



**WOMEN AND THE FREE TRADE AREA OF THE AMERICAS (FTAA)**

**REPORT PRESENTED AT THE V ANNUAL MEETING  
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## Women and the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA)

### **Introduction**

The Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA) is a compelling and vital issue for countries throughout our hemisphere. This initiative will have a major impact on our peoples and economies, particularly because not all economies are on an equal footing. This was what led the Parliamentary Confederation of the Americas (COPA) and the Network of Women Parliamentarians of the Americas to begin scrutinizing the issue, with the Network focusing more on FTAA impacts on women.

At the IV annual meeting of the Network of Women Parliamentarians of the Americas, held in Caracas, Venezuela, on November 24, 2003, we adopted a recommendation entitled "*The Impact of the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA) on Women.*" The last paragraph draws attention to the importance of this topic:

*"We, the members of the Network of Women Parliamentarians of the Americas, recommend that the Network of Women Parliamentarians constantly monitor the impact of the FTAA on women and invite the regional sections of the Network to do likewise in their respective parliaments."*

A first step in giving effect to this important mandate was completed at our Executive Committee meeting in Brasilia on March 24, 2004, when I had the honor of being elected rapporteur on "Women and the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA)." Given that my responsibility in this position was to consult the various Network parliaments regarding the impact of the FTAA on women and report on this matter at our next annual meeting, I asked for your cooperation on August 6, 2004, in ensuring that this report reflects the visions and positions of the various parliaments we represent. To this end, I asked you to send me a brief summary of the positions taken in your respective parliaments with regard to the impact of the Free Trade Area of the Americas on the status of women. I sent all Network Executive Committee members a form to help them compile this information (see attached form).

This questionnaire started with three general questions on the position of your parliament and your government with regard to the FTAA. These were followed by six specific questions on the

position of your parliament and your government on any economic and social impacts of the FTAA, as well as any impacts on public services and women. I also asked you what role you believed parliamentarians should play with regard to the FTAA and its impact on women.

Since in February 2005 we had received only three replies to this questionnaire—those from the Mexican Federal Senate, the Andean Parliament, and Québec—the Network Secretariat reiterated its request for a response to this questionnaire with all parliaments of the Americas. This second request was unsuccessful, since no further contributions were sent.

Nevertheless, given the importance of this issue for the women of the Americas, we decided to present this report, which takes the form of a preliminary progress report. Please note that to compensate for the lack of firsthand information from parliamentarians, we had to collect and analyze the information available on the websites of governments, parliaments, and interparliamentary organizations in the region, as well as on the official FTAA website. This information, although fragmented—particularly with regard to the impact of the FTAA on women—more than ever proves the importance of continuing to explore this theme in upcoming Network meetings.

The goal of this preliminary report is therefore to present the results of recent research on the impact of the FTAA on women. We will begin by presenting the FTAA negotiating process. Next, we will review the conclusions of COPA and Network meetings, with a particular focus on the latest Annual Meeting of the Network held in Caracas in November 2003. Last, we will look at how parliaments and governments expressed their position regarding the FTAA and its economic and social impacts on women, particularly when this information was available online.

## **1. FTAA negotiating process**

We have come a long way since the idea of the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA) was introduced at the Summit of the Americas in Miami in December 1994. The goal of the FTAA is to economically integrate the Americas while increasing each individual country's wealth.

Negotiations are by consensus and countries may choose to negotiate independently or as part of a trade bloc. The ministers of trade of FTAA countries meet approximately every eighteen months to supervise and manage the negotiations. The chairmanship of negotiations rotates at

the conclusion of each ministerial meeting. Since November 1, 2002, Brazil and the United States have co-chaired negotiations.

The Trade Negotiations Committee (TNC) is made up of vice ministers of trade. It is in charge of the work of other committees, the structure of the agreement, and institutional issues.

Nine negotiating groups deal respectively with market access, investment, services, government procurement, dispute settlement, agriculture, intellectual property rights, competition policy, and subsidies, countervailing duties, and antidumping measures. These groups are tasked with writing reports on their areas.

