



NETWORK OF WOMEN PARLIAMENTARIANS OF THE AMERICAS*

Given the mission and objectives set forth by the Network of Women Parliamentarians of the Americas, I would like to share with all my colleagues of the Parliamentary Confederation of the Americas certain reflections that I consider necessary if we are to make progress in the pursuit of the conditions enabling us to achieve full and effective equality between women and men.



Thanks to the ceaseless efforts of women's organizations throughout the world, we have persuaded governments to adopt and sign international agreements and treaties in an effort to have the fundamental rights of women upheld. Violence towards women is now recognized as a public health problem and a human rights violation; it is by the same token seen as an obstacle to achieving the objectives of equality, peace and development.



We are aware that the discriminatory treatment still inflicted on women, which represent half of the world population, is the result of a socio-cultural process that has been fed over the centuries by universally disseminated literature, education, religion, law and language – all mechanisms that have given rise to a culture that renders women invisible and discriminates against them, thus creating ideal conditions for subjecting them to psychological, physical and spiritual forms of violence in particular.

If we aspire to create the ideal conditions for establishing equality between men and women in all sectors of social, political, cultural, scientific and economic action, the eradication of gender-based violence is a priority. I consider it a challenge for all women parliamentarians of the Americas to break free from the inequality paradigm imposed on them and to promote a culture of recognition, respect and appreciation for the tremendous contribution that we women bring to the world through our roles as teachers, workers and players in the social, political, artistic and scientific fields and in all the human processes and works to which women bring their knowledge, labour and efforts. It is for this reason that we women must be given respect and recognition on an equal footing with men.

I propose that we devote 2009 to conducting a vast education and awareness campaign the effects of which would help us bring about a definitive collective change in attitude toward women, and the recognition of their value. Such a campaign will not be successful unless the media play a very important role. The day that violence against women, including young girls and elderly women, ceases, we will enter into a new era in the history of humanity, for men will have become more open to nobleness, gentleness, spirituality, love and mercy with regard to all living creatures, without sacrificing their masculinity. We will then be able to begin saving the planet and humanity, working together to eradicate poverty and build an inclusive and unified society that respects human dignity. United in the pursuit of this objective, we women parliamentarians will be successful in attaining the desired change in attitude!

*** Ms. Flor Ríos,**
Deputy and President of the Network of Women Parliamentarians of the Americas
National Assembly of Venezuela
florrios@an.gob.ve

CONTENT

Network of women	1
Guatemala	2
Uruguay	2
World Bank	3
Nicaragua	3
ALBA Commission	4
Cuba	4
Contact	4



Since the International Commission Against Impunity in Guatemala began its work one year ago, it has made significant progress in fighting clandestine organizations and impunity in the country, reported the head of the Commission, Spanish jurist Carlos Castresana.

As examples of that progress, the Commission head cited the investigation into the inner workings of the underground groups, the purge of over 1,700 members from the national police force and the changes made within the Public Prosecutor's Office to improve its effectiveness in fighting organized crime.

Castresana explained that the authorities are aware of the problem and are doing everything in their power to root it out, with the Commission's support. He pointed out that the Commission is working hand-in-hand with the Public Prosecutor's Office to conduct investigations and handle special cases.

Castresana also highlighted the strides made toward implementing the Commission's proposals for legislative reform. The Congress of the Republic, which had not yet examined the bills submitted to it by the Commission in 2008, has now begun the process and intends to fast-track the legislation. The government is collaborating in this reform effort by doing everything the Commission has asked it to do as quickly as it possibly can given the resources it has at its disposal.

The Commission head added that another major project is in the works, one that will require co-operation between the government of Guatemala and the international community. It involves setting up high-level courts in the country's capital to try the more complex cases involving transnational criminals. Castresana paid tribute to the Guatemalan authorities for the courage they have shown in recognizing the seriousness of the impunity problem afflicting the country and in asking the United Nations to help them address it. There are over 6,000 murders in Guatemala each year: 98 percent of the cases never go to court. *Source: UN News Centre (Spanish).*

URUGUAY VOTES AGAINST AMNESTY



The General Assembly of the Uruguayan Congress declared an amnesty law that granted immunity to most of the military and police officers accused of having committed human rights violations during the 1973-1985 military regime to be unconstitutional.

