

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

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CÁMARA DE DIPUTADOS



**NEWSLETTER OF THE NETWORK  
OF WOMEN PARLIAMENTARIANS OF THE AMERICAS**  
*English*

©Senado de la República, 2015  
First edition

**President of Women Parliamentarians of the Americas**  
Diva Hadamira Gastélum Bajo

Graphic Design  
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Printed in Quebec

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# MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

September 2015 Newsletter



Dear colleagues,

At last, we are tackling the transition the international community has been preparing for over a number of years, namely, moving from the Millennium Development Goals to the Sustainable Development Goals as part of the post-2015 agenda. The Network has been focusing on this change since 2014. Among the 17 goals and 169 targets proposed, the 5th goal is of particular interest, centred specifically on achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls. The Network is ready to work with international actors to maximize the impact of its initiatives on the women of the Americas.

The central theme of the Annual Meeting to be held in Guanajuato, Mexico is political violence against women. The expression refers to violence directed against women politicians because they are women in order to limit and, in certain cases, prevent them from exercising their political rights. This form of violence is one of the many obstacles that hinder women's participation in the political arena. Some countries have introduced and even passed laws to counter it but, despite this headway, legislative intervention is still limited.

Our Annual Meeting will serve as an opportunity to learn more about best practices in this area. The 3rd Consultation with Women Parliamentarians of the Americas will be held during this event. Under the theme of gender parity in politics, the initiative has been organized in collaboration with the Organization of American States' Inter-American Commission of Women.

Our participation in the Network affords us with a variety of dialogue mechanisms, but we all rally around the same objective: enhancing our impact as parliamentarians so we can achieve greater equality in our societies.

**Diva Hadamira Gastélum**  
Senator of the Republic of the United Mexican States

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María Dolores Fernós expert on sexual and reproductive rights and Sen. Under Diva Gastélum



Ms. Diva Gastélum (Mexico Senator)  
President of the Network, Eduardo Bhatia (Senator)  
President of the Senate of Puerto Rico and Ms. Maritère González  
(Puerto Rico Senator)

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# NEWS FROM THE NETWORK OF WOMEN PARLIAMENTARIANS

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## EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MEETING

15th of April, 2015, San Juan, Puerto Rico

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The Executive Committee was reunited in San Juan, Porto Rico, on April 15th of 2015. The president presented the new members of the Committee: Senator Maria Teresa González López, Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, Regional Representative for North America, Deputy Carmen Quesada Rodriguez, Legislative Assembly of the Republic of Costa Rica, Regional Representative for Central America, Deputy Edipcia Dubón, National Assembly of Nicaragua, Regional Representative for Central America, Deputy Romina Perez Ramos, Legislative Assembly of the Plurinational State of Bolivia, Regional Representative for the Andean Region.

Thereafter, Ms. Gastélum presented the Network Bulletin. She mentioned that it was in 2000, in San Juan, that was held the first Annual Meeting of the Network during which the current Statues were adopted. She thanked all the women who contributed to this Bulletin. Ms. de Santis, representative of the Network Secretariat introduced the secretariat's report for the period from November 6, 2014, to April 15, 2015. The President of the Network has meanwhile unveiled a poster that explains the main results of the 59th Session of the Commission on the Status of Women. Then Ms. de Santis made a presentation on the content of the national examination of Quebec and explained the changes that the Commission decided to carry out to improve its functioning and impact.

A follow-up on the three study themes of the Network Study was also conducted. First,



The Executive Committee of the Network met in San Juan, Puerto Rico, April 15, 2015

María Dolores Fernós discussed the sexual and reproductive rights of women in Puerto Rico. Second, Ms. Dubón gave a presentation on the migratory wave from Central America to Mexico and the United States under the theme women and migrant children. Finally, Ms. Gastélum presented the book Migration Normative Framework in the Americas: a gender perspective.