Special committees have also been created. Three deal with horizontal issues: the Consultative Group on Smaller Economies, the Committee of Government Representatives on the Participation of Civil Society, and the Joint Government–Private Sector Committee of Experts on Electronic Commerce. A technical committee looks at institutional issues, and a group of experts focuses on trade facilitation measures.

According to the timetable adopted at the various Summits of the Americas, negotiations should end in January 2005 for the agreement to come into effect no later than December of the same year. However, since the last ministerial meeting held in Miami in November 2003, negotiations seem to have ground to a halt. The Trade Negotiations Committee has asked for more time and postponed the previously scheduled ministerial meetings. Thus, the meeting slated for 2004 in Brazil did not occur.

The last meeting of Trade Negotiations Committee co-chairs Brazil and the United States was held in late March 2005 in Washington, D.C. The co-chairs still believe that negotiations can continue and the FTAA development process is heading in the right direction. The two countries plan to convene the Trade Negotiations Committee for a meeting in late April or early May.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Information is available on the official FTAA website at [www.ftaa-alca.org/alca\\_e.asp](http://www.ftaa-alca.org/alca_e.asp) and the Department of State website at <http://usinfo.state.gov/wh/Archive/2005/Feb/24-313504.html>.

## **2. Meetings of the Parliamentary Confederation of the Americas and the Network of Women Parliamentarians of the Americas**

### ***2.1 Parliamentary Confederation of the Americas (COPA)***

As one of COPA's objectives since its creation in 1997 has been to promote ongoing inter-American dialog, a number of recommendations from meetings and general assemblies have dealt with the FTAA.

The Québec City Final Declaration of September 21, 1997, calls on COPA to encourage public participation in the discussions and consultations leading up to decisions regarding the creation of a hemispheric free trade area. It also states that parliamentarians must promote the right to work and access to employment, and that the FTAA must promote policies that generate stable jobs. It must also ensure proper working conditions, fair remuneration, freedom of association, and protection against unemployment.

At the April 2001 special meeting held in Québec City concurrent to the Summit of the Americas, the COPA Executive Committee adopted an action plan in which parliamentarians undertook to notify the public regarding the issues surrounding the FTAA and hold public consultations. They also undertook to assess the impact of this agreement on inhabitants of the region and on women.

In November 2002 at the COPA General Assembly held in Ixtapan de la Sal, Mexico, the permanent committee on the FTAA, Economy, Trade, Labor, and Migration wrote a recommendation on economic integration in light of the FTAA. COPA asked that parliamentarians be party to deliberations on FTAA negotiations, that subsidies and protectionist measures be eliminated, and that compensatory measures be established to account for the asymmetries between countries.

This same committee met later in Quito in August 2003 to discuss the role of parliaments with regard to the FTAA. Following this meeting, it was agreed that parliamentarians implement a strategy for attendance at international FTAA negotiation forums and that the results be shared with the public. The Committee recommended that parliaments create interparliamentary committees representing the various regions of the Americas. Parliaments were also urged to address gender equality in the FTAA negotiating process.

At its 5th General Assembly held in November 2003 in Caracas, Venezuela, COPA adopted a recommendation on its involvement in the FTAA negotiating process. This text states that the involvement of parliamentarians in the negotiation process ensures fuller representation of the spectrum of opinion. It is important that parliamentarians have a say on the FTAA and promote dialog between governments and parliaments as part of the negotiation process. Also expressed was the desire of parliamentarians to be involved with the tripartite negotiation committee composed of the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), the Organization of American States (OAS), and the United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), and the desirability of establishing a formal relationship between COPA and this committee.

## ***2.2 Network of Women Parliamentarians of the Americas***

The Network began considering the impact of the FTAA at its April 2001 Executive Committee meeting in Québec City, when a declaration was adopted on the impact of the FTAA and hemispheric integration on the lives of women.

At the 4th Annual Meeting of the Network in Caracas, Venezuela, on November 24, 2003, a workshop on the impact of the FTAA on women was led by Ms. Graciela Rodriguez, coordinator of Red Internacional de Genero y Comercio and executive director of Brazil's Instituto Equit. Ms. Rodriguez explained which aspects of free trade agreements could affect women. In her opinion, by observing the results of trade agreements already in effect, it is possible to predict the consequences of the FTAA on women.

