



**PARLIAMENTARY CONFEDERATION OF THE AMERICAS  
HAVANA, CUBA  
October 27–28, 2011**

**Report  
(2011-12-19)**

**Opening Ceremony and Initial Presentations**

The meeting began at 9:30 a.m., with 36 participants representing 13 States of the Americas. The opening ceremony was presided by Agnès Becerra, an announcer with Cuban television, who welcomed the assembled parliamentarians. Daniellé Doyer, Member of the National Assembly of Québec, delivered a speech on behalf of Jacques Chagnon, COPA President and President of the National Assembly of Québec. A word of welcome was then given by Elsa Rojas Hernández, Chair of the Committee on Health and Social Protection.

Work began with a round table session during which Ms. Hernández asked all the parliamentarians to introduce themselves. Before taking up the work themes, Ms. Hernández made a few remarks about the Committee. She underlined the success of today's meeting, as shown by the large number of participants. Such participation was particularly significant given that this was the Committee's first meeting outside the context of a COPA General Assembly. She then submitted the minutes of the last meeting, held in Québec City on September 8, 2011, to the participants. **The minutes were adopted as presented.**

**Work Theme 1: Infant Mortality and Maternal Health**

Experts: Dr. Roberto Álvarez Fumero and Dr. Doris Sierra Pérez, Directors of Child Mortality and Primary Health Care at Cuba's Department of Public Health

In presenting her overview of Cuba's national health system, which is both free and universal, Dr. Sierra Pérez emphasized the network of polyclinics. Next, Dr. Fumero spoke in detail about Cuba's strategy to ensure maternal health and reduce infant mortality. He emphasized the variety of services available to pregnant women, notably through the network of "maternal residences", where pregnant women at risk are looked after for varying periods of time. During the ensuing debate, the participants asked the two experts many questions on the health system in general (organization of human resources in polyclinics, medical practice in rural areas, supply of material and equipment, etc.), as well as questions relating specifically to reproductive health care (early pregnancies, abortions, caesareans, contraceptive methods, etc.).

## **Work Theme 2: Handicapped Persons Assistance Program**

Expert: Dr. Alberto Fernández Seco, Director of Social Welfare and Care for Seniors at Cuba's Department of Public Health

Dr. Seco has implemented a number of programs in Cuba to help persons living with a handicap, a disability or an illness (blindness, autism, motor disabilities, Alzheimer's, etc.). The situation of seniors was broached, since Cuba, like Canada and many European countries, is facing the phenomenon of an aging population. The debate was extremely lively, with numerous parliamentarians asking questions or mentioning initiatives that have been implemented in their own countries.

## **Presentation of a book, *Mujeres de las Américas (Women of the Americas)*, by the President of the Network of Women Parliamentarians of the Americas**

Before the first day's working sessions came to an end, Diva Hadamira Gastélum Bajo, President of the Network of Women Parliamentarians of the Americas and Federal Deputy of the Chamber of Deputies of Mexico, launched the book *Mujeres de las Américas*, a project she directed. Ms. Bajo encouraged participants to discuss briefly the challenges to be overcome in order to improve the status of women in the Americas.

## **Work theme 3: Tuberculosis in Latin America and the Caribbean**

Expert: Dr. Libertad Carreras Corzo, Epidemiologist at Cuba's Department of Public Health

Dr. Carreras Corzo began her presentation with an overview of the progress made in Cuba in the fight against tuberculosis and HIV/AIDS. Both illnesses are taken into consideration in social program planning, since HIV-positive patients are more likely to contract more severe forms of tuberculosis that require special medical care. With a view to broadening the discussion on this theme, the parliamentarians discussed the programs and best practices which have proven successful in their own countries.

### **Other themes**

In addition to the themes already mentioned, the participants studied a draft resolution on infant mortality (see attached) that will be submitted for approval at the next COPA General Assembly. The participants also submitted the names of three parliamentarians for the position of Vice-Chair of the Committee on Health and Social Protection. The candidates are:

- María de los Angeles Higonet, National Senator of the Republic of **Argentina**
- Volnei Morastoni, Deputy for the State of Santa Catarina, **Brazil**
- Jennifer Simons, Chair of the National Assembly of the Republic of **Suriname**.

At the end of the meeting, Tubal Paez, Deputy of the National Assembly of Cuba and COPA Vice-President for the Caribbean Region, delivered the closing address on behalf of his National Assembly colleagues. Several parliamentarians commented on the high quality of the presentations and thanked the Cuban parliamentarians for their warm welcome.

Zoila Beatriz Quijada Solis, Deputy of the Legislative Assembly of El Salvador, proposed that the Committee prepare a declaration to denounce the negative effects that the trade embargo against Cuba is having on the health of that country's people. The participants agreed, and

asked the Committee secretariat to produce a preliminary version of the declaration (see attached). The final text will be presented to the members of the Committee with a view to having it adopted at the next General Assembly.

PROJECT