



Newsletter of the Network of Women Parliamentarians of the Americas

SEPTEMBER 2011 – MARCH 2012

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PRESIDENCE

DIVA HADAMIRA GASTÉLUM **FEDERAL MEMBER**

Deputy Gastélum obtained a law degree from Occidente University in her home state of Sinaloa. She has a Master's degree in family law and diplomas in parliamentary law, public policy and women's rights, public administration, penal law and family law.

Since 1978, Gastélum has been affiliated with the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI), where she has been a senior administrator of the women's branch at both the municipal and provincial levels, as well as a municipal, provincial and national political advisor. While on the Provincial Council of the party, she was the instigator of the reform for political recognition and gender equality in politics in the State of Sinaloa.



Gastélum was a local deputy in the 56th Legislature of the Congress of the State of Sinaloa. During that time, she chaired the Committee on Gender Equality and the Family, was Chair of the Board of the Congress. She distinguished herself as sponsor of the Law to Prevent, Punish and Eradicate Family Violence (the first of its kind in Mexico).

While federal deputy in the 59th Legislature, Gastélum distinguished herself as co-sponsor of the General Law on the Access of Women to a Life Free From Violence and as the founder of the Centre for Studies on the Advancement of Women and Gender Equality.

As local deputy in the 59th Legislature of the Congress of the State of Sinaloa, she was Chair of the Human Rights Committee. During that time, she worked on the constitutionalization of human rights and helped prepare the State of Sinaloa's first gender-specific budget.

Gastélum is currently a federal deputy in the 61st Legislature (2009-2012). As such, she presides over the Special Committee on Families.

NEWS FROM THE NETWORK

MEETING OF THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE OF THE NETWORK, HELD IN QUÉBEC, CANADA, ON SEPTEMBER 5, 2011, PRIOR TO THE ANNUAL MEETING



The Meeting of the Executive Committee of the Network prior to the Annual Meeting was held on September 5, 2011. In the absence of the President of the Network (for health reasons), the Vice-President, Deputy Emilia Alfaro Di Franco, conducted the work session.

Other members of the Executive Committee in attendance:

- Monique Richard, Member and Representative of the Founding Assembly and the Secretariat of the Network
- Norma Esparza Herrera, Senator and Representative for North America
- Hortensia Margarita Lopez Quintana, Member and Representative for Central America
- Mireya Zamora Alvarado, Member and Representative for Central America
- Yuderka De la Rosa, Member and Representative for the Caribbean
- Doralisa Mercedes Aravena, Member and Representative for the Patagonian Parliament
- Estela Mendez de De Micheli, Member and Representative for the Union of Parliamentarians of South America and Mercosur

The members approved the list naming the eight observers who attended the meeting.

The meeting allowed for the review and approval of the documents for the next day's Annual Meeting. The members then proceeded to designate five rapporteurs to study the themes covered in the Network's 2010-2012 Work Plan:

Water, Environment and the Status of Women:

- Doralisa Mercedes Aravena, Member of the Patagonian Parliament (solely as observer since December 2011)
- Mireya Zamora Alvarado, Member of the Legislative Assembly of Costa Rica

Poverty, Pay Equity and Economic Empowerment of Women:

- Ileana Brenes Jimenez, Member of the Legislative Assembly of Costa Rica
- Alicia Verónica Gutiérrez, Member for the Province of Santa Fe, Argentina
- Monique Richard, Member of the National Assembly of Québec

10TH ANNUAL MEETING OF THE NETWORK, QUÉBEC, CANADA, SEPTEMBER 6, 2011

The 10th Annual Meeting of the Network was held on September 6, 2011, with 50 participants attending. The meeting's main theme was *Women's Commitment to a Better Future: Water, Poverty and Sustainable Development*. This theme included the Network's two themes under study for 2010-2012. To introduce the debate on the issue, two experts took the floor: Almas Jiwani, President of the National Committee of UN Women Canada, and Angélica De la Peña, Advisor on Women's and Children's Rights, Mexico.

Subsequently, speakers and participants exchanged questions and opinions on the theme's different aspects, including the feminization of poverty, the privatization of water, the political representation of women and the role that women, especially women parliamentarians, can play to improve the status of women.



Following the debate, the President introduced the meeting's special guest, Rocío García Gaytán, President of the Inter-American Commission of Women (CIM) of the Organization of American States. Ms. García Gaytán presented her commission's work and proposed initiating a collaboration between the Network and the CIM.

The President of COPA and President of the National Assembly of Québec, Jacques Chagnon, came to welcome the participants of this prominent meeting in Québec City.



