

Annual Gathering of the Group of Women Parliamentarians  
“**Women in Power: Recent Changes in the Political Arena**”  
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## **Political Participation and Leadership of Afro-descendant Women**

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### **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

Our presentation, to be delivered as part of the session Political Participation and Leadership of Afro-descendant Women during this Annual Gathering of the Group of Women Parliamentarians, will focus on two areas. Firstly, we will share a conceptual description of racism, and the fight against this and all other forms of discrimination, with a special emphasis on the various international regulatory milestones that have led to the value currently ascribed to the concept of intersectionality. We will review the earlier perspectives, which focused on equal first-generation (civil and legal) rights, all the way through to new concepts that show there is intersectionality at different levels (not only ethnic and racial or generational, but also related to gender, sexual diversity, and disability, among others).

Secondly, the presentation will focus on Uruguay as a specific case in point. We will assess social macro-indicators, and review the African-Uruguayan collective history, as well as specific figures on gender intersectionality and the ethnic and racial perspective. This will allow us to prove that, despite the highly favourable performance of poverty and indigence indicators, and improved income distribution in Uruguay in the past eight years, the Afro-descendant population is still subject to discrimination, with Afro-descendant women's rights being particularly affected.

Finally, the presentation includes some of the actions currently undertaken by the Instituto Nacional de las Mujeres (INMUJERES) (National Women's institute) to put an end to situations of discrimination which have historically existed in Uruguay, such as the creation of a department within INMUJERES dealing with issues of Afro-descendant women; making the ethnic and racial perspective a cross-cutting State issue; supporting and encouraging various affirmative actions; and further strengthening gender institutionality within the State, among others.

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<sup>1</sup> Since her youth, Beatriz Ramírez Abella has been an activist for the rights of Afro-Uruguayan people. Later, she would incorporate a gender perspective into her activism and the double discrimination faced by women of the Afro-Uruguayan community.

Founder of the ACSUN Youth Groups (Black Cultural and Social Association, 1973) and cofounder of the Afro World Organization (1988). Cofounder of the Network of Afro-Latin and Afro-Caribbean Women (Dominican Republic, 1992) and Coordinator of the Southern Cone Region between 1996 and 2006. Founder of the Strategic Alliance for African Americans (2001).

In 2005 she joined Uruguay's National Women's Institute of the Ministry of Social Development (INMUJERES). She was named Head of the Department of Afro-Descendant Women in 2009 and Director of INMUJERES in 2010.

## PRESENTATION

First and foremost, we would like to thank the organizers of this important event for giving us the opportunity to discuss and reflect upon the global transformation process we are now witnessing.

Our analysis today will focus more specifically on the contribution made by Afro-descendant men and women to the fight for integration, inclusion and equality.

This process has developed over the past 500 years, starting with the struggle against slavery, which gave way to organized movements involving the academia, social and political activists, men and women who –in a process marked by resistance and resilience– have fought against poverty, inequality, discrimination and racism.

This has been a two-sided struggle. One side has involved the fight against racism, an ideology based on alleged racial superiority, on the assumed supremacy of one human group over another. This has been argued throughout history, through instituted religious values, pseudoscience (Social Darwinism), and hegemonic state, social, and political structures. Racism takes on a new dimension with the concept of intersection, where race becomes intersected with the ideas of gender and generations, thus giving rise to a new conception that leads to a discussion on the multiple forms of discrimination which further aggravate the situation of young and/or Afro-descendant women.

Racism has permeated structures whose cultural roots –based on values, assumptions and beliefs have underpinned and reproduced a perverse phenomenon that excludes large majorities inhabiting Latin America, the continent to which we belong, which brings us here today, and to which I will therefore refer.

The upside of this struggle has been the assertion of identities, the various forms of resistance and resilience of Afro-descendant populations in different situations and scenarios. These have allowed overcoming the most terrible and genocidal expressions [of racism], which range from exploitation in times of slavery to discrimination in terms of access to health, employment, and education; forms of spatial segregation that have resulted in our population settling on marginal areas (shanty towns, settlements, etc.), as well as in the displacement of vulnerable groups in many countries throughout our continent.

This assertion of identity has been strongly linked to highly diverse cultural expressions, often times laden with a significant degree of religiousness. Folk and artistic expressions have always served as a form of identification and collective sense of belonging; they have brought Diaspora groups together, and they have acted as the umbilical cord linking us to our mother continent; they have allowed us to survive the dominating hegemonic culture, and they have redefined the common values established by the determining principle of cultural internationalism, which shall constitute a central axis of the fight and struggle against racism and all forms of discrimination.

