



III ANNUAL MEETING OF THE NETWORK OF WOMEN PARLIAMENTARIANS OF THE AMERICAS

Ixtapan de la Sal, Mexico, November 24, 2002

REPORT

Approximately 50 women parliamentarians from some twenty countries took part in the III Annual Meeting of the Network of Women Parliamentarians of the Americas, on November 24, 2002, in Ixtapan de la Sal, Mexico. During this meeting, the participants:

1. Were given updates on regional activities: each representative on the Executive Committee reported on progress made in her respective region, regional parliamentary assembly or interparliamentary organization regarding legislation concerning women, or any other initiative of interest to the Network. While several participants were pleased with the actual increase in the number of women in positions of power, many of them nevertheless mentioned their concern about the importance of fostering greater participation by women in political life in their countries, particularly through the promotion or adoption of quota legislation.

The members of the Executive Committee in turn described the legislation and measures adopted to foster the advancement of women and to protect their rights. Several examples were given to the Assembly in order to illustrate the initiatives that have been put in place to eliminate violence against women and gender discrimination, sexual tourism exploiting women and children, and the trafficking of persons. Some participants mentioned seminars held in their region or country, analysing the rights of women workers and migration problems, but also the effects of the Free Trade Area of the Americas and its impacts on women. Finally, we also heard about measures and laws that made it possible to influence the development of budgets with a gender focus in certain countries.

2. Were given a report of the Network's activities since the last meeting of the Executive Committee, held in Mexico City in May 2002. The President, Lyse Leduc, spoke of the recommendations adopted at that meeting. Concerning that which denounced the kidnapping of the candidate for the presidency of the Republic of Colombia, Ingrid Bétancourt, on February 23, 2002, who is still being detained, Ms. Leduc informed the members that the National Assembly of Québec has unanimously adopted a motion in the House, denouncing this kidnapping, and brought a copy of the motion to the Colombian Embassy. Ms. Leduc took the opportunity to encourage the members of the Network to have similar motions adopted in their respective assemblies.

A demonstration was given by live projection on-line from the documentary bank, which can now be consulted on the COPA web site under the title Network of Women Parliamentarians at the address www.copa.qc.ca. This project from the plan of action put forward by the Executive Committee makes it possible to consult on-line various legislative bills on the status of women. The parliamentarians present were asked to send to the secretariat any texts, documents or legislative bills that could contribute to the improvement of the documentary bank.

Concerning the traineeship project for young women in various parliamentary assemblies, it should be recalled that this program aims to enable female students to familiarize themselves with the legislative processes and to interest them in considering a political career. In view of the problems experienced by the partner organization in following the steps set out in the schedule for implementing the theoretical component of the program, the Executive Committee decided to maintain the traineeship project in a modified form emphasizing the practical component, and to continue the research leading toward the implementation of a theoretical component. This practical traineeship will be implemented by the Assemblies on an independent basis, but the Network will provide models of similar programs in order to facilitate the implementation in other parliaments.

A recommendation was passed unanimously to the effect that the Executive Committee of the Network of Women Parliamentarians of the Americas would take steps to obtain, for the Network, observer status at the Meeting of Women Parliamentarians of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), much like the status that has been granted to COPA.

3. Participated in a thematic workshop on gender-specific budgets given by Ms. Semil Esim, economist at the *International Center for Research on Women*, based in Washington. Ms. Esim is an expert in this area, and has done research in Latin America and developed programs to foster the taking into account of gender-related aspects in budgets in various countries and organizations. She explained how budgets can influence public spending, taking into account its impact on men and women, and illustrated the mechanisms and instruments necessary to bring in such national strategies. The discussion that followed, between many participants and the guest speaker, was chaired by Ms. Ileana Rogel, Representative of the Legislative Assembly of El Salvador.
4. Adopted, following the workshop, a recommendation on budgets based on gender-specific budgets. The essential part of the recommendation urges the Heads of State and Government of the Americas to measure the scale of the disadvantages to women and of the persistent inequality between the sexes, and to apply the commitments, recommendations and plans of action arising out of international conferences, connected with issues between men and women. The recommendation suggests taking means to set up programs, strategies and initiatives for budgets, as well as to analyse their public policies and budgetary processes, taking into account the gender lens approach allowing women and men to have equal access to opportunities, to property, to resources and to services. In addition, she recommended including in the training of parliamentarians, of parliamentary staff and of committee chairs, not only this approach, but also that of increasing the number of women in these committees.

