

Newsletter of the Network of Women Parliamentarians of the Americas



MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

Fellow women parliamentarians,

I would like to take this opportunity to thank you once again for the privilege you granted me when, at our meeting held in Guanajuato, Mexico, in September 2015, you chose me as President of the Network of Women Parliamentarians of the Americas.

Since 1999, when the Network was founded, we have made much progress in our efforts to improve the lives of women in our continent.

There can be no doubt that sharing each region's studies and experiences with regard to the most pressing problems faced by women has enriched our understanding of the reality in which we live, and that this in turn is useful in our legislative work.



However, it seems that we never really achieve the objectives we have set. Despite the solid legal foundation provided us by such documents as the Convention for the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and its optional protocol, and the Inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment and Eradication of Violence Against Women (the Convention of Belém Do Pará), women in the Americas continue to be victims of discrimination and violence in many areas of life.

These international instruments, along with their implementation and monitoring mechanisms, seem to be insufficient.

This unfavorable state of affairs is confirmed by the lack of progress reported with regard to the objectives of the Beijing Platform for Action. The full report on this subject, published by UN Women in 2015, 20 years after the Platform was adopted, is worth consulting (see <http://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2015/02/beijing-synthesis-report>). The foreword describes the report as "a salutary account of a world that has not, in the main, improved much for women and girls, and for some has got a lot worse" and as "an account of a world where new actors are starting to recognize their shared responsibility for achieving change".

As for the Millennium Development Goals, those which relate to the rights of women have not been fully achieved despite some important advances ([http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/2015_MDG_Report/pdf/MDG%202015%20rev%20\(July%201\).pdf](http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/2015_MDG_Report/pdf/MDG%202015%20rev%20(July%201).pdf)).

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It is also crucial for us to have the opportunity to participate in the consultations of an organization as important as the Inter-American Commission of Women that specializes in issues regarding the status of women. Such participation brings us into contact with government authorities who are responsible for implementing policies fostering gender equality and who listen to our proposals each year.

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At the last meeting of the Network's Executive Committee, held in Aracajú, Brazil, in June 2016, we worked on two important themes: the phenomenon of girl mothers, and the total absence of women in the executive branch of the Brazilian federal government. After debating both themes, we outlined our position in two documents.

The reality we are facing stimulates us to continue working for better results; I am convinced that teamwork is the best way of achieving this.

The recommendations and observations of commissions and committees charged with following up on international human rights instruments must be implemented, and we are well aware of our responsibility for making this happen. An excellent way of going about this is to introduce legislation that translates into positive initiatives.

We are poised to take action and, with the Network's support, to achieve parity in all our legislative assemblies, so that we can introduce legislation that better protects women. More fundamentally, we must convince our governments to implement policies that truly encourage gender equality, and to provide the necessary financial resources as well.

This is an ambitious project but, if we intensify our efforts and continue in the direction the Network has laid out for us, it is a project we are capable of carrying to fruition!

Alicia V. Gutiérrez
President of the Network of Women Parliamentarians



Executive Committee of the Network
June 1st 2016, Aracajú, Brasil

NEWS FROM THE NETWORK OF WOMEN PARLIAMENTARIANS

This Newsletter reports on the Network of Women Parliamentarians of the Americas' activities since the last issue.

The Network held its 13th Annual Meeting on September 10, 2015 in Guanajuato, Mexico, focusing on the theme "political violence against women". Participants attended Marcela Salazar Talamas' conference "Impact of political violence in parity democracy", which proved extremely interesting. The speaker addressed the serious problem of political violence in many countries of the Americas and emphasized the importance of continuing to fight it.

The elections for 2015–2017 were also held during the Annual Meeting. Deputy Alicia Verónica Gutiérrez, Chamber of Deputies of the Province of Santa Fe, Argentina, was elected Network President, and Deputy Romina Pérez, Chamber of Deputies of the Legislative Assembly, Plurinational State of Bolivia, was elected Vice-President.

The Executive Committee held a meeting on June 1, 2016 in Aracajú, Brazil during which a conference on "empowerment of women" was organized with the Women's Secretariat of the UNALE.

The President was able to report on the activities she had implemented as a representative of the Network, in particular communications with the legislative bodies of Chile and Uruguay.



13th Annual Meeting of the Network of Women Parliamentarians
Guanajuato, México, September 9 to 11 2015

She also gave a presentation on women's sexual and reproductive rights. Since this topic had been discussed previously, a "Resolution on reproductive and sexual rights and the phenomenon of girl-mothers" was passed.