This is what gathers us all together and which has brought us to Suriname today. We have come here with a single purpose: To join efforts and establish solidarity and cooperation ties that may contribute to the transformation process that Latin America must necessarily undertake to head towards sustainable social, productive and human development. Only then will Latin America be able to escape being considered the world's most unequal continent.

Even though slavery was regulated by codes (Code Noir, laws and decrees), the pro-slavery process was the most lucrative form of exploitation in history. The struggles for equality and emancipation were therefore based on the scope of first generation rights, that is legal and civil rights.

Abolitionist processes first, followed by the struggles for independence in the early twentieth century, position freedom, justice and fraternity as the principles that contribute to consolidating the democratic republican model. It was the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948, however, which brought about a new era and questioned the established order by giving non-discrimination and equality the status of inalienable principles and allowing new forms of organization marked by a sense of citizenship that evolved throughout time. This struggle for survival led to a new path marked by Rights, equality and integration, which I believe we are still traveling today.

This effort was led by Afro-descendant men and women in the USA, Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean, who often lost their lives in this endeavour. There was a conscious sacrifice: they understood this as a collective problem that called for collective action.

The racial issue was an integral part of decolonization, of the fight for emancipation (from Haiti to the Bolivarian Revolution and all pro-independence processes), as well as of subsequent events. Afro-descendant groups have become organized around major struggles in different scenarios that have included the eradication of racism and their pursuit of full citizenship.

All of our countries have heroes and heroines whom we constantly “revive” in historiographical surveys by acknowledging their contribution to our nations. Moreover, all political platforms include the slaves’ feelings and thoughts of freedom. The anti-racist agenda has paradoxically been absent in these processes. The revindication of Afro-descendant groups has been omitted by placing them at a secondary level, or by considering them a “minor contradiction”.

The fight for civil rights, based on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, promotes the design and development of anti-discrimination principles enshrined in the 1965 International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, which will, in turn, lead to the subsequent defence of other human groups that will establish a new paradigm of Power and Rights.

The twentieth century faces the emergence of new right-holders, such as women, original peoples, the LGBTQ community, the disabled, as well as marginalized groups (the dalit, the gypsies), all of which have gradually made these principles their own and further enriched these concepts and analyses in a virtuous circle, always chasing utopia, in a constant pursuit of justice and equality.

Subsequent World Conferences that condemned forms of racism and racial discrimination, together with the UN system, contributed to the creation of international regulations that became binding (hence mandatory) upon national States.

It was international pressure that brought the ignominious apartheid to an end: the organized struggle of the South African peoples was legitimized by the international community, which supported the transition to a necessary democracy, led by the great Nelson Mandela. By the end of the twentieth century, new revindications, together with the scope of class, race and gender rights, all came together to shape a new paradigm.

The Third World Conference against Racism (Durban, 2001) took place at a time of significant global turmoil, when hegemonic forces drove a significant regression, and political and religious fundamentalist movements, which were marked by intolerance and authoritarianism, strived to settle in.

It is against this backdrop that this Conference took place, thus becoming a turning point in the history of mankind. It constituted the clash between single thought and intersectionality as the new plural, dialogical paradigm. The State, the market, and the community have taken on a new role in this new era.

Latin America has been devastated by poverty and inequality, with indigenous and Afro-descendant populations being the poor majorities. There have been dictatorships that tried to establish themselves through violence, and through the cultural and material exploitation of peoples. Despite the powerful structures supported by current imperialism, these development processes enter a new dimension, and the same may be said of the legitimacy of processes that have restored democracy to our countries. Identity, ethnicity, gender, all of them become highly politicized patterns that contribute to further strengthening this transforming Democracy.

I come from a small country, with a total population of 3.3 million inhabitants, of which Afro-descendants and indigenous peoples account for 8% and about 5%, respectively, according to data from the 2011 National Census. Uruguay has a strong European cultural background that derives from the immigration wave that came mainly from Spain and Italy.

We, Afro-descendants, are the largest minority, and one of the poorest population groups; one which has historically settled in the capital city and in the northern border, where many Brazilians fled and settled (it is worth noting that slavery was abolished first in Uruguay, and only 40 years later in Brazil).

