



Parliaments of the Americas: Present!

ACTIVITY REPORT OF THE PRESIDENT
2010-2013



Mr. Jacques Chagnon

President of the Parliamentary Confederation
of the Americas
President of the National Assembly of Québec

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Table of Contents	3
A Word from the President	5
1. Study of the Four Themes Proposed in the Plan of the President	7
2. Institutional Consolidation of COPA	11
3. Promotion of COPA	15
Towards A Stronger Parliamentary America	19

A WORD FROM THE PRESIDENT



My term as COPA President ends at the conclusion of our 12th General Assembly, to be held in Brasília, Brazil. With this in mind, it gives me great pleasure to present this report, which outlines the main activities carried out by COPA since our 10th General Assembly, held in Mar del Plata, Argentina, in November 2010, when my term as President was just beginning.

These three years at the head of COPA have been rich in activities, and have given me the opportunity to consolidate and promote COPA as an institution. Because COPA is still a young organization, I felt it was important to pursue clear objectives in order to ensure its effectiveness and its future, and to give it a stronger voice in the Americas. Thanks to the efforts and commitment of COPA's members, who have risen to every occasion when called upon, we are starting to see concrete results that bode a promising future for our organization.

At the outset of my term, I proposed four major issues for us to focus on. I am very happy to note that COPA's members were ready and willing to take on the challenge. Working in close collaboration, they have taken up these themes again and again, examining them from different perspectives in the course of COPA's activities.

One of my priorities as President was to give the six working committees a prominent role within the organization. The committee chairs answered the call, with the result that our committees are well on their way to becoming the pillars of our interparliamentary organization. Again, given the need to consolidate COPA as an institution, I considered it essential to ensure close coordination and collaboration between COPA's three secretariats. Much effort had been expended in this regard, with encouraging results. Finally, as it is likewise essential to strengthen our advisory role among parliamentary assemblies, executive powers and other organizations, various measures have been adopted throughout my term as President to publicize both our activities and the positions we hold on various issues, and to diversify participation and establish new partnerships.

More than 15 years down the road, we must keep these major goals at the heart of our efforts so that COPA may become a leading forum for examining the major challenges facing the Americas. I would like to thank all the members of COPA who are involved in its development. COPA is us, parliamentarians, and it is our job to ensure that our organization achieves the status it deserves throughout this great continent.

JACQUES CHAGNON
President of the National Assembly of Québec

1. STUDY OF THE FOUR THEMES PROPOSED IN THE PLAN OF THE PRESIDENT

During the 10th General Assembly, held in Mar del Plata, Argentina, I presented a plan entitled *Parliaments of the Americas: Present!* This plan outlines the fundamental issues I wished us to concentrate on during my mandate. In the plan I proposed that we focus our attention on the following four major challenges that require special attention and that call for the collaboration of the Americas as a whole:

- to combat infant mortality;
- to increase the secondary school graduation rate among people in the 25-plus age group;
- to eliminate the gender wage gap; and
- to protect water resources.

I suggested in this document that the permanent thematic committees and the Network of Women Parliamentarians take up these themes. In addition, I encouraged COPA's members to carry out an in-depth study within these bodies and to suggest to their colleagues possible solutions that might ultimately lead to formal commitments by COPA, particularly in the form of resolutions. The committee chairs and the President of the Network took up the call proposed in the Plan of the President, and thanks to their efforts the themes were studied from different

perspectives during committee and Network meetings, and resolutions concerning the themes were adopted.

1.1 Combating infant mortality

The Committee on Health and Social Protection was the obvious forum for examining the problem of infant mortality. It studied the theme during this period. Efforts by Committee Chair Elsa Rojas, Deputy of the National Assembly of the People's Power of the Republic of Cuba, and her Cuban colleagues made it possible for the Committee to meet in Cuba in October, 2011, to pursue its study of maternal health and infant mortality begun in 2010. It was agreed that regular monitoring of pregnant women and their access to clean water, a healthy diet and a basic education are the most important factors ensuring the health of mother and child. Discussions concluded with the examination of a draft resolution to be submitted for adoption at the 12th General Assembly. Committee members also agreed to pursue this theme until 2015, when it will be possible to know whether the Millennium Development Goal of reducing by two thirds the mortality rate of children under five years of age has been achieved in the Americas.