Through its clauses on investments, the FTAA could infringe on government powers and reduce the capacity of states to enact legislation. Privatization measures also lead to a reduction in public services, particularly in the health and education sectors. This exacerbates conditions for women, since they use these services most. Also noting that women work primarily in the informal sector, the social economy, and micro-enterprises, Ms. Rodriguez believes the agreement creating the FTAA should include SME support provisions. Furthermore, restricted

access to prenatal and maternity leave due to the abusive implementation of flexible working conditions has an impact on reproductive rights.<sup>2</sup>

Following her presentation, the speaker proposed courses of action to guide parliamentary initiatives. She noted that governments had a duty to inform the public of the impact of the FTAA. She also suggested increasing the technical and analytical capacity of negotiating teams, gathering gender-based data, and cooperating with research groups, civil society, and G20 countries.<sup>3</sup>

The recommendation on the impact of the FTAA on women adopted at that time urges parliamentarians to promote the active participation of women to better address their concerns. Mention was also made of promoting access to research, critical studies, and analyses completed by NGOs and other research centers. Through the Network, participants also undertook to take steps to influence upcoming ministerial meetings. They took on the mission of forcing governments to address the status of women in their policies. The Network undertook to monitor the impact of the FTAA on women on an ongoing basis.<sup>4</sup>

At the initiative of the Québec Section, on May 20, 2004, the Network also invited Ms. Lucie Lamarche, a professor at Université du Québec à Montréal, to speak to the National Assembly on the process of hemispheric integration. Her talk discussed the democratic contribution and responsibility of Québec parliamentarians. She noted that Québec is a province that makes women's rights a priority, and a free trade agreement should not damage this privilege by imposing the privatization of public services or restricting state action. Ms. Lamarche recommended that women participate in trade agreement negotiations and be consulted about appendixes and exclusion lists. She further recommended that the Québec National Assembly require government departments to demonstrate the use of gender-based analysis in assessing trade agreements.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Network of Women Parliamentarians of the Americas, IV Annual Meeting, Caracas, Venezuela, November 24, 2003, *Recommendation on the Impact of the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA) on Women*.

<sup>3</sup> *Idem, Report*.

<sup>4</sup> Network of Women Parliamentarians of the Americas, *op. cit.*

<sup>5</sup> Lucie Lamarche, *Does the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA) Take Women into Account? Some Reflections on the Democratic Roles and Responsibilities of Québec Parliamentarians*, presentation given at the National Assembly of Québec at the invitation of the Québec Section of the Network of Women Parliamentarians of the Americas, Québec City, May 20, 2004, 15 p.



### **3. Position of parliaments and governments on the FTAA and its impact on women**

Although not all parliaments have taken a position on the FTAA's impact on their country, and on women in particular, some parliaments and governments have attempted to assess the FTAA, its advantages and disadvantages, and its potential consequences for their citizens. Some governments have also held seminars in cooperation with civil society to inform citizens and engage them in the debates. In a majority of countries, governments are working together with their parliaments, either by keeping them informed of the progress of negotiations or creating task forces of parliamentarians. Interparliamentary organizations and regional parliaments have also discussed the matter. In addition, interparliamentary meetings have brought together various countries in the hemisphere to discuss the FTAA.

#### ***3.1 Parliaments and governments***

Given the lack of information, presented below are the positions of parliaments and governments that have made this information available.

In **Canada**, since interprovincial and international trade is a federal responsibility, the federal government must be informed of and consulted about FTAA negotiations. The Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Trade therefore produced three reports between 1999 and 2002 including recommendations on the FTAA and trade with the Americas. The House of Commons is in favor of a free trade area according to the reports, although it has identified certain points that the Government of Canada must take into consideration. The parliament recommends that the federal government lend a hand to the small countries of the Americas by supplying financial resources to help them better negotiate and benefit from the FTAA. It encourages the government to offer technical assistance to help these countries develop national programs to better adapt to free trade, along with more flexible implementation schedules. Lastly, the Committee asked the government to reject inclusion in the FTAA of dispute settlement mechanisms between investors and states like those included in the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA).