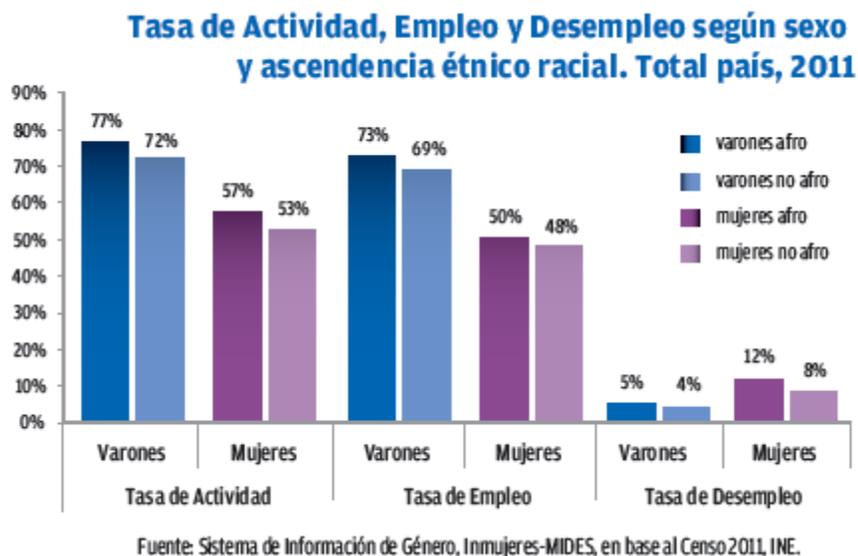
Our country's foundational activity was extensive farming; the slave population was therefore employed mainly as house servants, and only exceptionally as rural workers and cooks in the large *estancias* (cattle ranches). As far as Montevideo [the capital city] is concerned, they have lived on the city outskirts, in the "traditional" Afro-descendant boroughs.

This group became actively involved in the struggle for independence, with one of its members being an outstanding figure. He was a lieutenant working for Artigas, a national hero, who accompanied him to Paraguay to regroup the army and return to the country, to be later caught and imprisoned by Dictator Franco. This Afro-descendant lived with Artigas until his death, survived him, and finally died in Paraguay.

The insertion of the Afro-Uruguayan population into our society has been marked by racism and different forms of discrimination. Uruguay may be considered to be at the lead in this field, as throughout its recent history it has passed and adopted significant policies and rules favouring equality (Law on Abortion; Law on Divorce (in the 1930s); advanced labour regulations, such as the 8-hour day), but other data show that the Afro-descendant population is clearly at a disadvantage and subject to inequality as a result of the various forms of racial discrimination.

The selected tables below present figures that bear witness to this situation.<sup>2</sup>

**Labour Market:**



**Activity, Employment and Unemployment Rate, by Gender and Ethnical/Racial Group (Country Total, 2011)**

**References:**

Afro-descendant men – Non Afro-descendant men – Afro-descendant women – Non Afro-descendant women

**Bar Headings:**

Men – Women – Men – Women – Men – Women  
 Activity Rate – Employment Rate - Unemployment Rate

Source: Gender Information System – INMUJERES-MIDES, based on 2011 Census, INE.

<sup>2</sup>To see the figures and for more information please visit [www.inmujeres.gub.uy](http://www.inmujeres.gub.uy) [in Spanish]

**Cuadro 12. Distribución de las personas ocupadas según tipo de ocupación y sexo en población afrodescendiente y no afrodescendiente**

Tipo de ocupación	Mujeres			Varones		
	Afro	No afro	Total	Afro	No afro	Total
Miembros del Poder Ejecutivo y otros organismos del Estado	3,5	5,8	5,6	1,9	6,8	6,3
Profesionales	6,2	14,1	13,3	2,0	6,3	5,8
Técnicos y profesionales de nivel medio	4,1	6,2	6,0	3,9	7,0	6,7
Empleados/as de oficina	9,9	18,5	17,7	5,1	8,6	8,2
Trabajadores de los servicios y vendedores de comercios	24,2	21,2	21,5	10,2	8,3	8,5
Agricultores y trabajadores calificados agropecuarios y pesqueros	0,5	2,4	2,2	7,2	8,5	8,4
Oficiales, operarios y artesanos de artes mecánicas y de otros oficios	5,1	4,8	4,8	24,2	20,8	21,1
Operarios de instalaciones y máquinas y montadores	4,4	2,5	2,7	9,8	11,8	11,6
Trabajadores no calificados	41,9	24,5	26,1	33,8	20,8	22,1
Fuerzas armadas	0,2	0,1	0,1	1,9	1,1	1,1
<b>Total</b>	<b>100,0</b>	<b>100,0</b>	<b>100,0</b>	<b>100,0</b>	<b>100,0</b>	<b>100,0</b>

Fuente: Sistema de Información de Género de Inmujeres en base a ECH-INE 2008.