Subsequently, the President made a reminder of the history of collaboration between the Network and the Inter-American Commission of Women (CIM). She presented the proposed Third consultation with parliamentarians of the Americas to be held in the framework of the next General Assembly of COPA in Guanajuato, Mexico, with the central theme of political parity. Moreover, the Network's Facebook page was officially launched by the senator Mari Tere González. Finally, the members decided that the central theme of the next Annual meeting will be: The incidence of political violence in parity democracy.



Senator Angel Rodríguez, Antonio Fas Alzamora not Senator Puerto Rico with Senator Miguel Ángel Herrera Chico Mexico and his wife with the Executive Committee of the Network

The Americas is the continent with second highest proportion of women parliamentarians, with **25.7%** surpassed only by Europe with **25.8%**.

The 5 countries with the highest proportion of women parliamentarians, are Bolivia, which has **53.1%** in the lower house and **47.2%** in the high; Cuba with **48.9%**, Ecuador with **41.6%**, Nicaragua with **41.3%**.

Nicaragua, Panama, Chile, Argentina, Costa Rica and Brazil are the only countries in the Americas that have had women presidents elected in the polls, although other American women have held the position in their countries by constitutional succession, by way of Parliament election, or of de facto transition regime.

The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) has been ratified and signed by almost all countries of the continent. The only exception is the United States, who has just signed the convention.

Violence against women has a very real cost. The United States estimated that the annual cost of violence in which the aggressor is the female victim's partner amounted to 5,800 million dollars in 2003.

In context, Hurricane Odile, which destroyed the tourist area of Los Cabos, Mexico, in 2014 caused a damage of 470 million dollars in infrastructure.

According to the Report on Human Development, 10 of the **15 countries** with the highest levels of inequality in the world are in the region.

Additionally, the continent has regional protection instruments, such as the Convention of Belém do Pará.

## WOMEN IN THE AMERICAS



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# 2013-2015 NETWORK'S EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

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PRESIDENTA / PRESIDENT / PRESIDENTE / PRÉSIDENTE

Sra. Diva Hadamira Gastélum Bajo, Senadora  
Cámara de Senadores de la Unión de los Estados Unidos Mexicanos

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REPRESENTANTES REGIONALES / REGIONAL REPRESENTATIVES  
REPRESENTANTES REGIONAIS / REPRÉSENTANTES RÉGIONALES

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América Central / Central America / América Central / Amérique centrale

Sra. Carmen Quesada Santamaría  
Asamblea Legislativa de la República de Costa Rica



Cono Sur / Southern Cone / Cone Sul / Cône Sud

Sra. Alicia Verónica Gutiérrez, Diputada  
Cámara de Diputados de la Provincia de Santa Fe, Argentina



América Central / Central America / América Central / Amérique centrale

Sra. Edipcia Dubón  
Asamblea Nacional de la República de Nicaragua

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Región Andina / Andean Region / Região Andina / Région andine

Sra. Romina Guadalupe Pérez Ramos  
Cámara de Diputados de la Asamblea Legislativa del Estado Plurinacional de Bolivia

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América del Norte / North America / América do Norte / Amérique du Nord

Sra. Hilda Flores Escalera, Senadora  
Cámara de Senadores de la Unión de los Estados Unidos Mexicanos

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Asamblea fundadora de la Red y sede de la Secretaría /

Founding Assembly of the Network and host institution of the Secretariat /  
Assembléia fundadora da Rede e sede da Secretaria /  
Assemblée fondatrice du Réseau et hôte du Secrétariat

Mme Rita de Santis, Députée  
Assemblée nationale du Québec



América del Norte / North America / América do Norte / Amérique du Nord

Sra. Mari Tere González  
Senado del Estado Libre Asociado de Puerto Rico

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El Caribe / Caribbean / O Caribe / Antilles

Sra. Aixa Hevia González, Diputada  
Asamblea Nacional del Poder Popular de Cuba

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El Caribe / Caribbean / O Caribe / Antilles

Mrs. Sharon Ffolkes Abrahams, Member of Parliament  
Parliament of Jamaica

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## Presidency Parliamentary Confederation of the Americas

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Sra. Zulma Ramona Gómez Cáceres, Senadora

Cámara de Senadores de la República del Paraguay



# MEMBER'S CONTRIBUTION

GLORIA BIDEGAIN

National Deputy Argentine Republic

Gender equality in argentinian legislation

A bill to regulate beauty contests



Argentina is a leader in the recognition of women's rights, thanks to legislation on: comprehensive protection of women to prevent and eradicate gender-based violence; gender identity and same-sex marriage; sexual health and responsible procreation; and prevention and punishment of human trafficking, as well as various other initiatives, including introducing the notion of femicide into the penal code.

