only been ratified by 17 countries since its adoption in 1989. It should be noted the majority of countries that have ratified this convention are Latin American countries (13 out of 17), where the aboriginal population is high.

Inter-American Context

There is a continental network of indigenous women of the Americas created in 1993 by Canadian aboriginal women to bring together the hemisphere’s aboriginal women to discuss progress made in the rights of aboriginal women. The network includes numerous national aboriginal women’s organizations. It has organized a number of workshops since its creation. The first hemisphere-wide meeting of these women was held in 1995. The last was held in April 2004, in Lima, Peru. Recommendations were adopted after these meetings.

Moreover, the first Indigenous Women’s Summit of the Americas was held from November 30 to December 4, 2002, in Oaxaca, Mexico.

Organization of American States (OAS)

OAS has put in place numerous measures women can use to promote their rights, notably the American Convention on Human Rights (ACHR) and the Inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment, and Eradication of Violence Against Women. These conventions implicitly address the rights of aboriginal women and women in rural areas.

Conclusion

This second theme could also be discussed in the event the first theme (CEDAW) was chosen. The Convention calls for attention to be afforded all groups of women, including women in rural areas and aboriginal women, which could be addressed in the broader context of the first theme on a country-by-country basis for the entire hemisphere.