The Member of the National Assembly of Québec and Rapporteur of the Network on the theme of the political participation of women, Monique Richard, presented the main findings of the recent two-year study carried out on this theme by the Network. La députée de l'Assemblée nationale du Québec et rapporteure du Réseau sur le thème de la participation politique des femmes, Mme Monique Richard, a présenté les principales conclusions de l'étude que le Réseau a menée sur ce thème depuis les deux dernières années.

Two draft resolutions were presented: the Draft Resolution on the Political Participation of Women and the Draft Resolution on Women's Commitment to a Better Future: Water, Poverty and Sustainable Development. Participants proposed and adopted amendments, and subsequently adopted the final versions of the two texts.

Lastly, the President presented the research work we were preparing in the past year, entitled *Women and Armed Movements in the Americas*. She specifically thanked Mexico's Centre for Studies on the Advancement of Women and Gender Equality, her committee members, and the Mexican Congress for their vital support of this research task. She emphasized that an important precedent had been set for the Network and COPA: the research relied on the organization's own bibliography and analytical information on women's advancements and contributions throughout the history of the continent, so that these will become better known in our societies. The President closed by announcing that a new research project, entitled *Women in the Americas*, would be presented at a future meeting held by COPA and the Network.





COLLABORATION WITH THE INTER-AMERICAN COMMISSION OF WOMEN (CIM) OF THE ORGANIZATION OF AMERICAN STATES

Further to the interest shared between the President of the Network and the President of the CIM, at the last Annual Meeting, regarding the idea of initiating a collaboration between the two organizations, discussions were conducted in the fall to set out the framework for this collaboration. Although the projects have yet to be confirmed, the CIM proposed that the Network participate in its Second Hemispheric Forum on “Women’s Leadership for a Citizens’ Democracy,” to be held in the Dominican Republic in July 2012. Also discussed was the Network’s potential involvement in a project to strengthen the capabilities of parliamentary committees examining the status of women. As a first collaborative step in this project, we agreed to participate in a preliminary consultation that will be considered at the March Meeting of the Executive Committee of the Network.

NEWS FROM THE PRESIDENT

PARTICIPATION OF THE PRESIDENT OF THE NETWORK AT THE MEETING OF THE COPA COMMITTEE ON HEALTH AND SOCIAL PROTECTION, HELD IN HAVANA, CUBA ON OCTOBER 27 AND 28, 2011, AND PRESENTATION OF THE BOOK *WOMEN IN THE AMERICAS*

The President of the Network participated in the Meeting of the Committee on Health and Social Protection, held in Havana, Cuba, on October 27 and 28, 2011. As Representative of the Network, the President participated in the debates on the themes being studied by the Commission, which are directly aligned with issues related to the status of women, such as maternal health and assistance for people with disabilities.



At the end of the first day of work, the President of the Network took the floor to present the research work carried out under her direction, entitled *Women in the Americas*. She subsequently led a brief discussion between the participants on the challenges for the status of women in the Americas.

PARTICIPATION OF THE PRESIDENT OF THE NETWORK AT THE EXPERT'S INTERNATIONAL SEMINAR ON THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN NATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS INSTITUTIONS AND PARLIAMENTS HELD IN BELGRADE, SERBIA FROM FEBRUARY 21 TO 23, 2012.



The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights and the Serbian Parliament invited the President of the Network to participate in the Expert's International Seminar on the Relationship between National Human Rights Institutions and Parliaments.



The seminar's objective was to produce a set of principles and recommendations for the United Nations for improving the relationship



between national human rights institutions and parliaments in protecting human rights and promoting accountability. Significantly, participation in this seminar was limited to some 50 experts from across the world, including the President of the Network and an Ecuadorian parliamentarian, both representing the American continent.

CONCLUSION OF THE PRESIDENT

These activities constitute the work accomplished by the Network since September and reflect the priorities on which the President wishes the Network to continue concentrating in the coming months, until the mandate of Executive Committee members and her own term as President come to an end.

The President is confident that the members' ways of contributing to the Network through the themes described here will generate a greater consensus on eradicating the afflictions of women on this continent. The President appreciates the positive reception to the submitted documents. This is especially true of the reception to the *Women in the Americas* book, presented at the Meeting of the Executive Committee. The President hopes that the book will reach its objective and be distributed in your respective parliaments.