Some parties in the House of Commons have expressed dissent. The New Democratic Party (NDP), which opposes the existing agreements between Canada and the U.S. and other countries, disagrees with the reports presented by parliament. The Bloc Québécois is in favor of

the FTAA provided that Québec's interests are accounted for and the agreement shows transparency, provides equal access to all countries, and ensures globalization with a human face.<sup>6</sup>

Status of Women Canada (SWC), a federal body promoting gender equality, conducted three studies in 2000 to analyze the impact of international trade agreements on women and men.<sup>7</sup>

The first report addresses issues of trade liberalization and women. International trade affects women in a variety of sectors, particularly healthcare and education. These sectors are dominated by women and are most vulnerable to the liberalization of services, despite the Government of Canada's assurance they will remain untouched.

One of the studies in question describes the mechanisms Canadian governments use to consult the public, and women in particular, and how gender equality considerations can be integrated into trade policies. The report shows that the government's consultations processes do little to take women and gender equality into account in trade agreements. It also shows how these agreements primarily serve the interests of industry and business.

While Canada has government bodies responsible for the status of women, these bodies are not involved in the trade agreement negotiation process. Women's groups in Canada and other countries of the Americas therefore decided to pressure governments in order to influence their decisions in the negotiation process. The SWC report salutes the initiative of the Women's Forum, created under the Civil Society Forum of the Americas, and the recommendations presented to Canada's International Trade Minister in 1990 regarding women's status and FTAA negotiations. The report also criticizes the consultation mechanism used for civil society, claiming it filters out contributions not concerned with trade or deemed unconstructive.

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<sup>6</sup> Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Trade, *Free Trade Area of the Americas: Seeking an Agreement that Serves the Interests of Canadians*, October 1999; *Balance, Transparency and Engagement after the Quebec Summit*, June 2001; and *Strengthening Canada's Economic Links with the Americas*, June 2002.

<sup>7</sup> *Women and Trade in Canada: An Overview of Key Issues* (August 2000); *International Trade Policy: A Primer* (March 2000); and *International Trade: Putting Gender Into the Process. Initiatives and Lessons Learned* (December 2000), available online: [http://www.cfc-swc.gc.ca/pubs/pubssubject\\_e.html](http://www.cfc-swc.gc.ca/pubs/pubssubject_e.html)

Lastly, the report applauds Canada's initiative in negotiations at the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation Organization (APEC). In 1997, the Government of Canada formed a subcommittee of members from SWC and the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade (DFAIT) to discuss gender relations issues at APEC. The report recommends drawing on APEC experiences as well as criticisms from other trade agreement experiences to improve the transparency and democracy of trade agreements.

In **Québec**, the National Assembly's Committee on Institutions presented a report in December 2000, following a public consultation, on the FTAA's political and socioeconomic impact on Québec. In its report, the Committee made a number of recommendations to the government: executive authorities must promote transparency in negotiations and keep the public abreast of progress, while parliamentarians must be consulted and must have the right to express their opinions on the matter. The Committee proposed the creation of a parliamentary forum at the Summit of the Americas, like those at the European Union and MERCOSUR. Lastly, it asked the Government of Québec to ratify three International Labour Organization (ILO) conventions and the Government to Canada to ensure that the other governments incorporate environmental standards into their legislation.<sup>8</sup>

Conseil du statut de la femme (CSF), a government body responsible for the protection of women's rights in Québec, also reviewed the issue and drew up a report in response to the Committee on Institutions of the National Assembly of Québec. In its report, CSF explains that social development does not always go hand in hand with economic development, which is the objective of free trade agreements. There is also a risk that the traditionally strong government presence in Québec and Canada will be diminished. Québec women will therefore be affected by trade liberalization should it lead to reduced public services, particularly with regard to healthcare and education, which may lead more to women stay at home in a caretaking capacity, increasing their volume of unpaid work. CSF is convinced that "women need the state in order to achieve equality." It also denounces the lack of women in key sectors of FTAA negotiations, i.e., trade and the economy. In its report, CSF recommends that the governments of Québec and Canada ensure human rights clauses are incorporated into the FTAA, along with social and equalitarian objectives. It further recommends maintaining the exclusion of healthcare and education from trade liberalization. CSF also urges the Government of Québec

