



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

**Caracas, Venezuela
November 24, 2003**

PROCEEDINGS

Some 40 women parliamentarians from some 15 countries met during the IV Annual Meeting of the Network of Women Parliamentarians of the Americas, held November 24, 2003 in Caracas, Venezuela.

A welcoming address was given by the host of the annual meeting of the Network and the General Assembly of the Parliamentary Confederation of the Americas (COPA), Ms. Jhanett Madriz Sotillo, President of COPA and Vice-President of the Andean Parliament.

The President of the Network of Women Parliamentarians of the Americas, Ms. Ileana Rogel, Representative of the Legislative Assembly of El Salvador, presented a report on the Network's activities in 2002-2003. Since the time of the last annual meeting, the Network has carried out the following activities:

1. Follow-up was performed on the recommendations adopted during the III annual meeting of the Network at Ixtapan de la Sal, Mexico;
2. Groundwork was laid for the visit of the President of the Network to the National Assembly of Québec in February 2003, during which Ms. Louise Harel, President of the National Assembly, reiterated the support of her institution for the Network of Women Parliamentarians of the Americas by hosting the organization's secretariat and defraying secretariat expenses;
3. A meeting of the Executive Committee of the Network was held on Margarita Island, Venezuela, on February 22, 2003, at which the plan of action guiding the work of the Network for the coming years was defined;
4. Research and development was performed in connection with the GAIA document databank on the subject of gender budgets, which was uploaded onto the Network's webpage;
5. Contributions were actively made to developing and conducting the Seminar on Gender Budgets, held on September 19 and 20, 2003, in San Salvador, El Salvador;

6. Responsibility was assumed for chairing the COPA Permanent Thematic Working Committee on Health and Social Development;
7. A communication plan was developed, promotional materials were produced, and the Network webpage was upgraded;
8. Support was provided to Network members attending the “First meeting of women parliamentarians from Portuguese-speaking countries” and the “Second meeting of women representatives of Brazilian States”;
9. Groundwork was laid for the meeting with Ms. Jeanne Kohl-Welles, president of the US Women’s Legislative Network of the National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL). Following this meeting, an article presenting the Network was published in journal of this organization, which is distributed to more than 3000 women legislators in the United States.

The Report of the Network Secretariat was then filed. The Secretariat is hosted by the National Assembly of Québec, which also defrays the outfit’s operating expenses. The Secretariat is in charge of organizing the annual meetings of the Network and the meetings of the Executive Committee. It has also been mandated to handle the President’s correspondence, prepare and send out official Network documents, and update the promotional materials and document databanks.

The elected representatives on the Executive Committee presented their reports concerning: the implementation of initiatives stemming from the Network’s plan of action; regional activities; and the legislative advances accomplished in relation to women’s status in their respective regions.

Network statutes were modified by a draft amendment granting the National Assembly of Québec a seat on the Executive Committee as the Founding Assembly of the Network of Women Parliamentarians of the Americas and home to its Secretariat.

A thematic workshop concerning the impact on women of the creation of the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA) was led by Ms. Graciela Rodriguez, Coordinator of the *Red Internacional de Género y Comercio* and Executive Director of the *Instituto Equit* of Brazil. Ms. Rodriguez described how the process in which trade agreements, such as the FTAA, are expanded to cover services, intellectual property, and investments in effect infringes upon government powers and affects vital sectors that do not come exclusively within the scope of trade in goods.

She provided numerous examples of how the liberalization of these sectors and the implementation of macroeconomic models focusing on exports, a reduced role for government, privatization and concentration of economic activities in specialized sectors produce significant impacts on the lives of women and societies that must continue to be studied before pursuing negotiations of free trade treaties. Even at this time, there is probably a sufficient fund of data concerning the fallout of the structural adjustments being implemented in Latin American economies and the impact of other regional agreements for predicting the potential consequences of the FTAA—whence also the justification for proceeding with caution in future rounds of negotiations.