The law was debated in the Assembly—where Uruguay's two legislative bodies come together—on the request of the country's highest court, which also asked the executive branch to rule on the matter.

Just as President Tabaré Vázquez had done, the members of his party, the Frente Amplio (Broad Front), voted in favour of striking down the law as unconstitutional. The opposition refused to take part in the process. The representatives of both the Colorado and Blanco parties, which had passed the law in 1985, abstained from voting, and so the motion was adopted by the 69 deputies of the government party.

The debate on the constitutionality of the amnesty law focused on the case of Nibya Sabalsagaray, a communist activist murdered in 1974 while in the custody of a military unit. The Public Prosecutor in charge of the case requested that the law be declared null so that she could continue her investigation into the affair. If her request was granted, other similar cases could then be brought before the courts.



It is estimated that 200 Uruguayans disappeared under the military regime, most during Operation Condor, a joint endeavour of the military regimes of the Southern Cone. Julio María Sanguinetti, a Colorado party senator and former president of the country, explained that his colleagues abstained from voting because they considered it was not Parliament's place to intervene in the matter or to exert "political pressure" on the Supreme Court in an election year. However, according to government party senator Rafael Michelini, even if the law is repealed, it will not be possible to reopen past cases, as it would be possible if the very principle of the law was repealed.

The Supreme Court has 110 days to hand down its ruling. *Source: BBC (Spanish)*



WORLD BANK LOWERS GROWTH RATE FORECAST FOR LATIN AMERICA TO 0.3%



The economy of Latin America will grow by 0.3% in 2009, a much lower rate than projected earlier by the World Bank, which Vice-President Pamela Cox said is set to lend \$13 billion in the region to help Latin American countries face the global crisis. In a recent interview with the Associated Press, Cox explained that in Latin America, the crisis is not hitting the financial sector so much as the real economy, where unemployment is rising and exports, trade and production are falling.

Cox, who is World Bank Vice-President for Latin America and the Caribbean, travelled to Spain to get first-hand information on the government's plans on renewable energy development and climate change and to look at how they could be adapted in other countries. She added that, like all the other countries in the world, the Latin American countries are going through difficult times and that the World Bank now expected their economies to grow by only 0.3% in 2009, down from the 1% forecast in January 2009 and the 2.7% forecast in June 2008.

Cox confirmed that the World Bank will be extending \$13 billion in credit to the Latin American countries from July 2008 to June 2009 to see them through the crisis, which amounts to \$8 billion more than for the same period the previous year. Cox went on to say that the social programs in place in Latin America are exemplary, that it is important to support them in order to help those most in need and that the World Bank is currently tweaking a number of ideas it intends to submit to the governments concerned when comes the time to implement incentive measures. These measures would create jobs through infrastructure investments and maintain free trade policies.

The World Bank Vice-President stated that the recommendations vary with the countries, which are affected by the crisis in different ways. The Mexican and Central American economies are closely tied to the U.S. economy and will improve when it recovers, while the situation in South America is dependent to a greater extent on trade relations with China and Europe.



The World Bank estimates that the crisis will push 53 million people around the world over the brink into poverty. Cox stressed the importance of freeing up the resources needed to be able, socially, to meet the needs of these people. Last, Cox recognized that the G20 meetings are vital for the reform of the financial system and of international credit agencies. She believes the World Bank should seek fairer representation, especially on its board, and thus a stronger presence of the emerging economies, some of which are Latin American. *Source: semana.com*

NICARAGUA MOVES AWAY FROM FREE SPEECH

Freedom of speech and freedom of the press have regressed in Nicaragua under the government of Daniel Ortega, despite the President's public promises, according to a report of the Communications Media Observatory presented by its director, Dr. Guillermo Rothschild Villanueva. The report notes that in 2001, during his third presidential campaign, Ortega signed the Chapultepec Declaration in favour of freedom of the press and freedom of expression.



But a closer look at the Sandinista president's second term shows he polarized the country and persisted in an intolerant and discriminatory attitude toward certain media in the allocation of government advertising contracts. The report describes other realities that were characteristic of the period: the intimidation and defamation of civil society, independent media and opposition members by the government, the weakness of the country's institutions, and the international community's growing concern about freedom of expression and other human rights in Nicaragua.