Brazil's troubling context, involving women being expelled entirely from executive authority, was also discussed at the meeting. This discussion led to the adoption of the "Declaration on due respect of gender equality within Government institutions".

(Continued on next page)



During the works of the Executive Committee of the Network of Women
Parliamentarians
Aracajú, Brazil, 1st June 2016

The President also participated in the Inter-American Commission of Women (CIM) Assembly of Delegates in Peru in May 2016, where she moderated a panel on “OAS Strategic Initiative for More Life, More Health for Women and Children in the Americas: Towards a Plan to Reduce Maternal Mortality and Disease”.

The Network’s work plan for 2015–2017 was discussed and defined. In keeping with the CIM’s proposal, the theme chosen for the 14th Annual Meeting was “sexual abuse and violence towards girls and women”.



XXXVII Assembly of Delegates of the CIM
May 24th and 25th 2016, Lima, Peru

WOMEN IN NATIONAL PARLIAMENTS

Each year, the Interparliamentary Union compiled data about women’s presence in national parliaments. At the world level, the last ones were compiled by 1st August 2016.

For more information: <http://www.ipu.org/wmn-f/world.htm>

Both houses combined	
Total MPS	46 043
Men	35 551
Women	10 492
Percentage of women	22,8%

Regional averages			
	Single or lower House	Senate	Both houses combined
Americas	27,7%	27%	27,6%
Europe	25,8%	25,1%	25,6%
Sub-Saharan Africa	23%	21,9%	22,9%
Arab States	18,4%	12,1%	17,5%

2015-2017 NETWORK'S EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE



**Presidenta / President / Presidente /
Présidente**

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



**Vicepresidenta / Vice-President / Vice-Presidente /
Vice-Présidente**

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

REPRESENTANTES REGIONALES / REGIONAL REPRESENTATIVES REPRESENTANTES REGIONAIS / REPRÉSENTANTES RÉGIONALES



**América Central / Central America / América Central /
Amérique centrale**

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



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

Sra. Sonia Rocha Acosta, Senadora
Senado de la República de los Estados Unidos Mexicanos



El Caribe / Caribbean / O Caribe / Antilles

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



Cono Sur / Southern Cone / Cone Sul / Cône Sud

Sra. Inés Angélica Bertero, Diputada
Cámara de Diputados de la Provincia de Santa Fe, Argentina



Cono Sur / Southern Cone / Cone Sul / Cône Sud

Sra. María Carísimo, Diputada
Cámara de Diputados de la República del Paraguay



**Parlamentos regionales y organizaciones
interparlamentarias /
Regional Parliaments and Interparliamentary
Organizations /
Parlamentos regionais e organizações interparlamentares /
Parlements régionaux et organisations interparlementaires**

Sra. Luana Ribeiro, Diputada
União Nacional dos Legisladores e Legislativos Estaduais
(UNALE)



**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**

M^{me} Nicole Ménard, Députée
Assemblée nationale du Québec

**Próxima Asamblea anfitriona / Next Host Assembly /
Próxima Assembléia anfitriã / Prochaine assemblée hôte**

Señora Emilia Rosa Figueroa, Diputada
Cámara de Diputados de la Provincia de Salta
Argentina



**Ex-Presidenta saliente /Outgoing President /
ExPresidenta sainte / Présidente sortante**

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

MEMBER'S CONTRIBUTION



MARI TERE GONZÁLEZ

Senator
Commonwealth of Puerto Rico

WOMEN'S POLITICAL UNDER-REPRESENTATION IN A DEMOCRACY IN CRISIS

Democracy is based on the right of all segments of society to be politically represented. However, our institutions continue to be dominated by men. This situation highlights the fact that women's inclusion in the political space is crucial to breaking the hegemonic masculine narrative.¹

The Constitution of the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico acknowledges equality as a distinctive characteristic of democratic countries. But women's inclusion in the spheres of power is limited by barriers that are generally attributable to social constructs leading to gender-based segregation and wage gaps, among other consequences of inequality.

In Puerto Rico, there are too few women in positions of responsibility to shift the numbers toward more balanced gender representation. The political parties are largely responsible for this, as they could provide the leverage women would need to access such positions. Currently, 4 out of 78 municipalities—barely 5%—are run by a female mayor. Although women represent 52% of the population of Puerto Rico and 54% of the electorate, in the Senate, the organization I represent, they account for less than a quarter of the members, with 6 seats out of a total of 27.