Meeting of the Committee on Health and Social Protection,
Havana, Cuba, October 27–28, 2011

1.2 Increasing the secondary school graduation rate in the 25-plus age group

Since this theme is a significant issue not only for youth, but for the economy, culture and development of our societies, it was studied from different perspectives by three of COPA's thematic committees.

First, I was very pleased to note that Mexican Senator Claudia S. Corichi García, Chair of the Committee on Education, Culture, Science and Technology, took the Plan of the President into account when proposing, in the 2011–2012 work plan, that the previously initiated study of school dropout be continued. The work plan pledges to study one of the avenues for action proposed in the Plan of the President, namely, to “make sure the State has a dropout prevention plan, school reintegration programs and/or an action plan to increase school enrolment rates”.

With this in mind, during the Committee's meeting in Québec City, six parliamentarians participated in a round table on school dropout in the Americas. Each one outlined the initiatives undertaken in his or her own country to combat the phenomenon. The report by the Québec rapporteur contains various initiatives taken by the States of the Americas to combat school dropout. Reflecting the complexity of the phenomenon itself, the measures proposed by the parliamentarians included personal, family, social, economic, and school-oriented considerations. With a view to pursuing this theme, Committee Chair Corichi and her successor, María Guadalupe Mondragón

González, decided to include the examination of school reintegration and adult education in the Committee's work plan. Hence, the parliamentarians will have set forth measures not only to prevent school dropout, but also to remedy it after the fact.

Education-related themes were also studied by the Committee on the Economy, Trade, Labour, Competitiveness and Trading Blocs and the Committee on Human Rights, Aboriginal Peoples and Citizen Security during their Québec City meetings. The first of these committees, chaired by Mexican Deputy Ana Elia Paredes Arciga, looked at young people “who neither study nor work”, while the second, chaired by Brazilian Deputy José Luis Schafer, took up the theme of “Aboriginal Populations and the Right to Education”. In both cases, the parliamentarians attended expert presentations on the subject and were able to ask questions and exchange views on these highly important challenges. These discussions led to the adoption of resolutions by which the parliamentarians pledged to work in a coordinated and concerted fashion throughout the Americas to promote legislation supporting professionalization. The imperative of adapting national institutions and legal systems to Aboriginal customs and lifestyles was also recognized, with a view to ensuring respect for their identity and culture.



Meeting of the Committee on Education, Culture, Science and Technology, Québec City, Canada, September 7, 2011

1.3 Eliminating the gender wage gap

During the annual meeting of the Network of Women Parliamentarians (the Network), held in Mar del Plata, Argentina, women parliamentarians held a round table on “the political and economic empowerment of women”. This provided an opportunity to raise various issues relating to the gender wage gap and the financial empowerment of women.

Following the round table, the Network, presided by Mexican Senator Diva Hadamira Gastélum, decided to undertake an in-depth analysis of “poverty, pay equity and the economic empowerment of women”. This has been an opportunity for the Network to thoroughly examine the gender wage gap issue. Reducing the wage gap is a precondition if women are to acquire the financial autonomy they need to break the cycle of economic dependence and combat poverty, exploitation and violence. I am pleased to note that three deputies volunteered to act as rapporteurs, a reflection of the great enthusiasm demonstrated for this highly important theme. Their final report was tabled during the 11th annual meeting of the Network.

1.4 Protecting water resources

As the protection of water resources has both environmental and social dimensions, the theme was studied, from different perspectives, by the Committee on Health and Social Protection, the Network, and the Committee on the Environment and Sustainable Development.