Erving Vega, the Channel 8 press chief, Fabián Medina, the LA PRENSA information director and supplements coordinator, and communications expert Alfonso Malespín commented on the report at a forum held by the Observatory. Medina confided that he had been saddened by what he had read in the report. Having started his career as a journalist at the end of the 1980s, when Ortega first came to power, he realized that the polarization observed in the media is still as strong now as it was then. He noted that the media has still not found an "intelligent response" to counter this message emanating from the government. Medina also condemned the culture of secrecy prevalent in the government apparatus and the climate of intolerance toward the media which, in his view, is also a product of the public's appetite for sensationalistic news reports, a "virus that is infecting journalism".

Vega said he shared the same feeling of sadness but added that the situation sends a challenge to produce better journalism and better inform the public so that they will react to what is happening. Malespín agreed this could be seen as an opportunity to practise another brand of journalism and to break with convention and classic news coverage by taking a more active interest in people's everyday lives and shifting the focus away from the government agenda. *Source: La Prensa de Nicaragua*

CREATION OF THE ALBA PERMANENT COMMISSION



The member countries of the Bolivarian Alternative for the Americas (ALBA) have taken another major step toward more rapid and efficient implementation of projects and initiatives aimed at sustaining their development and growth under the principles of solidarity and complementarity.

The 8th meeting of the Political Commission of ALBA was held recently in Caracas. Delegations from Cuba, Bolivia, Dominica, Honduras, Nicaragua and Venezuela decided by consensus to create a Permanent Commission that will—within the guidelines imparted by the Presidents—design, implement and monitor projects, and formulate recommendations about them to the Political Commission, explained Francisco Arias Cárdenas, Venezuela's Deputy Foreign Minister for Latin America and the Caribbean.

The ALBA Permanent Commission, which will be chaired by Venezuela for the first two years, will be responsible for following up on decisions made at presidential summits and ministerial meetings and assessed by the Political Commission.

At the meeting, the Bank of ALBA proposed stepping up lending to Petrocaribe member countries and other Latin American countries with a view to fulfilling the mandate given by the ALBA heads of state and government regarding the constitution of an ALBA food fund.

One of the first tasks awaiting the Permanent Commission of ALBA will be to evaluate the technical sustainability of a "grand national" soy growing enterprise that would involve Bolivia, Nicaragua and Venezuela. The enterprise is one of the seven priority sub-projects that are part of the overall project to set up a "grand national" agrifood enterprise. *Source: Granma de Cuba.*

CUBA—DOMINICAN REPUBLIC: "THE WORLD SHOULD LEARN FROM LATIN AMERICA"



Raúl Castro Ruiz, Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces and President of the State Council and Council of Ministers, met with Leonel Fernández Reyna, President of the Dominican Republic, at the Revolution Palace in early March. Reyna was in Cuba on an official visit. After the welcome ceremony, the presidents sat for official meetings in a spirit of mutual friendship and respect that reflects the nature of the ties between the two countries, which are so close not only in terms of their geographical location but also in terms of their history and culture.

Both presidents said they are pleased with the excellent relations their countries maintain with each other and hope to forge even stronger ties. They shared their views on the challenges facing their respective countries and discussed other regional and global issues. The Dominican President invited his Cuban counterpart to visit his country at his convenience, an invitation that was well-received, and emphasized the importance of Latin American and Caribbean integration if the region is to frame its own policies, particularly in light of the global economic crisis. He then spoke in favour of the United States ending the embargo it has unfairly maintained against Cuba for close to 50 years.

In his statements to the press at the end of his visit of the exhibition halls at the José Martí commemorative monument, the Dominican President said that, given its seriousness, the issue of the crisis had come up during a long conversation he had with Fidel Castro, the leader of the Cuban Revolution. He said he considered it a privilege to have had the opportunity to meet with Fidel and talk about the Dominican Republic, Latin America and the financial crisis. *Source: Granma de Cuba*

CONTACT INFORMATION

COPA MEXICO

If you have an article you would like to publish in COPA's newsletter, please forward it to the following address:

Av. Congreso de la Unión No. 66, Col. El Parque,
Delegación Venustiano Carranza, C.P. 15969.
México. D.F. Tel.: (52 55) 5628-1300 ext. 6232 y 6229
Email: copa@congreso.gob.mx