**Table 12. Afro-descendant/Non Afro-descendant Employed Population Distribution, broken down by occupation and gender**

Job Type	Women			Men		
	Afro-descendant	Non Afro-descendant	Total	Afro-descendant	Non Afro-descendant	Total
Executive Power officers and other civil servants	3.5	5.8	5.6	1.9	6.8	6.3
Professionals	6.2	14.1	13.3	2.0	6.3	5.8
Professionals and technicians (College level)	4.1	6.2	6.0	3.9	7.0	6.7
Service providers and salespersons	9.9	18.5	17.7	5.1	8.6	8.2
Blue-collar workers	24.2	21.2	21.5	10.2	8.3	8.5
Farmers and skilled workers (farming and fisheries)	0.5	2.4	2.2	7.2	8.5	8.4
Officers, workers and craftsmen (mechanics and other trades)	5.1	4.8	4.8	24.2	20.8	21.1
Machinery operators/assemblers	4.4	2.5	2.7	9.8	11.8	11.6
Non-skilled workers	41.9	24.5	26.1	33.8	20.8	22.1
Armed forces	0.2	0.1	0.1	1.9	1.1	1.1
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Source: INMUJERES – Gender Information system, based on ECH-INE 2008.

## Education:

### Distribución porcentual de las personas mayores de 24 años según sexo y ascendencia étnico racial por nivel educativo. Total país, 2011

	Afro		No afro	
	Varones	Mujeres	Varones	Mujeres
Sin instrucción	1,8	2,0	1,1	1,4
Primaria (común o especial)	45,2	42,1	34,5	33,9
Ciclo básico	26,2	23,3	22,7	18,0
Bachillerato	13,7	16,3	19,0	20,4
Enseñanza Técnica; Formación profesional	6,2	4,3	6,1	3,8
Terciario no universitario	2,3	5,3	3,6	8,7
Universidad y Posgrado	4,6	6,8	12,9	13,9
Total	100,0	100,0	100,0	100,0

Fuente: Sistema de Información de Género, Inmujeres-MIDES, en base al Censo 2011, INE

% Distribution of People >24 by Gender and Ethnical/Racial Group (broken down by literacy level) (Country Total, 2011)				
	Afro-descendant		Non Afro-descendant	
	Men	Women	Men	Women
Illiterate	1.8	2.0	1.1	1.4
Primary School (Ordinary or Special)	45.2	42.1	34.5	33.9
Basic High School education	26.2	23.3	22.7	18.0
Full High School Education ( <i>Bachillerato</i> )	13.7	16.3	19.0	20.4
Technical Education:				
Professional Training	6.2	4.3	6.1	3.8
College (non-University)	2.3	5.3	3.6	8.7
University – Post-graduate	4.6	6.8	12.9	13.9
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: Gender Information System – INMUJERES-MIDES, based on 2011 Census, INE.

### Cuadro 5. Máximo nivel educativo alcanzado por personas de 20 años o más en población afrodescendiente y no afrodescendiente

Nivel Educativo	Población Afro	Población No Afro
Sin instrucción o Primaria	47,1	37,7
Ciclo básico incompleto	15,6	10,9
Ciclo básico completo	11,3	10,2
Segundo ciclo	18,7	23,9
Terciaria y Universitaria	7,4	17,4
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>100,0</b>	<b>100,0</b>

Fuente: Sistema de Información de Género de Inmujeres en base a ECH-INE 2008.

**Table 5: Highest Literacy Level in the >20 Afro-descendant and Non Afro-descendant Population**

Literacy Level	Afro-descendant Population	Non Afro-descendant Population
Illiterate / Primary level education	47.1	37.7
Basic high-school education I(incomplete)	15.6	10.9
Basic high-school education (finished)	11.3	10.2
Secondary school	18.7	23.9
College and university level	7.4	17.4
Total	100.0	100.0

Source: INMUJERES – Gender Information system, based on ECH-INE 2008

**Cuadro 7. Asistencia a establecimientos de enseñanza según tramos de edad en población afrodescendiente y no afrodescendiente**

Edades	Población Afro	Población No Afro
0 a 3	11,9	13,8
4 a 5	85,0	89,3
6 a 12	99,0	98,8
13 a 17	77,4	82,7
18 a 24	25,2	40,8

Fuente: Sistema de Información de Género de Inmujeres en base a ECH-INE 2008.