Meeting of
the Committee on the Environment and Sustainable Development,
Asunción, Paraguay, May 12–14, 2011



10th Annual Meeting of the Network,
Québec City, Canada, September 6, 2011

The meeting of the Committee on the Environment and Sustainable Development held in Asunción, Paraguay, in May 2011, at the invitation of Paraguayan Senator Zulma Gomez (First Vice-President of COPA) and Mexican Deputy Caritina Saenz Vargas (Interim Committee Chair), took as its theme “protecting water resources”. During the two days entirely devoted to this theme, parliamentarians gained a solid knowledge of the subject through talks and presentations on the situation in their respective countries. At the meeting held during the Québec City General Assembly, the Committee dealt with the theme of “water and climate change”. Further to this meeting, the legislators agreed, by means of a resolution, to develop a repertory or a support document which would outline the legislative progress made in all COPA member countries with regard to water conservation and management. Such a document would also serve as a guide for increasing the number of measures aimed at guaranteeing the fundamental right of access to a sufficient quantity of clean water

Also during the Québec City General Assembly, the Committee on Health and Social Protection studied the theme of “water, health and poverty”. Alicia Gutiérrez, Deputy of the Chamber of Deputies for the State of Santa Fe, Argentina, volunteered to act as rapporteur.



Meeting of the Committee on the Environment and Sustainable Development,
Asunción, Paraguay, May 12–14, 2011

The members of the Network agreed to study the theme of “water, the environment and the status of women” in the course of their coming meetings. I am extremely happy about this, since the point of view of women must be taken into account in any debate on sustainable development, a fact which was underlined by the women parliamentarians in a resolution they adopted during the Network’s annual meeting in Québec City

1.5 Achieving the Millennium Development Goals

For each of the four themes in the Plan of the President, specific objectives were formulated to guide our work. Most of these objectives were inspired by the Millennium Development Goals adopted at the Millennium Summit, which took place in 2000 at the United Nations headquarters in New York. For each objective to be achieved by the

year 2015, regional objectives are identified. Already at the Québec City General Assembly, I was pleased to see that these objectives were at the heart of our work and had been taken into account in our resolutions.

In the words spoken at the opening ceremony of the Québec City General Assembly by Oscar Arias, Nobel peace prize winner and former President of the Republic of Costa Rica, “In a shrinking world that is increasingly complex and selfish, the political and moral force of parliaments must always defend the most just causes of humanity.” Thus, I ardently hope that we will continue the work undertaken on our four major themes so that we, as parliamentarians, may join the efforts being deployed to achieve the regional objectives for the Americas. It is essential that our citizens be the central concern of our actions, and that they see on our part a genuine will to improve the living conditions of all the populations of the Americas that we represent.



Opening ceremony of the 11th General Assembly,
Québec, Canada, September 6–9, 2011

2. INSTITUTIONAL CONSOLIDATION OF COPA

COPA is a young organization. It is therefore important that we work together toward its overall consolidation as a means of ensuring its future and effectiveness. This is why I proposed certain measures during my term of office to further the consolidation of COPA as an institution. The collaboration and sustained efforts of the parliamentarians participating in our activities has allowed us to make good progress in terms of making committee work more central and vital, strengthening the coordination of the work of the secretariats and consolidating our finances.

2.1 Making committee work more central and vital

As COPA's President, one of my institutional priorities has been to give the six permanent thematic committees a primary role in the organization. I am pleased to note that, once again, the committee chairs have answered the call, and it seems that our committees have already taken on a new life. A number of committees have appointed vice-chairs and rapporteurs, and produced reports in order to proceed with the in-depth examination of the themes under study. Some committees have also responded positively to my desire, expressed at the outset of my term, to see COPA's thematic committees meet between general assemblies. Indeed, four of the six committees have done so during the 2010–2013 period.

In addition to the Committee on the Environment and Sustainable Development, which met in Asunción, Paraguay, in May 2011, and the Committee on Health and Social Protection, which met in Cuba in October 2011, two other committees have met outside the context of a general assembly.

In April 2012, the Committee on Democracy and Peace met in Santa Fe, Argentina, at the invitation of Argentinian Deputy María Alejandra Vucasovich, Committee Vice-Chair. Chaired by Québec Member Marjolain Dufour, this meeting saw the unveiling of a self-evaluation tool for parliaments of the Americas based on the benchmarks for parliamentary democracy adopted during the 11th General Assembly, held in September 2011 in Québec City. Also discussed were the financing of political parties in the Americas and an overview of the first six years of COPA's electoral observation program.