I would like to insist on the fact that even when we account for the majority of the electorate, we are not proportionally represented in elective offices. This creates an imbalance, as the gender distribution of elective positions neither

reflects nor comes anywhere near reflecting women's demographic weight. This feeds and perpetuates the deficit in women's representation in participatory and representative democracy. But we cannot lay the blame on the electorate, as the process of choosing electoral candidates is administered by the political parties in accordance with the rules governing their platforms.

women's inclusion in the political space is crucial to breaking the hegemonic masculine narrative

Salvo del Canto

In 1992, the Athens Declaration, signed by women at the European Summit on Women in Power, marked the start of the parity democracy era. Inspired by the

Declaration, many countries such as the Dominican Republic and Spain passed laws to promote the principle of balanced participation in political life.

In 2013, given the need to raise awareness among the members of our political and government institutions, I introduced a bill² in favour of the strictly equal participation of men and women in our legal and electoral systems.

Puerto Rico can no longer remain silent in the face of this situation or continue to take part in the masquerade that is representative democracy, and must join in global efforts for greater equality. As women, we must make our voices heard and fight the good fight until we obtain our fair share in terms of political representation. We simply cannot rest content with under-representation, which is the cause of so many ills and backwardness within our so-called democracies.

Original text in Spanish

1. Salvo del Canto, P. and Infante Erazo, M. (2010), *Mujeres Derecho a tener Derechos*. Spain. Derived from: http://2015ymas.org/IMG/pdf/MUJERES_INTERIOR_v4.pdf

2. See Senate Bill 449 introduced on March 11, 2013 (www.oslpr.org/buscar).



ALICIA GUTIÉRREZ

Provincial Deputy

President of the Network of Women Parliamentarians of the Americas

Santa Fe – Argentina

THIRTY YEARS OF MEETINGS

Women's struggle to create a more inclusive society represents an important chapter in our country's and in humanity's history. Throughout the centuries, many women from different regions, cultures and traditions have taken up this ever changing battle. However, today, I would like to talk about one specific link in this chain of discussions, agreements and disagreements that women have participated in throughout history in their efforts to make the world more egalitarian and inclusive. I am referring to the National Women's Meetings that my country Argentina has been organizing for the last 30 years.

... the cultural networks on which patriarchal society is based must be dismantled to pave the way for a more inclusive form of democracy

The first of these meetings took place in the initial years after democracy was restored. The history of this initiative is therefore interwoven with our country's history, with the various milestones that have allowed a growing number of

rights to be recognized and with the debates that have yet to be resolved in our society. But, above all, it is the contemporary issues affecting women worldwide that have motivated the holding of these meetings since 1986.

Since then, the growing number participating in these meetings each year bodes well for the future. About 50,000 women from all regions of our country now take part in debates, reflection and discussion empowering Argentinian women's fight for the recognition of their rights. These meetings have allowed diverse topics such as parental authority (when divorce legislation did not yet exist in our country), violence against women, the decriminalization of abortion and gender quotas to be debated openly.

This year, the city of Rosario will host the National Women's Meeting for the third time. In October 2016, thousands of women will meet to focus their attention on the main gender equity issues of the day in order to continue building a more inclusive society for all women. We, the Women Parliamentarians of the Americas, are also ready to take on this challenge because we know that while the image of women may have changed in the last century, there is still much work to be done. We want to fight this battle alongside thousands of other women worldwide who believe the cultural networks on which patriarchal society is based must be dismantled to pave the way for a more inclusive form of democracy.

Original text in Spanish



NICOLE MÉNARD

Member of the National Assembly of Québec
Representative of the Secretariat of the Network of Women Parliamentarians of the Americas

THE SITUATION OF ABORIGINAL WOMEN IN QUÉBEC

Although significant progress has been made in recent decades, gender equality has yet to be achieved in Québec. Furthermore, gender-related disparities are greater among Aboriginal peoples. For instance, femicide is 4.5 times higher among Aboriginal women than their non-Aboriginal counterparts throughout Canada.

To assess the situation in Québec, this year, the National Assembly of Québec's Committee on Citizen Relations decided to take on the self-initiated mandate of studying "Aboriginal women's living conditions as affected by sexual assault and domestic violence".

