



PARLIAMENTARY DECLARATION OF RIO DE JANEIRO

General Assembly of the Parliamentary Conference of the Americas Rio de Janeiro, November 18 - 21, 2001

WHEREAS the Parliamentary Conference of the Americas (COPA) is a permanent and autonomous forum that brings together the parliamentary assemblies of the unitary, federal, federated and associated states, regional parliaments and interparliamentary organizations of the Americas;

RECALLING that COPA fosters parliamentary dialogue on matters of common interest related to the process of integration of the Americas;

WHEREAS it is our duty, as the elected representatives of the populations of the Americas, to see to the defense and promotion of their interests, to work to improve their living conditions and to ensure equal opportunities for human development to all citizens;

REITERATING our support to the objectives of the Summits of the Americas to build a community of the Americas founded on the respect of the dignity of persons, on peace, on democracy, on social justice, on solidarity between nations and on gender equity;

CONGRATULATING the General Assembly of the Organization of American States for the adoption of the Inter-American Democratic Charter, which is an important instrument for the protection and reinforcement of democracy in the region;

WHEREAS inter-state cooperation projects, and more particularly economic integration projects, gain in terms of legitimacy and transparency if they are accompanied by mechanisms of parliamentary oversight;

WHEREAS in our capacity as legislators, we will eventually be called upon to ratify or to integrate within our national legislation the agreement creating the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA);

REAFFIRMING our desire to instigate an ongoing dialogue with the executive authorities of the hemisphere that will make it possible to strengthen the transparency and legitimacy of the process of the Summits of the Americas and the negotiations aiming to create the FTAA;

RECALLING that we have set the groundwork for the dialogue with the Heads of State and Government by adopting, at the first two General Assemblies of COPA, declarations and recommendations on fundamental issues of inter-American cooperation, which were transmitted to them;

WE, women and men representatives of the parliamentary assemblies of the unitary, federal, federated and associated states, regional parliaments and interparliamentary organizations of the Americas, gathered in order to debate the place of parliamentarians within the inter-American system and in the FTAA negotiations, as well as the effects that this agreement will have on the respect of human rights, on the environment, on the fight against drug trafficking, on urban violence, on education policies and on the fight against poverty:

The fight against terrorism

EXTEND our condolences to those persons who lost loved ones in the attacks that occurred on September 11, 2001, and express our solidarity toward the people of the United States of America.

CONDEMN all acts of terrorism and ask our governments to work to intensify the hemispheric collaboration in the fight against this curse which aims to shake the very foundations of our democratic societies.

Role of parliamentarians in the FTAA negotiations

ACKNOWLEDGE the Quebec City Parliamentary Declaration and the Plan of Action, adopted on April 19, 2001, in which the members of the COPA Executive Committee made the commitment, among other things, to:

- have COPA recognized as the legitimate forum of the parliamentary assemblies of the unitary, federal, federated and associated states as well as of the regional parliaments and interparliamentary organizations of the hemisphere and, in that capacity, have COPA delegates received by the Trade Ministers at the Ministers' meetings dealing with the FTAA negotiations;
- take the necessary measures to inform the populations that we represent concerning the issues of the FTAA in order to bring them to debate these issues;
- hold consultations on the FTAA and transmit the conclusions to COPA in order that the latter may inform the parliamentary assemblies of the Americas thereof;
- continue the collaboration with the College of the Americas in connection with the work of the Inter-American Research Chair on Parliamentary Approaches to Continental Integration;

AGREE to continue working, in accordance with the commitments made by the Heads of State and Government for transparency in the trade negotiations, toward the establishment of a true collaboration with the executive authorities of our respective states, in order, on the one hand, to be involved in defining the national position, and on the other hand, to be invited to participate directly in the hemispheric negotiations;

REQUEST that the member parliamentarians of the COPA network on the FTAA create a follow-up committee on the FTAA negotiations with a mandate to produce reports, with the assistance of the General Secretariat, that will be presented periodically to the other members of the network and at the COPA General Assembly;

Role of parliamentarians in the inter-American system

AGREE to exercise greater oversight over the actions of the executive authorities of the hemisphere, particularly on questions that are addressed to the leaders of the organizations of the inter-American system as well as to the officials responsible for the FTAA negotiations;