Despite this regulatory framework, Argentinian society continues to see extreme violence against women, sometimes resulting in death. We must therefore eliminate or transform certain deeply ingrained aspects of our culture that are at the root of this violence, even though they may be difficult to recognize and may seem inconsequential.

I am referring to patriarchal traditions (prejudice, symbols, customs) that degrade women and promote their subordination, thus leading to violence. Argentinian legislation recognizes various types of violence: physical, psychological, sexual, economic and symbolic.

This is why, in my capacity as Deputy, I have introduced a bill to regulate the beauty contests that are held during public festivities in our country.

My purpose is to shed light on the stereotypes underlying these contests, which trivialize the objectification of women, the marketing of their bodies and the hypersexualization of girls; encourage relationships based on discrimination; and promote behaviour related to eating disorders.

The bill has three main thrusts:

First, it attempts to debunk the artificial canons of beauty that are imposed on us as parameters for success and happiness. We seek to promote acceptance of diversity to take our people's various

realities into account by proposing that all requirements regarding age, body measurements, marital status and pregnancy be eliminated, and we encourage event organizers to include disabled people and respect individuals' gender choice. We would like to see these events replaced by cultural activities, and we demand that documents be distributed to raise awareness about violence against women.

Second, the bill is intended to prohibit the participation of children and adolescents under age 16 in these contests. We believe that beauty pageant eligibility requirements harm these girls' physical and psychological health, and may attract or even shield organizations involved in enticing minors.

Third, the bill is intended to discourage beauty paradigms that encourage emaciation and that can lead to disorders like bulimia and anorexia.

On June 3, 2015, thousands of people in cities across Argentina, Chile and Uruguay adopted the slogan #NiUnaMenos (Not One Less) to denounce the murder of women and violence against them. We know that this rallying cry is being taken up throughout Latin America. It is our duty to work to establish preventive policies and legislative frameworks to halt the increase in the number of victims.





## RITA LC DE SANTIS

Member of the National Assembly of Québec

Representative of the Secretariat of the Network of Women Parliamentarians of the Americas

### 75th Anniversary of Women's Suffrage in Québec: What's Next?

This year marks the 75th anniversary of Québec women winning the right to vote and run for election. After decades of struggle, on April 25, 1940, women obtained the right to vote in provincial elections in Québec – the last province to enfranchise women.

As the President of the Conseil du statut de la femme (Québec's council on the status of women) reminds us, "Seeing equality in law become equality in fact can take a long time." The right to vote is of course an important gain for women's equality, but this anniversary reminds us today that, despite all the progress we have seen, the road to gender equality is still a long one. Without undermining the importance of this historic milestone, and even if various measures have been adopted over the years, the fight is ongoing and must continue so that we can achieve genuine equality.

One such measure is the Policy on Preventing and Managing Situations Involving Harassment in the Workplace, recently adopted by the National Assembly. After allegations by two Members of Parliament in the House of Commons in Ottawa that they were sexually harassed by colleagues, the National Assembly decided to adopt a harassment policy, which replaces the Program on prevention and controlling harassment and violence in the workplace (French only), that applied to administrative staff only. By contrast, the new policy covers all administrative personnel and Members, and prohibits any form of workplace harassment. We congratulate the National Assembly President on his initiative to mandate the Members of the Cercle des femmes parlementaires (circle of women Members of the National Assembly) to find a solution to the lack of official guidelines to address such situations.