Finally, the President of the National Union of Legislative Assemblies of the Federated States of Brazil (UNALE) invited two of COPA's permanent thematic committees to hold their working meetings in conjunction with its 16th Annual Conference at Natal, in the State of Rio Grande do Norte, Brazil. Thus, on May 30, 2012, COPA parliamentarians participated in the meetings of the Committee on the Environment and Sustainable Development and the Committee on Human Rights, Aboriginal Peoples and Citizen Security held in conjunction with the conference, under the themes of renewable energy, and immigration and human rights.



Meeting of the Committee on Democracy and Peace, Santa Fe, Argentina, April 12–13, 2012



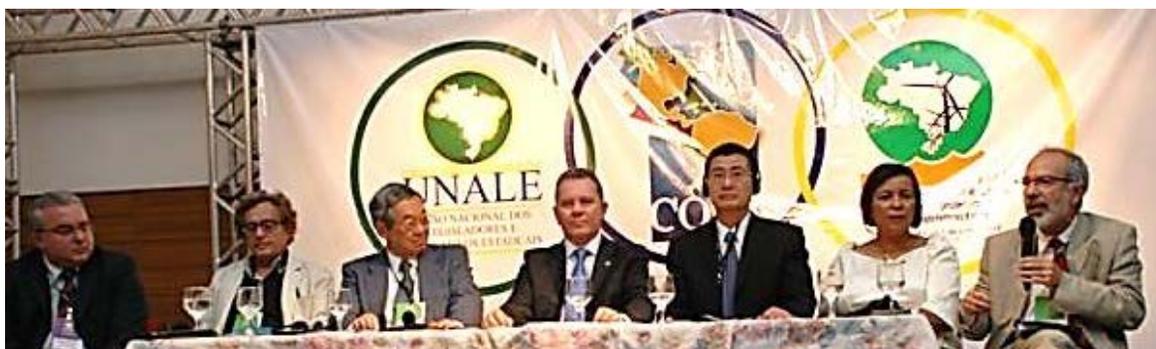
Electoral observation mission,
Mexico City, Mexico, June 27–July 2, 2012

2.2 The Committee on Democracy and Peace: consolidation and development of its electoral observation mission (EOM) program

The electoral observation mission (EOM) program, now in its eighth year, plays a key role in helping COPA achieve one of its primary objectives: to strengthen democracy and provide elected representatives of the Americas with an opportunity to make an active contribution to the progress and consolidation of democracy throughout our continent. Three EOMs were conducted during the 2010–2013 period. First, at the invitation of the Electoral Institute of the State of Mexico, a delegation of 15 COPA parliamentarians observed the gubernatorial election held in the State of Mexico on July 3, 2011. This was COPA's first EOM in a federated state, and was followed by a second EOM conducted in Mexico from

June 27 to July 2, 2012. This time the elections observed were for the Mexican presidency and for seats in Mexico's Congress of the Union. Finally, COPA parliamentarians travelled to Asunción, Paraguay from April 17 to 22, 2013 to observe the general election held on April 21.

In addition to organizing these three EOMs, the Committee on Democracy and Peace produced a report in which it assessed the situation and made a prospective analysis of the program. With the ever-increasing popularity of the program, it became necessary to rethink various aspects of it in order, on the one hand, to ensure its effectiveness and sustainability and, on the other hand, to ensure that the expertise and credibility developed by COPA over the years is maintained and reinforced. It was with these objectives in mind that a report containing 12 recommendations was presented. I am happy to note that, inspired by these recommendations, the



Meetings of the Committee on the Environment and Sustainable Development and the Committee on Human Rights, Aboriginal Peoples and Citizen Security,
Natal, Brazil, May 30–June 1, 2012



COPA President Jacques Chagnon with José Luis Schafer,
Coordinator of the Brazil Secretariat

Committee on Democracy and Peace will continue to be able to develop a solid, credible, impartial and effective EOM program.

Finally, talks were begun with the Organization of American States (OAS) with a view to having the two organizations collaborate together on electoral observation missions. More specifically, such a partnership would foster the sharing of information, knowledge and know-how, facilitate the conduct of missions for the mutual benefit of COPA and the OAS, and ensure better follow-up on the recommendations contained in the reports of the two organizations.