**Table 7. Attendance to Education Institutions, by age group (Afro-descendant and Non Afro-descendant Population)**

Ages	Afro-descendant Population	Non Afro-descendant Population
0 to 3	11.9	13.8
4 to 5	85.0	89.3
6 to 12	99.0	98.8
13 to 17	77.4	82.7
18 to 24	25.2	40.8

Source: INMUJERES – Gender Information system, based on ECH-INE 2008

## Income & Poverty:

**Cuadro 13. Proporción de personas viviendo en hogares indigentes y pobres según sexo en población afrodescendiente (Línea de Pobreza 2002)**

	Mujeres			Varones		
	Afro	No afro	Total	Afro	No afro	Total
<b>Indigentes</b>	3,9	1,3	1,5	3,3	1,3	1,5
<b>Pobres</b>	40,6	17,9	20,2	38,6	18,2	20,4

Fuente: Sistema de Información de Género de Inmujeres en base a ECH-INE 2008.

**Table 13. Extremely Poor and Poor People, broken down by gender (Afro-descendant and Non Afro-descendant Population (Poverty Line for 2002)**

	Women			Men		
	Afro-descendant Population	Non Afro-descendant Population	Total	Afro-descendant Population	Non Afro-descendant Population	Total
<b>Extremely Poor</b>	3.9	1.3	1.5	3.3	1.3	1.5
<b>Poor</b>	40.6	17.9	20.2	38.6	18.2	20.4

Source: INMUJERES – Gender Information system, based on ECH-INE 2008

**Cuadro 16. Brecha de ingresos entre afrodescendientes y no afrodescendientes por hora de trabajo según tipo de ocupación**

Miembros del Poder Ejecutivo y otros organismos del Estado	55,7
Profesionales, científicos e intelectuales	82,5
Técnicos y profesionales de nivel medio	82,7
Empleados/as de oficina	83,5
Trabajadores de los servicios y vendedores de comercios y mercados	84,2
Agricultores y trabajadores calificados agropecuarios y pesqueros	67,0
Oficiales, operarios y artesanos de artes mecánicas y de otros oficios	95,4
Operarios de instalaciones y máquinas y montadores	80,2
Trabajadores no calificados	91,9
Fuerzas armadas	68,0
<b>Total</b>	<b>71,5</b>

Fuente: Sistema de Información de Género de Inmujeres en base a ECH-INE 2008.

**Table 16. Income Gap between Afro-descendants and Non Afro-descendants (per hour, broken down by occupation)**

<b>Executive Power and other Civil Servants</b>	55.7
<b>Professionals, scientists, intellectuals</b>	82.5
<b>Technicians and Professionals</b>	82.7
<b>Blue-collar workers</b>	83.5
<b>Service providers and salespersons</b>	84.2

<b>Farmers and skilled workers (farming and fisheries)</b>	67.0
<b>Officers, workers and craftsmen (mechanics and other trades)</b>	95.4
<b>Machinery operators/assemblers</b>	80.2
<b>Non-skilled workers</b>	91.9
<b>Armed forces</b>	68.0
<b>Total</b>	71.5

Source: INMUJERES – Gender Information system, based on ECH-INE 2008

**Cuadro 17. Brecha de ingresos entre afrodescendientes y no afrodescendientes por hora de trabajo según nivel educativo alcanzado**

<b>Nivel educativo</b>	<b>Brecha de ingresos por hora en ocupación principal</b>
<b>Sin instrucción o Primaria</b>	88.0
<b>Ciclo básico incompleto</b>	87.8
<b>Ciclo básico completo</b>	91.1
<b>Segundo ciclo</b>	76.9
<b>Terciaria y Universitaria</b>	78.4
<b>Total</b>	71.5

Fuente: Sistema de Información de Género de Inmujeres en base a ECH-INE 2008.