THEMES OF STUDY FOR 2011-2012

By the Network Secretariat

POVERTY, PAY EQUITY AND THE ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN

Food for Thought

The work plan theme *Poverty, pay equity and the economic empowerment of women* is on the Network's 2010-2012 agenda for discussion. The Network's last newsletter included an article that provided a general overview of the subject. To stimulate discussion, it is pertinent to remind Network members of the core dimensions of this theme before presenting some examples of concrete actions taken by the States of the Americas in this area.

The United Nations Population Fund defines women's empowerment through five major components: women's sense of self-worth; their right to have and determine choices; their right to have access to opportunities and resources; their right to have the power to control their own lives, both within and outside the home; and their ability to influence the direction of social change to create a more just social and economic order, nationally and internationally.¹

To take a step further and concentrate on economic empowerment, let's turn to the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) established by the UN, the World Bank and the OECD, which have become the universal reference for identifying targets that must be attained to eradicate poverty by 2015. Goal 3 is to "Promote Gender Equality and Empower Women" and focuses specifically on economic empowerment. The UN believes that achieving this goal will facilitate the attainment of other MDGs, such as the eradication of extreme poverty and hunger, universal primary education, and improving maternal health.

The three core dimensions of women's economic empowerment have been identified as:

- expanding women's economic opportunities, which includes enhancing their employability and entrepreneurship and promoting access to decent work as well as access to financial products and credit tailored to their needs;
- strengthening women's legal status and their rights in relation to land ownership, succession and inheritance rights, labour rights, etc.;
- ensuring women's participation and inclusion in economic decision-making by setting up mechanisms to increase their voice in public decision-making.

¹ United Nations Development Programme, *Innovative Approaches to Promoting Women's Economic Empowerment*, 2008, p.9 [<http://www.undp.org/women/publications.shtml>].



As you can see, women's economic empowerment is a wider-ranging issue than it appears to be at first glance, as it encompasses the many different aspects of poverty. The obstacles women have to face in this sense affect their emancipation, development and, most definitely, gender equality. To nurture our discussion of this theme, here are a few examples of concrete measures that have been adopted by some COPA member States:

- In Costa Rica, the government is collaborating with small- and medium-size businesses by offering an Equality Seal labour certification to companies that promote the inclusion of women in the workplace. The goal is to encourage the private sector to reconcile its practices with national social policy in order to promote the empowerment of women. This has allowed participating companies to increase labour productivity and to develop new standards and practices that promote workplace equality between men and women.²
- In Peru, the Peru Rural Roads project includes the objective of ensuring the significant participation of women. Women are involved in all aspects of the project from administrative tasks to manual labour. This has helped battling gender stereotypes and allowed women to become engaged in the community while gaining valuable experience. In addition, the improvement of roads has made it easier for women to get around (e.g. to travel to sell harvested products) and for young girls to have access to schools, which is often a problem in rural areas.³
- Honduras has a government program that offers technical and legal assistance to families with little or no access to land ownership who wish to acquire land. It focuses on the participation and training of women. As women in this country are almost exclusively responsible for raising children and managing households, they have traditionally had little time to devote to other activities. By creating projects adapted specifically to women's needs and providing support to public health care, education and daycare facilities, the proportion of local businesses managed by both a man and a woman has increased by 24%.⁴
- With regards to women's political representation, many Latin American countries have adopted a gender quota system for their national parliaments to increase the proportion of women in the political decision-making process. Argentina was the first country to adopt gender quota legislation in 1991. Bolivia, Brazil, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Honduras, Mexico, Panama, Paraguay and Peru followed suit.⁵

I hope these examples will inspire Network members to continue to reflect on this theme. The rapporteurs will be presenting a final report on the theme at the next Annual Meeting of the Network.

Original text in French

² *Ibid.*, p.25.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 29.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 65.

⁵ Pär ZETTERBERG, "Do Gender Quotas Foster Women Political Engagement? Lessons from Latin America", *Political Research Quarterly*, Vol. 64, No. 2, December 2009, p. 720.



WATER, THE ENVIRONMENT AND THE STATUS OF WOMEN

Food for Thought

One of the study themes for 2010–2012 is *Water, the Environment and the Status of Women*. Topics are proposed here to help define the concepts broached and so guide our members in their reflections on the theme.

In general, climate change has particularly serious consequences for women who live in poverty or in precarious conditions, especially those who live in rural areas. These women often have to shoulder the responsibility of caring for their families alone. If an environmental crisis develops or a natural disaster strikes, the weight of these family responsibilities becomes even heavier, as these women have limited access to resources and services. Their living conditions deteriorate yet further when major environmental changes occur. Access to clean drinking water is a case in point.