2.3 Better coordination of the work of the secretariats

The three secretariats must work in concert with each other if the work of the organization as a whole is to be well coordinated. I have devoted much effort to strengthening inter-secretarial coordination and to reactivating the third secretariat in order to ensure that all members have the tools they need to participate fully in our work. In March 2011, I visited the Mexican authorities in charge of the Executive Secretariat and I had the opportunity to speak with

M. Manlio Fabio Beltrones Rivera, President of the Senate of the Republic of Mexico, M. Jorge Carlos Ramirez Marin, Chair of the Steering Committee of the Honourable Chamber of Deputies of the Congress of the Union, and M. Ernesto Javier Nemer Álvarez, President of the Congress of the State of Mexico.

Secondly, to ensure that we would be able to count on three functioning and dynamic secretariats as quickly as possible, measures were taken to have the Brazil Secretariat resume its activities. In this effort, I was very favourably received by our Brazilian friends. Already at the very beginning of my term of office, I contacted M. Alencar da Silveira Junior, President of the National Union of Legislative Assemblies of the Federated States of Brazil (UNALE). He invited me to attend the 15th Annual Conference of UNALE, held in Florianópolis, Brazil, from May 18 to 19, 2011. Subsequently, UNALE sent a sizable delegation to participate in COPA's 11th General Assembly, held in Québec City. Both occasions provided an opportunity to discuss the resumption of the Brazil Secretariat's activities with



COPA President Jacques Chagnon and COPA Executive
Secretary Cristina Ruiz Sandoval

UNALE's chief authorities, including José Luis Schafer, successor to Alencar da Silveira Junior.

In February 2012, Mr. Schafer formally confirmed to me that the Brazil Secretariat would resume its activities at UNALE's expense. Finally, in August 2012, I went to Brazil to meet with the parliamentary authorities responsible for the Secretariat's activities and to continue efforts to improve coordination between the three secretariats.

I would especially like to thank Mexican Deputy Cristina Ruiz Sandoval (COPA's Executive Secretary) and Brazilian Deputy José Luis Schafer for their invaluable aid throughout my term of office. Their constant support has been indispensable for the success of our work over the past three years.

In addition, their coordination of the hosting of the March 2011 Executive Committee meeting in Toluca de Lerdo (Mexico), the December 2012 meeting in Mexico City, F.D. and the 12th General Assembly in Brasília (Brasil) greatly contributed to the vitality of our organization.

autonomy. During the 2010–2013 period, various actions were initiated in close collaboration with the treasurer, Mexican Deputy Miguel Ángel Terrón Mendoza and his successor, Ms. Lucila Garfías Gutiérrez, to consolidate COPA's finances. The objective was twofold: to make sure that COPA has at its disposal a sufficient and recurrent source of funding; and to ensure that financial support is available for the organization of activities and events. The first step was to develop a strategy, with the support of the treasury, concerning the collection of annual contributions. The statutory contributions table was revised and will be submitted for approval during the 12th General Assembly. Measures were also put in place to guarantee the regular and systematic collection of contributions. The second step was to formulate dispositions that would allow for financial assistance to be granted to parliaments hosting COPA's statutory activities. Such initiative will allow us to hold more COPA activities and will make it possible for more parliaments to host General Assemblies and committee meetings. Some assemblies have already received such financial assistance.

2.4 Consolidating COPA's finances

If our organization is to have a future characterized by dynamic activities, we must ensure its financial



22nd Executive Committee meeting,
Toluca de Lerdo, Mexico, March 8–11, 2011

3. PROMOTION OF COPA

3.1 Better publicizing COPA's activities and points of view

To strengthen COPA's role throughout the continent, it is essential that the results of our parliamentarians' reflections be widely circulated. Hence, the Québec Declaration, adopted during the plenary session at the 11th General Assembly, held in Québec City in September 2011, was sent to all the parliaments of the Americas. The Declaration reiterates the importance of both legislators and interparliamentary relations, and also sets out the objectives concerning which COPA parliamentarians wish to take a position and pledge their commitment. The Declaration has also been sent to the Secretary General of the Organization of American States (OAS), the Executive Secretary of the Summits of the Americas and the Chair of the Summit Implementation Review Group so that it will be circulated among the heads of state of the governments of the Americas.