When the National Assembly of Québec adopted the Policy on Preventing and Managing Situations Involving Harassment in the Workplace on June 5, 2015, it became Canada's second legislative assembly to endorse a policy clearly designed to provide tools to people who believe they have been victims of harassment in the workplace, so that they can file a complaint that will be investigated according to a clearly established procedure.

Although it is unfortunate that this type of policy is still necessary today because inappropriate, disrespectful behaviour persists, it is encouraging that we now have measures to put an end to such conduct. We must celebrate this advance as an important step in ensuring that Members and employees of the National Assembly enjoy a workplace that is respectful and civil, with equal opportunities for everyone.

During this anniversary year, we must acknowledge that much remains to be done to achieve not only equality in law but equality in fact. Liberal Premier Adélard Godbout who helped pass the Act granting to women the right to vote and to be eligible as candidates, said, "Women have the same duties and obligations, so why refuse them the same rights?" Today, he would no doubt add, "Why not continue our efforts to build a society that is truly equal, just and tolerant?"

18 So, let's get to work... together!





## DIPUTADA EDIPCIA DUBÓN

Member of the National Assembly of Nicaragua  
Representative for the Central America Region

### Human Rights and Natural Resources

On 28 July 2015, at the Organization of American States headquarters in Washington, the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association, Maina Kiai, presented a report prepared by the United Nations Human Rights Council, which I had the privilege to comment on.

Of Kenyan origin, Mr. Kiai studied at Harvard University and has extensive experience in advocating for human rights. His 2015 report focuses on human rights violations resulting from natural resource development.

I felt it was important to bring parts of this report to your attention. Even if the report does not directly refer to the situation in Nicaragua, the practices observed by the rapporteur in the countries he visited on various continents as well as the recommendations he makes highlight the realities we must face and the challenges we must overcome. I would like to share a few of the paragraphs that I found most relevant.

Let us start with the “consultation” process. The report states: When the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association are restricted contrary to international human rights law standards, questions automatically arise as to how genuine consultation processes or decisions are and how valid is the expression of free, prior and informed consent of affected parties.

On the subject of corruption, the rapporteur has this to say: Secrecy cloaks decision-making processes and outcomes... This opaque and lucrative environment presents ideal conditions for corruption to thrive, a challenge with which many resource-rich countries have to contend.

Worth noting is a reference to a situation that is becoming more and more prevalent in Nicaragua, that is, the use of private security services: An issue of significant concern to the Special Rapporteur is the use of private military and security companies to protect the property and facilities of corporations engaged in natural resource exploitation. (...) In his view, the potential for violations of rights, including to peaceful assembly and association rights, is particularly high when law enforcement responsibilities are ceded to private actors, who are accountable to their clients rather than to the public.

Lastly, one of the report's central recommendations is that States create an enabling environment in which civil society can access relevant information, participate in decision-making and express opinions freely, including through peaceful assemblies, without threats of prosecution or other harm for legitimate opposition; ensure that cases of violations of human rights, including peaceful assembly and association rights, are promptly and impartially investigated and those responsible for the violations are held to account.

The Special Rapporteur concludes his report by stressing that peaceful social contestation must be promoted and encouraged.





**CAROLINA GAILLARD**

National Deputy

Argentine Republic

## Women in the Forefront of History: Their Struggles, Resistance and Victories

As women parliamentarians, we have an enormous responsibility far beyond our legislative work: to tell the story of women's struggle throughout Latin American.

Our struggle has proven to be essential in this region, despite a system of patriarchal domination that has sought to sweep it under the rug. Women have always spearheaded the truly crucial causes. And, despite all attempts to fight them, silence them, judge them prematurely, ignore them or objectify them, women have clearly left their mark on our societies over the past 200 years.