Today in Latin America and the Caribbean, 93% of people living in urban areas have sustainable access to safe drinking water, compared to 69%⁶ of people living in rural areas. Often natural disasters or significant environmental disturbances caused by climate change result in steep drops in water reserves and changes in the geographical distribution of water—not to mention shifts in rainfall and drought patterns. These things have a huge impact on people living in poverty, particularly on women in rural areas. Shortages of safe drinking water and changes in rainfall patterns make women's daily tasks more difficult. Furthermore, agriculture requires large quantities of water and is particularly susceptible to environmental and climate change, yet it is the principal source of income for these women, who are thus doubly affected by water shortages.

Water pollution and the deterioration of water purification and distribution infrastructures caused by pollution and changes to the environment can also have serious consequences on human health, especially for pregnant women, young children and old people—both in rural and urban areas. Women are more directly affected than men in this sense, as they are often responsible for caring for the weaker members of their family circle.

Girls living in poverty are also affected, for they suffer the repercussions of the migrations caused by climate change. Men often have to move about to find work, while women stay at home to care for the family—however, in the absence of men they often solicit the help of daughters to cope with the situation, which results in girls leaving school at an early age.

In light of the above, it is imperative that States, when considering sustainable development and water supplies for both agricultural and personal use, adopt laws and take measures with the realities of women in mind. Rural women often have limited access to services and do not have the same level of technical training as men. They are therefore not as well equipped to deal with the effects of climate change. In order to improve their condition, women can be encouraged to participate in sustainable

⁶ UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs Statistic Division, *Progress towards the Millennium Development goals, 1990-2005, Goal 7 – Ensure environmental sustainability*, UN, 2005, p. 12.



development projects. For example, in Peru,⁷ women help build roads in rural areas. The project is designed to improve their access to water and other resources in the medium to long term and to help them develop new skills.

In Brazil, the UNESCO Chair on Water, Women and Development was established in the summer of 2006 at the *Universidade Federal de Ouro Preto* (Federal University of Ouro Preto). The objective was to create a national and regional network of women with decision-making power in water-related issues, capable of intervening in decisions affecting information, training and the protection of women living in areas where water quality is particularly vulnerable.⁸

Through this overview it is evident that climate change and environmental problems affect women—especially the very poorest women—differently from men. It is therefore essential to find new ways to encourage their involvement and see that women play a pivotal role in their community and their State in seeking solutions that will ensure that our societies develop in a sustainable and humane way.

This document should guide Network members in their reflection and in the drafting of the final report on this study theme.

Original text in French

⁷. United Nations Development Programme, *Innovative Approaches to Promoting Women's Economic Empowerment*, 2008, p. 29.

⁸. UNESCO, UNESCO Chair, "Water, Women and Development", <http://www.unesco.org/fr/unitwin/access-by-region/latin-america-and-the-caribbean/brazil/chaire-unesco-eau-femmes-et-developpement-753/>, page consulted February 8, 2012.

ARTICLES FROM THE MEMBERS



Contribution by Mrs. **Mireya Zamora Alvarado**

Deputy of the Legislative Assembly of Costa Rica

Representative of Central America

INTERNATIONAL FORUM ON WOMEN AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

On November 11, 2011, I had the privilege of giving the closing address at the International Forum on Women and Sustainable Development, held in Beijing in the People's Republic of China.

Organized by the All-China Women's Federation, the forum brought together 300 women from around the world—including ministers and senior civil servants in charge of gender and development issues, as well as high-ranking United Nations officials—women who have distinguished themselves as leaders in their fields. Activities focussed on progress, perspectives and challenges with regard to the fundamental role women must play if sustainable development is to be successful.

The forum was a unique opportunity to review and update our commitments, promote new avenues for international cooperation and discuss some of the social, environmental and economic issues that preoccupy all our societies.

Most importantly, it helped us to renew our motivation, forge new communities and alliances, and strengthen the position of groups that, like women, are often relegated to a secondary role.

While it is true that international dialogue in recent years has focussed on environmental objectives achievable at the expense of jobs and the economy, it now seems clear that environmental protection is not incompatible with economic and social well-being.

As women, we fulfill clearly defined functions and invest our time, energy, abilities and personal vision in the growth of families, communities and nations. Hence we form the cornerstone of all efforts aimed at achieving sustainable human development in the medium and long terms.

We must not forget that sustainable human development implies not only environmental conditions and the protection of human resources, but also social sustainability, which is founded on inclusion, gender equality, education, collaboration, the elimination of extreme poverty and the growth of individuals and families.