AGREE to create a mechanism to enable COPA to take positions officially on important texts, such as the Inter-American Democratic Charter, which define the international standards in the inter-American system;

Human rights

AGREE to work toward having those countries that have not yet done so recognize the jurisdiction of the Inter-American Court of Human Rights;

RECOMMEND to our governments that they make greater use of the expertise of the Inter-American Commission, Institute and Court of Human Rights to solve the problems affecting the most vulnerable groups of citizens, such as children, handicapped persons, aboriginal people and migrant workers;

Environment

AGREE to consult civil society concerning the measures to be adopted in order to create an FTAA that is respectful of the environment;

AGREE to pay particular attention to environmental issues in the framework of the consultations on the FTAA, that we will hold within our respective parliaments.

The fight against drug trafficking

AGREE to contribute to the proper functioning of the Multilateral Evaluation Mechanism (MEM) set up by the OAS, particularly by examining the annual reports of that organization and by working to implement the recommendations that they contain;

FURTHER AGREE, with the assistance of inter-American organizations active in this field, particularly the Inter-American Drug Abuse Control Commission (CICAD), to draw up an assessment of the most positive experiences in the area of the fight against drug trafficking, and to collaborate, with our respective governments, to ensure that the resources devoted to limiting the production, trafficking and consumption of drugs are allocated to programs whose effectiveness has been demonstrated;

Urban violence

AGREE to study, within our parliaments and in the framework of the future activities of COPA, the respective merit of prevention measures and repression measures in the fight against urban violence;

COMMIT OURSELVES to promote, within our respective assemblies, cost-effective measures of proven efficacy such as organizing activities aiming to consolidate social bonds, restricting the selling hours of alcohol and, with the accord of the electronic media, enforcing codes of ethics limiting the violence portrayed in the media;

Education

AGREE to encourage the inter-American organizations active in the field of education and the fight against poverty to devote part of their resources to implementing programs, in all countries of the region, aiming to reduce child labour in order to increase school attendance;

COMMIT OURSELVES to continue the search for simple and cost-effective means of increasing school attendance, success rates and the quality of teaching;

Poverty

COMMIT OURSELVES to ensure that the social policies adopted in our respective states, particularly policies to fight against poverty, are transparent and non-discriminatory;

COMMIT OURSELVES, in collaboration with our Heads of State and Government, to study the situation of local and infra-state governments whose resources are often insufficient to play the role that is incumbent upon them in the fight against poverty;

AGREE to encourage our respective governments to collaborate with the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) in order to put in place national anti-poverty strategies, to gain an awareness of the studies drafted by the IDB on exemplary practices in the area of the fight against poverty, and to make use of the services offered by the Unit for Social Development and Education of the OAS;

Network of Women Parliamentarians of the Americas

ACKNOWLEDGE the Declaration on the Contribution of Women to the Democratic Process and Peace, adopted during the Second Annual Meeting of the Network of Women Parliamentarians of the Americas, which took place on November 18, 2001;

Statutes and permanent financing of the Conference

ADOPT the Statutes of the Parliamentary Conference of the Americas

ADOPT the permanent financing plan of COPA;

Follow-up on the Declaration

AGREE to transmit the Parliamentary Declaration of Rio de Janeiro as well as the Recommendation adopted at the Meeting of the Network of Women Parliamentarians to the Heads of State and Government of the Americas;

COMMIT OURSELVES to transmit this Declaration to our respective parliamentary assemblies and to follow up on it.

Leftovers

WHEREAS economic integration, if not properly guided, risks leading to the exhaustion of natural resources, to an increase in pollution, and even to the disappearance of habitats and species;

WHEREAS criminal organizations that control drug trafficking threaten the security of our fellow citizens as well as the very foundation of our democracies through their systematic use of violence and corruption;

WHEREAS urban violence carries an incalculable human and economic cost, in addition to representing a threat to the functioning of our democratic processes;

WHEREAS the success of the fight against poverty depends to a large extent on the choice of policies put in place by the governments to face this problem;

WHEREAS education makes it possible to break the cycle of poverty transmitted from generation to generation, but child labour remains one of the major obstacles to education for all;