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<sup>8</sup> Committee on Institutions, National Assembly of Québec, *Le Québec et la Zone de libre-échange des Amériques : Effets politiques et socio-économiques*, December 2000.

to ratify three International Labour Organization (ILO) conventions. Lastly, it calls for the creation of a true forum for participation by civil society, with the same ways and means as those at the disposal of the business community Forum.<sup>9</sup>

In the **U.S.**, in August 2002 the government had the Senate and House of Representatives vote it the authority to fast-track free trade negotiations. Under this “Trade Promotion Authority,” Congress can no longer amend free trade agreements, only approve or reject them.<sup>10</sup> This guarantees the government that an agreement negotiated under its authority will not be amended by parliament. The Senate still has the authority, however, to verify whether a signed free trade agreement violates U.S. antidumping laws.

As for **Mexico**, Senator Saldaña Pérez presented us a report showing that the executive and legislative branches disagree on the impacts the FTAA would have on the population. The Mexican government is in favor of the FTAA, but is aware that the agricultural sector is the most vulnerable and that women will be affected differently from men. The Mexican parliament is divided on the issue. The opinions of parliamentarians were presented at the latest interparliamentary assemblies in reports to the Senate or the House of Representatives. Nevertheless, the House of Representatives submitted a resolution on farmers’ rights to the federal government. The legislative branch recommends that structures be put into place to enable women to discuss trade agreements and that specialists on women’s issues be included in the negotiations. It also calls on the government to create a national program providing women access to jobs and technological training.<sup>11</sup>

In 2003, **Venezuela** proposed an FTAA alternative: the Bolivarian Alternative for the Americas (ALBA). This proposal takes aim at poverty and social exclusion through the provision of high quality services as a counterweight to the withdrawal of the state. It also seeks to foster Latin American integration through a compensatory fund that would integrate structures in order to finance investments in infrastructure and services. The ALBA would give states the right to set

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<sup>9</sup> Brief by Conseil du statut de la femme, *Les Québécoises, la mondialisation et la Zone de libre-échange des Amériques: une première réflexion*, Québec, April 2001.

<sup>10</sup> U.S. Department of State, Trade Promotion Authority, Fact Sheet, Bureau of Oceans and International Environmental and Scientific Affairs, Washington, D.C., August 23, 2002, [www.state.gov/g/oes/rls/fs/2002/12953.htm](http://www.state.gov/g/oes/rls/fs/2002/12953.htm)

<sup>11</sup> Information-gathering form to draw up a report on women and the FTAA by Ms. Fatima Houada-Pepin, a member of the National Assembly of Québec and rapporteur for the issue “Women and the FTAA,” to be submitted to the Network’s Annual Meeting in April 2005. Position of parliaments and/or governments of the Americas, Lucero Saldaña Pérez, Senator of the Mexican Republic.

up programs for producing sectors in order to lessen inequalities.<sup>12</sup> The government further emphasizes that it would prefer to strengthen regional integration before carrying on with FTAA negotiations. The Venezuelan parliament does not appear to have taken a position on the BAA, but at the special session on January 14, 2005, the Republic's president announced his intentions in this regard in his annual speech required under the constitution.<sup>13</sup> In 2001, following the COPA meeting in Québec City, deputy Benita Araujo de Chacon also asked parliament to analyze Venezuela's entry into the FTAA.

In **Cuba**, the parliament asserted its support for the Bolivarian Alternative for the Americas (ALBA), also approving the adoption of a Venezuela-Cuba joint declaration on the agreement's implementation. Cuba's National Assembly of the People's Power insists that the countries of the Americas reject the FTAA, which they see as a U.S. colonization threat.<sup>14</sup>

**Brazil's** Chamber of Deputies held a seminar on Brazil and the FTAA from October 23 to 24, in collaboration with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The purpose was to analyze Brazil's position globally in the context of various free trade agreements, such as MERCOSUR and the FTAA, and bodies such as the World Trade Organization (WTO) and the European Union. Arguments were made for and against the FTAA, but the majority of attendees agreed that the free trade area would have to serve the interests of Brazil, which wishes to stimulate its export sector and trade with the rest of the world. The Government of Brazil is therefore seeking to promote access to more vibrant markets, lower nontariff barriers, and an end to protectionism through the FTAA. The protection of intellectual property would also stimulate countries' technological potential.<sup>15</sup>