Think of women like María Rosario del Valle and Juana Azurduy. Though they were great revolutionaries, defending the cause of independence for nations throughout the Americas, their names languished in obscurity for almost two centuries. They fought outside aggression alongside the Creole, Métis and Native peoples, and are seen today as symbols of strength and dignity. Think also of the achievements of the thousands of women anarchists who took part in the social and political struggles of the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

And, let us not forget the woman who did so much to bring the promises of equality to fruition: Eva Duarte de Perón. Evita, the standard-bearer of social justice. Evita, who served as an inspiration for thousands of women revolutionaries (in Argentina and throughout the Americas) in the 1960s and 1970s, a period marked by the dream of, and thirst for, freedom. These young women were ready to sacrifice their lives for the emancipation of their countries. Victims of State terrorism, they were sequestered, raped, separated from the children they bore in captivity, and assassinated. Today, their struggle finds an echo in the younger generation.

The combat of the mothers and grandmothers of the Plaza de Mayo was born of grief. Their maternal sorrow became a symbol of resistance. They endured all the hardships a dictatorship could throw their way: indifference, insecurity, impunity, hatred, defamation, and the apparent defeat of the causes for which their sons had died. I say “apparent” defeat because we know today that these causes will never die, despite the efforts made to bury them. These women are our mothers too, for they gave birth to our history.

In 2001, when many men experienced the shame of being unable to feed their children after the policies of Neoliberalism left them out of work, it was women who organized soup kitchens in order to feed their families.

Our President, Cristina Fernández de Kirchner, embodies the strength of these heroic and courageous women. A strong, intelligent, determined stateswoman, she is also a woman of conviction and pointed observation, the strategic leader of one of the largest popular movements in Latin America.

While we have won great victories, we know that many challenges remain. Women are still victims of discrimination, violence and exclusion. Our work must continue until women are no longer enslaved, mistreated, treated as objects, or victim to human trafficking. We must ensure that not one more woman dies because of sexist, institutional, marital or gratuitous violence. Lastly, we must continue the struggle, alongside our male counterparts, for social justice, economic independence and political sovereignty throughout Latin America. This struggle must be part of a North and South American political project based on inclusion and equality.





## DIVA HADAMIRA GASTÉLUM

Senator Republic of the  
United Mexican States

President of the Network of Women  
Parliamentarians of the America

### Parity Democracy and Progress in Fighting Political Violence

Women hold 22.2% of all parliamentary seats in the world, and 45 countries have attained a critical mass of women participants (40% to 60%) in their legislative assemblies. In the Americas, the proportion of women in parliamentary assemblies is 27%, a percentage surpassed only in Scandinavian countries, with 41.3%. In Bolivia, which ranks second worldwide for women parliamentarians, women make up 53.1% of the lower chamber and 47.2 % of the Senate. In Cuba, which ranks third, women account for 48.9% of the National Assembly. These numbers are a testament to the colossal efforts to gain full access to political rights made by the women of the Americas and their allies. In this struggle, we seek to obtain not only equal access, as per the amendment to the Constitution of Mexico by the Chamber of Deputies last year, but also to ensure that this access comes under conditions of equality.

Women have had to overcome many obstacles when running for office, facing violence and discrimination, often simply because we are women. Bolivia has been a pioneer in adopting legislative measures to tackle this problem. There, political violence against women took the form of acts, attacks and assault intended to cause physical, psychological and sexual harm to candidates (whether elected or not) and their families, in order to make it difficult for these women to carry out their duties and force them to make certain decisions. Preventing, hindering or restricting women's participation in decision-making processes is an expression of that violence. In Mexico, the Instituto Nacional de las Mujeres (National Institute of Women) revealed that violence was particularly significant at the municipal level, where women's participation is lowest.

In addition to legislating against political violence, parity democracy requires adopting corrective measures to support women candidates. We must raise awareness among men, but also among political parties, which are the main springboards enabling candidates to be elected. We also need to create tools adapted to candidates' needs, since some women are just beginning their careers, while others have been in the political arena for a long time. Finally, we must provide parallel funding for initiatives that close the gender gap and adopt measures designed to balance work and family for women candidates and women as a whole. The goal of all these efforts is to make the Americas fairer and more prosperous.