Progress in women's rights constitutes one of the most profound and important social revolutions in history. Amartya Sen, Nobel Laureate in Economics, has pointedly noted that "Nothing, arguably, is as important today in the political economy of development as an adequate recognition of political, economic and social participation and leadership of women."

This insight indicates the direction our societies should be taking and suggests that all nations make it a priority to closely monitor the environment in which women evolve, so that we are always in a position to demand better opportunities, greater participation, more respect, and true equality for women.

Original text in Spanish





Contribution by **Monique Richard**

Member of the National Assembly of Québec

Representative of the Network Secretariat

THE FEMINIZATION OF POVERTY IN QUÉBEC: CHALLENGES AND PERSPECTIVES

Despite notable progress in recent decades, the feminization of poverty remains a reality in Québec. Whether in terms of job insecurity, pay equity, income disparity or the burden of domestic work, the causes of gender inequality are similar throughout the Americas. Over the years, Québec's parliamentarians have adopted several measures to help improve women's economic situation.

In Québec, women hold a disproportionate number of insecure jobs, often at minimum wage. In fact, 63.4% of all minimum-wage jobs are held by women, and for this type of job the average number of work hours per week is 25. This directly affects the economic situation of a large proportion of women, whose low wages and unstable conditions of employment contribute to their poverty and vulnerability. Raising the minimum wage and building social housing are measures that directly improve the economic situation of women, as women are more likely than men to spend more than 30% of their income on housing.

The *Pay Equity Act*, adopted in 1996 and aimed at closing the salary gap based on gender discrimination, requires that businesses with ten or more employees implement pay equity measures.⁹ The effects of the Act have been positive: from 1997 to 2007, the wage gap between men and women fell from 16.1% to 12.8%. The Act has been strengthened and improved over the years, and since March 2011 businesses must file an annual pay equity report.

Women's average income is only 78% of that of men.¹⁰ For women between 45 and 64 years of age, this figure is 68.6%. That there are few women in management positions contributes directly to this disparity. Hence, steps have been taken to ensure that at least 50% of the board members of Québec's 24 State-owned corporations are women. It is also important to note that the more educated women are, the smaller the wage gap becomes. For example, the income of women with a university certificate is 92% of that of men with a comparable education. However, this figure drops to 53% for women with a

1. The Commission de l'équité salariale du Québec (pay equity commission) defines pay equity as a matter of ensuring that persons employed in traditionally female job classes receive equal pay in relation to those in traditionally male job classes even if the jobs are different, provided they are of equal or comparable value in the business concerned. Thus the principle of pay equity goes beyond "equal pay for equal work", since it requires "equal pay for different but equivalent work". Commission de l'équité salariale du Québec, <http://www.ces.gouv.qc.ca/apropos/equite.asp>, consulted on February 13, 2012.

2. Gouvernement du Québec, *L'égalité entre les hommes et les femmes au Québec : faits saillants*, 2010, p. 19.



9th-grade education. Access to education is thus crucial for women's economic development. And while it is true that women now make up a majority of university and college graduates, they also tend to choose studies that fall into stereotyped categories, which means that fewer women than men are opting for the higher-paying fields.

On average, women spend more time than men do on housework and on caring for children and seniors. Therefore, they are more often absent from work for family reasons and undergo additional stress because of the accumulation of responsibilities. Québec's low-cost childcare program helps reconcile the dilemma between work and family life by relieving women of some of their traditional family responsibilities. Today, more than 205,000 Québec children benefit from State-subsidized childcare services.

Among the anti-poverty measures adopted in recent years is the policy entitled *Turning Equality in Law into Equality in Fact*, which has effect from 2006 to 2015. The policy has given rise to various measures aimed at reducing the wage gap and social inequalities between men and women, which include encouraging career-choice diversification and school persistence, providing support for adolescent mothers, giving assistance to women entrepreneurs and supporting reconciliation of work and family life. The second action plan designed to implement the policy covers the years 2011 to 2015 and takes into account the recommendations made by Members of the National Assembly during the assessment of the first five years of the plan (2006 to 2011) by a parliamentary committee.

Original text in French

**Secretariat of the Network of Women Parliamentarians of the Americas
Parliamentary Confederation of the Americas**

**Assemblée nationale du Québec
1020, rue des Parlementaires, 6e étage
Québec (Québec) G1A 1A3 CANADA**

**Tél. : 418 644-2888
Fax : 418 643-1865**

feminamericas@assnat.qc.ca