In **Paraguay**, the Ministry of Foreign affairs held a debate on July 17, 2003, on the FTAA and its socioeconomic impacts for Paraguay, as well as a seminar on the challenges and outlook of MERCOSUR and FTAA for Paraguay.<sup>16</sup> Attendees said they were more in favor of MERCOSUR than the FTAA, criticizing the conditions imposed by the U.S. in treaty negotiations.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> *Por qué el ALBA*, Antonio Morrillo, Radio Nacional de Venezuela, February 16, 2005, [www.rnv.gov.ve/noticias/index.php?act=ST&f=15&t=13735](http://www.rnv.gov.ve/noticias/index.php?act=ST&f=15&t=13735)

<sup>13</sup> <http://www.asambleanacional.gov.ve/ns2/diarios.asp?id=528>

<sup>14</sup> <http://www.rnv.gov.ve/noticias/index.php?act=ST&f=15&t=13735>

<sup>15</sup> Seminar: Brazil and the FTAA, Chamber of Deputies, Institute of Research in International Relations (IPRI)/FUNAG, Brasilia, 2002.

<sup>16</sup> [www.ftaa-alca.org/SPCOMM/SOC/cs24r1\\_e.asp](http://www.ftaa-alca.org/SPCOMM/SOC/cs24r1_e.asp)

<sup>17</sup> [www.argenpress.info/notas.asp?num=006557](http://www.argenpress.info/notas.asp?num=006557)

### **3.2 Interparliamentary organizations and regional parliaments**

Interparliamentary organizations and regional parliaments have also expressed their opinions on the FTAA, either through seminars or declarations.

The **Andean Parliament** held a regional seminar on the FTAA on December 10 and 11, 2002, in Lima, Peru. On the meeting's conclusion, a declaration was adopted on the Andean Parliament's position on the FTAA. The parliament wishes to consolidate the Andean community and promote agreements like the Andean Community of Nations (CAN) and MERCOSUR. The organization deems that debates should be more thorough in the negotiations and that society and parliamentarians should take part. The declaration further emphasizes the need for transparency in the negotiations. The Parliament made special mention of the environmental vulnerability of the Amazon forest and the importance that an agreement like the FTAA take this into consideration. Parliamentarians in the Andean region believe that the FTAA is only feasible if developed countries revise their policies on patents, intellectual property, and agriculture subsidies. Lastly, the FTAA should demonstrate that it will reduce poverty, create jobs, and improve quality of life in the region.<sup>18</sup>

The **Latin American Parliament** (PARLATINO) discussed the FTAA at a professional seminar on ceremonial, protocol, and events in Latin America on May 19 and 20, 2004. The opening lecture was entitled "FTAA: a problem or solution for Latin America?" Deputy and PARLATINO president Ney Lopes concluded that the impact of the FTAA on Latin America would depend on each country and how negotiations are handled. He reminded attendees that parliamentarians must take part. Furthermore, the agreement will have sociocultural, environmental, political, and economic impacts, and the key is to make these impacts positive.<sup>19</sup>

The **Indigenous Parliament of the Americas** opposes the creation of the FTAA. Because the countries of Latin America have not reached the same level of economic and technological advancement as developed countries, this regional parliament is not prepared to negotiate a free trade agreement with the latter.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> El Parlamento Andino frente al Área de Libre Comercio de las Américas, Seminario/Taller Regional sobre las negociaciones del ALCA, Lima, December 10 and 11, 2002, [www.parlamentoandino.org](http://www.parlamentoandino.org) .

<sup>19</sup> [www.parlatino.org/printWindow.php?tbl=&id=820&lg=es](http://www.parlatino.org/printWindow.php?tbl=&id=820&lg=es)

<sup>20</sup> [www.parlamentoindigenadeamerica.org](http://www.parlamentoindigenadeamerica.org)

### **3.3 Interparliamentary meetings**

Various interparliamentary meetings gave parliaments the opportunity to express their opinions on the creation of the FTAA.