11th General Assembly,
Québec City, Canada, September 6-9, 2011

In this era of information technologies, it is extremely important that our organization make its presence felt on the Web. This is an excellent means of promoting COPA and its activities while providing our members with the documents they need to participate fully in meetings. For this reason I undertook, in close collaboration with the Québec Secretariat, the revamping of the COPA/Network website, which is



11th General Assembly,
Québec City, Canada, September 6-9, 2011

now more interactive and user-friendly, as well as easier to navigate. Visit it regularly to keep abreast of the latest information concerning our organization.

3.2 Reinforcing the role of COPA in parliamentary assemblies and its importance across the continent

During the 2010-2013 period, the number of delegates, parliaments and States participating in COPA activities increased considerably. As proof, we need only cite the fact that 160 parliamentarians from 36 parliaments were present at the General Assembly in Québec City. Such diversified participation is essential if COPA is to be representative of the great variety of viewpoints existing on our continent and remain a leading forum in the Americas. Consequently, at various times during my term, I have visited other parliaments of the Americas to promote COPA's activities and encourage participation in those activities. In January 2011, during a trip to Cuba, I paid a visit to our colleagues at the Cuban National Assembly in order to present the Plan of the President and to reaffirm the importance I attach to the participation of Cuban parliamentarians in COPA's work.

In March 2011, in addition to visiting those in charge of the Mexico Secretariat, I had the honour of meeting

María Alejandra Barrales Magdaleno, President of the Legislative Assembly of the Federal District of Mexico, in order to promote COPA and the Network of Women Parliamentarians.

On the occasion of the 124th, 125th and 126th statutory assemblies of the Inter-parliamentary Union (IPU), held respectively in Panama, Berne and Kampala, Mexican Senators Carlos Jiménez Macías and Eduardo Nava Bolaños promoted COPA to the parliamentarians in attendance from all over the world.

In October 2012, I attended the 127th statutory assembly of the IPU in Québec City. This provided me with an opportunity to meet several other parliamentarians from our continent, including Fernando Cordero Cueva, President of the National Assembly of Ecuador, and Sigfrido Reyes Morales, President of the Legislative Assembly of El Salvador, and to promote our organization.

I also invited the members of the Geopolitical Group of Latin America and the Caribbean (GRULAC) to take part in COPA activities. Lastly, as COPA President, I was invited to participate in a round table on "Multilateralism and the role of parliamentary diplomacy" with other international interparliamentary organizations. The talk I gave is available on COPA's website.

In March 2012, I travelled to San José, Costa Rica, for COPA's Executive Committee meeting, the first to be held in Central America since 1999. I used the opportunity to promote the participation of this region so that it might be well represented within COPA. At the Executive Committee meeting, I met Juan Carlos Mendoza García, President of the Legislative Assembly of Costa Rica, Laura Chinchilla Miranda, President of the Republic, and Carlos Roverssi Rojas, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs. Pleased to see Costa Rica participating more in COPA's work, and hosting an Executive Committee meeting, I used the opportunity provided by these meetings and talks to promote COPA, its work, and the four priorities set out in the Plan of the President.

While in Central America, I also went to Panama to promote COPA's activities. There I met Héctor Aparicio, President of the National Assembly of Panama, and Élias Castillo, President of the Latin American Parliament. On this occasion, I was also able to engage in discussions with deputies representing Panama in the Central American Parliament.



COPA President Jacques Chagnon with Héctor Aparicio, President of the National Assembly of Panama



24th Meeting of the Executive Committee,
San José, Costa Rica, March 6–8, 2012

While in Brazil in August 2012, I met with the authorities of certain Brazilian parliamentary institutions, including José Sarney, President of the Federal Senate, Marco Maia, President of the Chamber of Deputies, Sidney da Silva Patricio, President of the Legislative Chamber of the Federal District, and Paulo Barros Munhoz, President of the Legislative Assembly of the State of São Paulo, in order to promote COPA and encourage Brazil's participation in COPA activities. I also had meetings at the Legislative Assembly of the State of Rio de Janeiro.