At the end of her presentation, Ms. Rodriguez proposed a series of avenues of action which prompted a lengthy exchange of questions, answers, and comments between workshop participants and herself. She suggested increasing the technical and analytical capacity of the

negotiating teams, initiating data gathering according to a gender analysis approach, and building alliances with groups from the research sector, civil society, and the G20 countries in order to assess the impacts of these treaties. She reiterated her view that the role of parliamentarians is absolutely critical with respect to trade negotiations and monitoring of the integration processes, both of which affect the status of women, the well-being of peoples, and the capacity of States to legislate. This workshop also provided an opportunity for adopting the recommendation respecting the impact on women of the creation of the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA), which also sets out the main actions to be carried out by parliamentarians in connection with this issue.

Thereafter, Ms. Nidia Diaz, who represents the Central American Parliament (PARLACEN) on the Executive Committee, presented the report of the Seminar on Gender Budgets held in San Salvador, El Salvador, on September 19 and 20, 2003. This seminar was organized with the very active collaboration of the Network, the Legislative Assembly of El Salvador, and the Anaya Melida Montes-Las Melidas Association. Thanks to this seminar, close to 150 women parliamentarians and representatives of women's organization had the opportunity to share information, views, and experiences about the analytical tools, mechanisms, and instruments required to implement strategies so as to bring about budget processes that promoted greater gender equity. Workshop participants were thus able to deepen their knowledge of the various experiences surrounding the implementation of this type of budget in Mexico, Québec, and El Salvador.

Continuing with this topic, a live projection was given of the GAIA Document Databank – Gender Budgets: Analysis and Information in the Americas. Developed by the Network Secretariat, this document databank can be consulted on the COPA website at: www.copa.gc.ca, under the heading of Network of Women Parliamentarians. The objective is to inform parliamentarians, by means of pooling the main studies, analyses, and tools used to perform gender analysis. Following this presentation, a resolution was adopted urging parliamentarians to send the Secretariat any text that would help enrich the GAIA document databank.

At the close of the annual meeting, participants duly observed the International Day Against Violence Against Women, with a declaration being read before the General Assembly of COPA. The historic role played by Ms. Manuela Sáenz in gaining independence for several South American countries was also recognized. Finally, one proposal was put to participants to write the Prime Minister and the President of Parliament of Sweden to condemn the assassination of the parliamentarian Anna Lindh, Foreign Minister of Sweden; also during this meeting, a second motion thanking the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela for its hospitality was put forward and voted.

The following representatives were elected to the Executive Committee:

President:

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

Regional Representatives:

North America

Ms. Lucero Saldaña, Senator of the Congress of the United Mexican States

Seat vacant

Central America

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

Ms. Albertina Urbina Zelaya, Representative de the National Assembly of Nicaragua

Caribbean

Ms. Velda González de Modestti, Deputy Speaker of the Senate of Puerto Rico

Ms. Elsa Rojas Hernandez, Representative of the National Assembly of People's Power of Cuba

Andean Region

Ms. Marelis Perez, Representative de the National Assembly of Venezuela

Ms. Miryam Garces Davila, Representative of the National Congress of Ecuador

Southern Cone

Ms. Graciela De Leo, Senator, Senate Chamber of the province of Buenos Aires, Argentina

Ms. Aparecida Gama, representative de the Legislative Assembly of the State of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil

Interparliamentarian Organizations and Regional Parliaments:

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

Ms. Nidia Díaz, Representative of the Central American Parliament

Ms. Sonia Fontes, Representative of the Legislative Assembly of the State of Bahia and Representative of the National Union of Legislative Assemblies of the Federated States of Brazil (UNALE)

Founding Assembly of the Network and Host Institution for the Secretariat

Ms. Fatima Houda-Pepin, Member of the National Assembly of Québec

Next Host Assembly for the Annual Meeting

Ms. Alice Portugal, Representative of the Legislative Assembly of the State of Bahia, Brazil

Ms. Iara Bernardi, Representative of the Federal Congress of Brazil

It is important to recall that the President of the Network of Women Parliamentarians of the Americas, Ms. Ileana Rogel, is ex-officio one of the six Vice-Presidents of COPA.

Ms. Velda González de Modestti, Deputy Speaker of the Senate of Puerto Rico, was elected as the second representative of the Network of Women Parliamentarians of the Americas on the Executive Committee of COPA.