In Quito, Ecuador, a **hemispheric meeting of parliamentarians on the FTAA and the role of regional parliaments** took place on October 29 and 30, 2002. Representatives attended from Bolivia, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Mexico, Nicaragua, Peru, Québec, El Salvador, Uruguay, and Venezuela.

The final declaration adopted at the end of this meeting reasserted the legislative role of parliamentarians. It also criticized the fact that the negotiation process excludes parliamentarians. The parties to the declaration pointed out that parliaments are responsible for studying free trade agreements with potential repercussions on agriculture and agricultural workers. Economic reforms and privatizations with an impact on society (i.e., on essential services) were denounced, as was the FTAA intellectual property system, which will be to the sole benefit of the U.S. The declaration goes on to say that the goal of the FTAA is to strengthen U.S. hegemony. The parliamentarians in attendance were encouraged to create special committees on the FTAA. The parliaments will also have to assess the results of other agreements already in place. The signing parties suggested that FTAA working documents be made publicly available in order to eliminate the secrecy of the negotiations. Lastly, the parliamentarians recommended rejecting the FTAA and strengthening existing regional agreements.<sup>21</sup>

Also in Quito, Ecuador, the first **Interparliamentary Forum of the Americas** took place from July 27 to 28, 2004, as part of the Americas Social Forum. Argentina, Brazil, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, Guatemala, Mexico, El Salvador, and Venezuela were represented.

This forum essentially addressed regional problems, including that of the FTAA. The parliamentarians in attendance criticized the neoliberal policies in effect in their countries, which they believe have a particularly negative impact on women. According to forum attendees, the free trade agreements were negotiated without consulting the parliaments. These agreements,

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<sup>21</sup> Encuentro Continental Parlamentario Sobre el ALCA y el Rol de los Parlamentos de la Región, Declaración de Quito, [www.ctera.org.ar/Web/alca/rtf/quito\\_parlamentarios.rtf](http://www.ctera.org.ar/Web/alca/rtf/quito_parlamentarios.rtf) , 29 y 30 de octubre de 2002.

in the view of the declaration signatories, infringe on national sovereignty while worsening the circumstances of workers and reinforcing inequality. They also mentioned their support for Mexican parliamentarians regarding the renegotiation of NAFTA. The parliamentarians of Central America were asked not to ratify the free trade agreements their governments signed with the U.S. This declaration also emphasizes the priority that parliamentarians give to regional agreements between Latin America and the Caribbean. The parliamentarians in attendance spoke out against the FTAA, the U.S.-Central America Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA), and other agreements while lending their support to anti-free-trade movements. The declaration recommends working in partnership with social and women's group and asserts the forum's support for the World March of Women.<sup>22</sup>

Lastly, **Andean parliamentarians** met on May 15, 2003, in Quito, to discuss the environmental impact of international treaties. The declaration, signed by Ecuadorean deputy Ricardo Ulcuango and Columbian senator Jorge Robledo, declares that the parliamentarians in attendance are opposed to the FTAA. They stressed the importance of developing domestic markets and promoting agreements between the countries of Latin America. According to the parliamentarians, development policies do not take the rights of indigenous populations into account. They also recommend promoting economic development policies that protect the environment. In addition, they ask parliamentarians in the region to support resistance within society to the FTAA.<sup>23</sup>

### **3.4 Information activities**

Other countries of the Americas also organized information activities with civil society. The **Committee of Government Representatives on the Participation of Civil Society** posted the various government initiatives on its website.<sup>24</sup>

- In the **Dominican Republic**, the Ministry of Foreign Relations organized seminars and conferences to generate consensus on the advantages and disadvantages of the

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<sup>22</sup> Declaración del Primer Foro Parlamentario de las Américas, Quito, July 27 and 28, 2004.

<sup>23</sup> Encuentro de parlamentarios andinos sobre el impacto de los convenios internacionales (ALCA, OMC, TLCAN) en el medio ambiente, Declaración, Quito, May 15, 2003, [www.accionecologica.org](http://www.accionecologica.org).

