



## **MEETING OF THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE OF THE NETWORK OF WOMEN PARLIAMENTARIANS OF THE AMERICAS**

### **Declaration of Toluca**

We, the members of the Executive Committee of the Network of Women Parliamentarians of the Americas, a body of the Parliamentary Confederation of the Americas, which brings together the congresses and parliamentary assemblies of the unitary, federal, federated and associated States, the regional parliaments and the interparliamentary organizations of the Americas, at the meeting held in Toluca, Mexico, on March 8, 2011, having discussed the theme of violence against women, adopt, in accordance with the conclusions reached at this meeting, the following declaration:

CONCERNED by the alarming numbers and indicators that show that the level of violence against women and girls remains unchanged all over the world, regardless of country, culture, social status, religion or other factors;

CONSCIOUS of the different forms of violence against women, that is, physical, psychological, sexual and patrimonial;

AWARE that violence against women is a form of discrimination that reflects the unequal power relationships between men and women;

CONSIDERING that many women are victims not only of gender-based violence, but also of discriminatory practices based on their race, religion, political opinions, country of origin, migrant status, sexual orientation, age, health, physical condition, personal assets or patrimonial situation;

NOTING the persistent forms of violence condoned by customs, traditions or religious practice;

ACKNOWLEDGING that in many places on our continent, violence and discrimination against women is often ignored, hidden or underestimated, and therefore goes unpunished;

REAFFIRMING that gender-based violence and discrimination constitutes not only a violation of women's fundamental rights, but also an obstacle to achieving the democracy, peace and development objectives of the Americas;

AWARE that violence against women is linked directly to the way people think of women and the relationship between men and women, and that this reality has a profound cultural basis;

RECOGNIZING that initiatives by women and civil society organizations in a number of countries of the Americas have led to the passing of laws to fight, eradicate and prevent violence against women;

**We declare:**

That it is imperative that action plans setting out clear objectives, deadlines and means be developed and implemented, in order to diminish in the short term—and eliminate in the medium term—violence and discrimination against women;

That we recognize that it is our responsibility to propose and carry out legislative reforms in order to protect women against all forms of violence, and assume that responsibility;

That our parliamentary action must be reinforced by the passing of laws that specifically target certain forms of violence, for instance, domestic violence or sexual violence;

That it is urgent that there be a review of the existing legislation in our respective States, with a view to abolishing the laws that have discriminatory impacts and worsen women's vulnerability to violence;

That we must ensure that the legislative frameworks in the States of the Americas protect all women equally, without distinction of race, religion, marital status, age, physical condition, health, political opinion, sexual orientation, migrant status, fortune, etc., in accordance with obligations relating to human rights established under international law;

That the attitude of the States that tolerate forms of violence against women condoned by customs, traditions, culture or religion is deplorable and that we exhort those States to embrace international standards as regards human rights;

That the concealing of violence against women must be fought through awareness initiatives directed toward the public, the media, schools, government authorities, health institutions, etc.;

That all the measures adopted to fight violence and discrimination against women must be part of a comprehensive approach that favours prevention, puts an end to impunity and guarantees support for victims;

That it is crucial to fight violence against women through education, by promoting equal, non-sexist and non-heterosexist relations between men and women, beginning in childhood.

That the Network of Women Parliamentarians of the Americas must continue to work for the protection of the human dignity and personal integrity of all women in the Americas.

***Toluca, Mexico, March 8, 2011***