<b>Table 17. Income Gap among Afro-descendants and Non Afro-descendants (per hour of work, broken down by literacy level)</b>	
<b>Literacy Level</b>	<b>Income Gap (per hour of work (main occupation)</b>
<b>Illiterate / Primary level education</b>	88.0
<b>Basic high-school education I(incomplete)</b>	87.8
<b>Basic high-school education (finished)</b>	91.1
<b>Secondary school</b>	76.9
<b>College and university level</b>	78.4
<b>Total</b>	71.5

Source: INMUJERES – Gender Information system, based on ECH-INE 2008

**Cuadro 18. Ingreso medio por hora de trabajo y brecha en población afrodescendiente y no afrodescendiente según nivel educativo**

Nivel educativo	Mujeres			Varones		
	Ingreso medio por hora en ocupación principal		Brecha de ingresos por hora entre Afro y no Afro	Ingreso medio por hora en ocupación principal		Brecha de ingresos por hora entre Afro y no Afro
	Afro	No afro		Afro	No afro	
Sin instrucción o Primaria	29,4	31,6	92,9	33,1	38,5	85,9
Ciclo básico incompleto	33,3	34,1	97,7	36,8	44,1	83,6
Ciclo básico completo	34,6	36,2	95,5	47,1	51,1	92,2
Segundo ciclo	39,1	50,5	77,4	51,3	66,8	76,9
Terciaria y Universitaria	68,9	84,8	81,3	88,1	113,2	77,9
Total	38,0	52,4	72,5	41,5	58,8	70,6

Fuente: Sistema de Información de Género de Inmujeres en base a ECH-INE 2008.

**Table 18. Average Income per hour of work, and income gap in the Afro-descendant/non Afro-descendant population, broken down by literacy level**

Literacy level	Women			Men		
	Average Income per hour (main job)		Income gap per hour between Afro-descendants/ Non Afro-descendants	Average Income per hour (main job)		Income gap per hour between Afro-descendants/ Non Afro-descendants
	Afro-descendant	Non Afro-descendant		Afro-descendant	Non Afro-descendant	
Illiterate / Primary level education	29.4	31.6	92.9	33.1	38.5	85.9
Basic high-school education I(incomplete)	33.3	34.1	97.7	36.8	44.1	83.6
Basic high-school education (finished)	34.6	36.2	95.5	47.1	51.1	92.2
Secondary school	39.1	50.5	77.4	51.3	66.8	76.9
College and university level	68.9	84.8	81.3	88.1	113.2	77.9
Total	38.0	51.4	72.5	41.5	58.8	70.6

Source: INMUJERES – Gender Information system, based on ECH-INE 2008

The declaration and plan of action issued by the above-mentioned World Conference against Racism, held in Durban in 2001, constituted an undertaking by States to develop policies, programs and actions to respond to this issue, and faced them with the pressing need to implement public policies to improve the situation of the Afro-descendant population, which had historically been at a disadvantage.

The year 2004, when racial equality mechanisms were created at a central and departmental level within the Uruguayan State, marked the start of a process of institutionalization of racial issues in Uruguay. Witness to this is the enactment of several pieces of legislation, such as Law No. 17817 on the fight against racism, xenophobia and discrimination; Law No. 18059 (*Ley Nacional del Candombe, la cultura Afrouruguaya y la Equidad Racial*) (National Law on *Candombe*<sup>3</sup>, the Afro-Uruguay Culture and Racial Equality); and Law No. 18104 on equal rights and opportunities for men and women, all of which provide a framework for the development of gender and racial equality promotion policies.

Under the new powers granted to it by law, the *Instituto Nacional de las Mujeres* (National Women's Institute) structured a department to deal with Afro-descendant women issues (the *Departamento de las Mujeres Afrodescendientes*), a mechanism for the promotion of gender and racial equality that encourages actions to make gender and racial/ethnic equality a cross-cutting issue in Government agencies, as well as empowerment actions geared towards Afro-descendant women, with a view to generating a qualified critical mass that may demand that its rights be respected.

The conditions required for public policy design, such as gathering data to identify the inequalities endured by Afro-descendant women through the Institute's Gender Information System, have been created since 2007. Additionally, training is provided to men and women decision makers and to those in charge of making the ethnic/racial dimension a cross-cutting issue in the gender discussions at the level of the ENAP (National Public Administration School) and of the State.

Yet another example of the work undertaken in relation to this group is the design of the first diploma course on race and gender together with UDELAR (*Universidad de la República*). Additionally, affirmative actions of various kinds are being encouraged, such as quotas for Afro-descendant youngsters through the law on youth employment, and a bill on affirmative actions for the Afro-descendant population to be submitted to the Senate by mid-year, which constitutes a historical milestone in the recognition of their rights in the fields of labour and education.

Lastly, it is worth noting that work is currently under way to set up an African Affairs Embassy.

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<sup>3</sup> Translator's Note: A Uruguayan music and dance style originating with African slaves.