



## **4th GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE PARLIAMENTARY CONFEDERATION OF THE AMERICAS (COPA)**

### **REPORT**

From November 24 to November 27, 2002, Ixtapan de la Sal in Mexico played host to the 4th General Assembly of COPA. Some 278 representatives from 22 countries and 68 parliamentary assemblies, regional parliaments, and interparliamentary organizations in the hemisphere gathered to discuss parliamentary strategies for promoting equitable development in the Americas.

A number of dignitaries were on hand for the General Assembly's opening ceremony, including Mexican president Mr. Vicente Fox, the president of the Mexican Chamber of Deputies Ms Beatriz Paredes Rangel, and Mr. Martí Batres Guadarrama, the President of the Political Coordination Commission of the Mexican Chamber of Deputies.

In addition to attending presentations on democracy by Mr. José Woldenberg, President of the Federal Electoral Institute (IFE) of Mexico), and drug addiction by Mr. Guido Belsasso, National Commissioner of the National Council against Drug Addictions in the Health Sector of Mexico, and Mr. Estuardo Mario Bermúdez Molina, an Attorney specializing in health-related offences, parliamentarians at the Ixtapan de la Sal assembly met within COPA's six recently established permanent commissions (health and social development; education, culture, science, and technology; environment and sustainable development; democracy and human rights; peace and public security; and Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA), economy, trade, labour, and migration).

Discussion papers were prepared for each commission looking at the issues from a hemispheric perspective and suggesting practical courses of action for the parliamentarians. The lively debates that took place helped establish a clear consensus on the recommendations adopted.

In the Ixtapan de la Sal Parliamentary Declaration, which summarizes the main conclusions of the permanent commissions, the parliamentarians reaffirmed their desire for equitable continental integration not guided exclusively by economic imperatives. They also stressed the importance of addressing the democratic deficit by involving elected representatives in the negotiation process and asked the parliamentary assemblies of the Americas to more actively monitor the decisions of heads of state and government at the Summits of the Americas. They also urged representatives of the executive branches of government to ensure sufficient funding for healthcare in the hemisphere and asked that at least 6% of GDP be earmarked for education.

A new Executive Committee was named during the meeting, and Ms Jhannett Madriz Sotillo, president of the Andean Parliament (representing Venezuela), was elected First Vice-President of COPA. She will replace Ms Laura Pavón Jaramillo, representative of the Federal Congress of Mexico, as president of COPA in February 2003. As a result, the 5th COPA General Assembly will be held in Venezuela in fall 2003.

COPA Statutes were also amended during the 4th General Assembly to notably strengthen the powers of the Executive Committee and create the position of Parliamentary Treasurer.

The 4th General Assembly was preceded on November 24 by the 3rd Meeting of the Network of Women Parliamentarians of the Americas. Some 50 participants representing 20-odd countries and 40 parliamentary assemblies, regional parliaments, and interparliamentary organizations attended the meeting, which was chaired by Ms Lyse Leduc, a member of the National Assembly of Québec, and the Network's founding president. During the meeting, each member of the Executive Committee summarized the progress made within their respective parliaments or interparliamentary organizations with regard to legislation affecting women and any other initiatives of interest to the Network. Ms Simel Esim, an economist at the International Center for Research on Women, a Washington-based non-profit organization, also gave a presentation on gender-specific budgeting. The participants subsequently adopted a recommendation on this topic suggesting that the necessary steps be taken to establish budget programs, strategies, and initiatives based on the gender-specific approach in order to provide women and men with equal access to opportunities, goods, resources, and services.

*Québec Secretariat of COPA  
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