3.3 Development of Partnerships

To strengthen COPA's role in the Americas, we must also create ties with other organizations. Such ties give COPA's work more visibility and allow the organizations concerned to coordinate their actions. Effectively coordinating the work of experts with that of elected representatives in the Americas makes it possible to better identify the needs of our populations and facilitate the implementation of solutions. A number of such initiatives have been undertaken in recent years. For example, as mentioned above, the Committee on Democracy and Peace has taken steps

towards a partnership with the OAS concerning electoral observation missions.

In addition, COPA is now an institution affiliated with the AGORA portal,¹ a reference tool that brings together international organizations, experts and professionals in the field of parliamentary development. Also active on this portal are legislators from all over the world, parliamentary staff, non-governmental bodies and civil society organizations. The benchmarks for parliamentary democracy, adopted at the Québec City General Assembly, are posted on the site.

The Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) is another body with which COPA hopes to cooperate in the future in order to broaden the scope of the work of both organizations. In that respect, when the Committee on Health and Social Protection held meetings during the Québec City General Assembly in September 2011, Committee members attended a presentation by a PAHO expert on the theme of "water, health and poverty". In addition, as part of their 2011–2012 work plan, they agreed to study the

1. You can visit this site at www.agora-parl.org.



Members of the Network of Women Parliamentarians of the Americas during the Pan American Forum "Women's Full Citizenship for Democracy", Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic, July 18-21, 2012

theme of chronic illnesses, currently a major focus of PAHO's work. In May 2011, the rapporteur for this theme, Brazilian Deputy Volnei Morastoni, attended the Pan American Forum for Action on Non-communicable Diseases held by PAHO in Brasília, Brazil.

For its part, the Network began collaborating with the Inter-American Commission of Women of the OAS (CIM). During the Network's Québec City annual meeting, CIM President María del Rocío García Gaytán, attending as an observer, gave a presentation on the work of the CIM and proposed that agreements be made between her organization and the Network. At its meeting in March 2012 in San José, the Executive Committee of the Network approved proposals for projects to be initiated with the CIM. The Network also collaborated in organizing a panel on legislative reform for a more complete consideration of gender equality in the context of the Pan American Forum "Women's Full Citizenship for Democracy", which took place in July 2012 in Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic. In conjunction with this forum, the Network also took part in a day of consultations on strengthening parliamentary committees that deal with the status of women.

A second consultation was held during the Network's 11th annual meeting, and a collaborative agreement was signed with the CIM. I must give special credit to Mexican Senator Diva Hadamira Gastélum, President of the Network, who has accomplished remarkable work in giving fresh impetus to the Network during her

mandate and who is intent on bringing the voice of women parliamentarians to numerous forums.

TOWARDS A STRONGER PARLIAMENTARY AMERICA

In conclusion, I would like to reiterate how proud I am of the work we have accomplished together over the three years during which I have had the honour of presiding over COPA's work. It was a real pleasure for me to collaborate with you, COPA parliamentarians, and I thank you for your sustained involvement in pursuing the objective that brings us together in this organization: that of improving the living conditions of the peoples of the Americas.

I ardently hope that COPA will continue to work toward the objectives I have emphasized during my term as President. As some of our measures have been successful and some are on the way to becoming so, I believe it is essential that we continue to make efforts to consolidate COPA as an institution so that it remains a leading forum in the Americas. I also hope that we will follow up on the themes we have studied over the past years; this will ensure not only that we continue thinking about important issues, but also that we make progress in improving the well-being of our citizens.

Finally, I hope that we will continue, as parliamentarians of the Americas, to share ideas, debate the great challenges facing our societies, and take concrete action within COPA—always with a view to preparing a better future for the peoples of our continent. Proud of the work accomplished by our organization, and confident of its ability to meet new challenges confronting the Americas, I pledge to support COPA's future initiatives so that the voices of our parliamentarians bring the aspirations of our citizens to the attention of our governments and of international organizations.