Today, Québec is home to nearly 100,000 Aboriginal people—approximately 85% are members of First Nations and 15% are Inuit. Their reality is very different from that of other Quebecers: unenviable socio-economic conditions, higher poverty levels and above-average unemployment rates.

Statistics show that Aboriginal women are especially hard hit by these inequalities. Levels of domestic violence are 2.5 times higher for Aboriginal women than for other Canadian women. Aware of this problem, Québec's elected officials wanted to institute an initiative to address the issue.

Last May, the Committee released the interim report on its order of initiative, which includes four specific suggestions for improving the situation.

First, the women consulted consider economic empowerment essential to ensuring their independence in situations involving domestic violence. Economically self-sufficient women are more likely to break the cycle of poverty and violence and participate in political, economic and cultural activities in their community.

Second, the groups of women consulted feel it is crucial that community social services be adapted to their particular needs. Specifically, this means that, when helping out in a community, professionals need to know the community's culture and language. In addition, the women pointed out that the number of professional resources available should be increased.

Third, these women identified the need to improve housing conditions as a problem to address. The phenomenon of overcrowded housing is an aggravating factor to be taken seriously, since it exacerbates situations involving violence and increases the number of victims.

Finally, to get to the root of the problem, the women consulted consider it extremely important to implement support mechanisms for men engaging in violent behaviour.

This self-initiated order has already helped identify potential, sustainable solutions that involve working with Aboriginal communities to improve the situation of their women. The final report, which will be tabled by the Committee, will undoubtedly explore these possibilities further.

Original text in french

...femicide is 4.5 times higher among Aboriginal women than their non-Aboriginal counterparts throughout Canada.



CARMEN QUESADA SANTAMARÍA

Member of the Legislative Assembly of Costa Rica

Representative of Central America of the Network of Women Parliamentarians of the Americas

WOMEN'S POLITICAL PARTICIPATION IN COSTA RICA: ENVIRONMENTAL SCAN OF THIS HUMAN RIGHT

For many years in Costa Rica, women could not vote in elections or even hold public office. But this situation has changed, thanks to the courage and enthusiasm of the many women who were determined to have their rights and the rights of all Costa Rican women recognized. It is because of their efforts that the situation of women in Costa Rica began to change. They started rising to higher and higher positions and surmounting obstacles to their advancement, which allowed them to gradually take their place on the political and social chessboard. Even if positive changes have been observed, women still have a long way to go before truly egalitarian participation can be achieved.

As a deputy, member of the Women's Committee and passionate advocate of the rights of all women, I feel it is important that we keep looking for solutions to break down the barriers still standing in our way. Bill 19.010 is an example of the efforts we are making in this regard in Costa Rica. It aims to ensure parity between women and men at the party nomination stage ahead of general elections, the ultimate goal being to promote egalitarian participation and so increase women's presence in politics. Even if it is still awaiting approval, I am very pleased with our Constitutional Court's decision on the unconstitutionality claim against the Supreme Electoral Tribunal's jurisprudence as regards the notion of "parity in totality", which was not concretely applied. Indeed, the claim was rejected because it was deemed contrary to the principles of gender equality and equity, which are part of our constitutional order and

Costa Rican constitutional law. The Constitutional Court found that, given the liberal and systematic nature of the Election Code, political parties are required to respect the parity principle not only in internal electoral lists, but also in electoral lists for general elections. This ruling is an important step forward for women's rights in Costa Rica, because it ratifies the general principles of parity and equality between women and men in all electoral lists.

Bill 19.010 aims to ensure parity between women and men at the party nomination stage ahead of general elections, the ultimate goal being to promote egalitarian participation and so increase women's presence in politics.

Formal participation corresponds to women's right to represent their co-citizens and to be represented, which is entrenched in the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, the *Charter of the United Nations* and the *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women*.

In Costa Rica, the equality principle is set out in section 33 of the Political Constitution:

"All persons are equal before the law and no discrimination contrary to human dignity shall be practised".

Women must participate in political life through formal and informal mechanisms on an equal footing with men and, to do so, should be able to rely on mixed spaces allowing them to focus their efforts on objectives that will improve the rights of all in an equitable manner. With this goal in mind, political parties must establish and implement a gender equality and equity policy that includes clear and specific positive discrimination measures and helps advance equality between women and men in politics.

Original text in Spanish

COLLABORATION



SUSANA CHIAROTTI

Integrante del Consejo Consultivo del CLADEM
Profesora en la Universidad Nacional de Rosario
Argentina



NOTAS



NOTAS