A request was formulated to the effect that a specific recommendation adopting the same principles be sent to the political parties in order for them to develop their party platforms and make a commitment in their election campaigns to promote and adopt budgets developed according to the gender -specific approach. It would appear that each member of the Network will have to do the follow-up with her respective political party.

5. Took notice of the following proposals:

Ms. Elisa Carca, representative of the Southern Cone, presented the *Buenos Aires Declaration* which was adopted at the regional meeting of the Southern Cone members of the Women's Network on November 4, 2002. By signing this declaration, the parliamentarians present made a commitment to honour their political mandate by defending the poorest sectors of society. The General Assembly of the Women's Network took notice of the Declaration and adopted the conclusion which demands that COPA as well as other institutional organizations of the region take measures that are not mere statements, but real commitments toward the respect of the rights of women and children.

Ms. Nidia Díaz, representative of the Central American Parliament, presented a declaration underlining the Day against violence against women, on November 25. It was proposed that this declaration be presented before the COPA General Assembly the following day, by the President, Ms. Laura Pavón.

Ms. Velda González de Modestti, Vice-President of the Senate of Puerto Rico, also presented a recommendation to denounce the violations of the fundamental rights of women and to show disapproval of the death sentences pronounced against Nigerian women when they are single mothers. This recommendation was presented and supported by the Network.

Ms. Fatima Houda-Pepin, of the Québec Section of the Women's Network presented a recommendation aiming to support Afghan women, and particularly Dr. Sima Samar, former Deputy Prime Minister of the transitional Afghan government, who is currently waging a courageous struggle to fight violence against women in Afghanistan, and who is striving to have a human rights committee created for that purpose. The recommendation was supported by the Network.

A request for the Network of Women Parliamentarians to delegate an official observer to the elections in El Salvador on March 16, 2003, was sent by the political party *Frente Farabundo Martí para la Liberación Nacional (FMLN)*. It was proposed that the Executive Committee be mandated to make a decision concerning this request.

6. Elected by acclamation their new Executive Committee, which is now composed of:

President:

Ms. Ileana Rogel, Representative of the Legislative Assembly of El Salvador

Regional representatives:

North America

Ms. Maria Elena Chapa, Representative of the Mexican Federal Congress

Ms. Deborah Hudson, Representative of the Delaware House of Representatives, United States of America

Central America

Ms. Antonieta Botto Handal de Fernández, Representative of the National Congress of Honduras

Caribbean

Ms. Velda González de Modestti, Vice-President of the Senate of Puerto Rico

Ms. Ruth Jeanette Wijdenbosch, Vice-President of the National Assembly of Suriname

Andean Region

Ms. Iris María Valera Rangel, Representative of the National Assembly of Venezuela

Southern Cone

Ms. Elisa Carca, Senator of the Province of Buenos Aires, Argentina

Ms. Araceli Lemos, Representative of the Legislative Assembly of the State of Pará, Brazil

Interparliamentary organizations and regional parliaments:

Ms. Adela Muñoz de Liendo, Representative of the Andean Parliament

Ms. Nidia Díaz, Representative of the Central American Parliament

Ms. Andriana Coirini, Representative of the Parliamentary Union of Mercosur

Ex-President

Ms. Lyse Leduc (1999-2002), Member of the National Assembly of Québec

It is important to take note that the President of the Network of Women Parliamentarian of the Americas, Ms. Ileana Rogel, holds de facto one of the six vice-presidencies of COPA.

At the meeting of the new Executive Committee which was held November 25, 2002, Ms. Velda González de Modestti, Vice-President of the Senate of Puerto Rico, was elected second representative of the Network of Women Parliamentarians of the Americas on the Executive Committee of COPA.