**HON. MARI TERE GONZÁLEZ**  
Senator

Puerto Rico  
Representative for the North America region

## Women and the invisible nature of human trafficking in Puerto Rico

For some years now, human trafficking has garnered international attention, because it undermines the dignity of those who are most vulnerable. The United Nations Organization defines this scourge as “the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons, including the exchange or transfer of the control exercised over these persons, by means of threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation.” Since trafficking in persons is considered the second most lucrative crime worldwide, many experts see it as a modern-day form of slavery.

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This appalling crime has spread like an epidemic, leaving no country untouched. Until recently, authorities continued to deny its presence in Puerto Rico. However, various studies have confirmed that human trafficking is a reality on our island and that it affects the most vulnerable and marginalized groups, through forced labour, armed violence, begging, exploitation for reproductive purposes or abusive domestic servitude.

Although there are no official statistics on this loathsome crime in Puerto Rico, a rise in the number of human trafficking cases has been observed in recent years. Social science experts link this increase directly to factors such as poverty and social inequalities. In Puerto Rico, women make up 52% of the population. However, our income is below the poverty line and we are a minority in the labour force. This socioeconomic reality explains why Puerto Rican women and female immigrants are so vulnerable to human trafficking.

In this context, the Government of the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico has participated in

international efforts to tackle human trafficking head-on. In my capacity as Senator, I have proposed a number of such measures, one of which resulted in the adoption of Act No. 225-2014, which implements a framework to define the practice and concept of human trafficking in our legislation and considers its prevention a family and State obligation. In addition to this measure, trafficking in persons is now considered a serious offence under our penal code and legislation to protect immigrants from this dreadful crime.

Puerto Rico is clearly on the road to recognizing the rights of the most vulnerable members of society. However, there is much work left to do. This forum offers an excellent opportunity to join forces concretely to make a real difference in many countries around the world. To wipe out human trafficking in our respective countries, we must ensure that all sectors affected by this crime, whose main victims are women and children, are included and participate in our efforts.





**DRA. ALICIA GUTIÉRREZ**  
Deputy of the Province of Santa Fe

Argentina

## Non-punishable abortion vs. the right to conscientious objection

The right to conscientious objection allows people to avoid being forced to act contrary to their moral convictions or religious beliefs. In Argentina, this right is enshrined in the country's Constitution, which recognizes freedom of religion and the legitimacy of any private act that does not affect morality or public order and does not cause prejudice to anyone.

In this context, the right to conscientious objection legitimately allows health professionals to refuse to provide services that run counter to their convictions. However, this right should not take precedence over a woman's right to obtain an abortion.

International committees have drafted opinions stating that penalizing abortion across the board contravenes the provisions of international human rights treaties, as it infringes women's right to life, well-being and health.

Reproductive health is a human right, defined as a state of physical, mental and social well-being in all matters relating to the reproductive system. It includes the right to choose not to have children, and the protection of this right necessarily entails access to means of contraception and the possibility of safely terminating a pregnancy. This is the interpretation advanced by certain countries that have decriminalized abortion.

In Argentina, abortion is allowed in two cases: if the pregnancy poses a risk to a women's health or life, or if it is the consequence of sexual abuse. These provisions were written into the Penal Code in 1921. However, until very recently, a woman who wanted to get an abortion had to obtain a judicial mandate beforehand.

It was only in 2012 that the Supreme Court laid the bases for non-punishable abortions no longer being brought before the courts, thereby forcing the country and the provincial States to establish protocols in this area.

National legislation, jurisprudence and the international normative framework are clear: all women have the right to obtain an abortion if the pregnancy is the result of rape or is life-threatening. Despite this, certain health professionals assert their right to conscientious objection, therefore requiring the States to propose alternatives which protect these conflicting rights.

To provide legal security to conscientious objectors as well as women seeking a non-punishable abortion, I have introduced a bill to create a public register of conscientious objectors in order to avoid delays that could jeopardize patients' safety. This initiative also forces health care providers to provide abortion services through professionals who are not conscientious objectors, as I find it unacceptable that human rights should be violated in a State governed by the rule of law.

28 The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women voices its concerns regarding difficulty accessing abortion services because of conscientious objection legislation. However, if these same laws recognize women's inalienable rights, we will have found a solution to this conflict of interests.