<sup>24</sup> FTAA – Committee of Government Representatives on the Participation of Civil Society, Best Practices and Illustrative Examples of Consultations with Civil Society at the National/Regional Level, [www.ftaa-alca.org/SPCOMM/SOC/cs24r1\\_e.asp](http://www.ftaa-alca.org/SPCOMM/SOC/cs24r1_e.asp).



FTAA. The government also placed top priority on the transparency of the negotiations, since consensus between the various political parties is necessary for the country's Congress to approve the agreement.

- The heads of government of the Caribbean Community (**CARICOM**) held a conference in July 2002 to involve civil society in the various processes under way in the region. Three working groups discussed three themes—equitable human resource development (notably regarding women, youth, people with disabilities, migration, and diasporas), the Caribbean single market, and capital investment and governance, respectively.
- In **Costa Rica**, open dialog was established between the government and the legislative assembly to keep parliamentarians up to date on the course of negotiations. The purpose of these consultations was to determine civil society's and the country's view of the FTAA.
- In **Argentina**, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs set up a task force in December 2000 in cooperation with the parliament. This task force is made up of legislators who already sit on parliamentary committees on matters of foreign affairs, trade, industry, agriculture, MERCOSUR, integration, and trade negotiations. In addition, the government's industrial economy center assessed the impacts of the agreement.
- The **Chilean** government created a ministerial council that includes parliamentarians and incorporates different viewpoints on FTAA negotiations. The purpose of these consultations is to develop compliance with laws and the constitution. The government also organized seminars throughout the country to inform civil society about the FTAA.
- In **Colombia**, the Ministry of Foreign Trade held a seminar in cooperation with *Asociación Latinoamericana de Integración* (ALADI) on May 23, 2002, on the effects of the FTAA on the Colombian economy.
- The Government of **Ecuador** published the country's strategies with regard to the FTAA with a view to stimulating public debate. It also organized a number of seminars and forums on the FTAA, both in Quito and Guayaquil.

- The Government of **Peru** set up an FTAA/Peru committee that transmits FTAA negotiation information to the country's Congress. The government also created a task force on environmental issues, made up of representatives of various ministries and civil society. From July to October 2002, the task force held workshops on FTAA negotiations from an environmental standpoint. The issues of intellectual property, investment, agriculture, and differential treatment were also discussed. In addition, the Ministry of Foreign Trade and Tourism created a task force on trade and labor rights.

## **Conclusion**

As I mentioned in my introduction, I have presented a preliminary progress report that reflects the positions of the various parliaments and governments on the FTAA's impact on women.

On a country-by-country basis, parliaments are divided on the issue, and certain disagreements exist within parliaments themselves. Nevertheless, all parliamentarians call for greater transparency in negotiations and heightened involvement of members of the legislative branch.

Although seminars have been held to inform the public about the FTAA, this has not been done in all countries party to the negotiations, and the negotiations are still viewed to be shrouded in secrecy.

Lastly, the positions are taken at interparliamentary meetings are not the same. The parliamentarians in attendance at these meetings have spoken out against the FTAA.

Other than the Network of Women Parliamentarians of the Americas, very few parliaments or organizations have addressed this issue in their discussions. Despite the recommendation adopted in Caracas to continually monitor the FTAA's impacts on women, little documentation to this effect is available from parliaments, nor have governments produced reports on the situation facing women.

Continuing emphasis of issues surrounding women's status is therefore necessary at upcoming meetings. Since no ministers' meetings are currently scheduled, parliamentarians must prepare

for the Summit of the Americas, where a portion of the program will be dedicated to FTAA negotiations. Given the theme of the fourth summit, “Creating Jobs to Fight Poverty and Strengthen Democratic Governance,” it is important to ensure that women are taken into account.

In closing, we strongly urge those parliamentarians who have not yet taken a position on the FTAA to do so and all parliamentarians in the Americas to reflect seriously on the impact the agreement will have on women. I am counting on all COPA Member Parliaments to respond to the questionnaire, as this information will provide us with a clear picture of the situation. This will help us better set priorities for the Network’s future initiatives, define the role parliamentarians must play in the FTAA negotiation process, and take our own institutional positions on this important issue as the Network of Women Parliamentarians of the Americas.