



Foro Interparlamentario de las Américas  
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Current economic situation discussed at the 2008 FIPA Congress of Women Parliamentarians

## United in the Face of the Crisis

"Behind every crisis lies an opportunity," asserted the FIPA President, Brazilian representative Luiz Carlos Hauly, at the opening of the Congress, "Towards a Gender-Sensitive Legislative Agenda for Development in the Americas." These remarks set the tone for the meeting which was organized by Colombian Senator and President of the FIPA Group of Women Parliamentarians Cecilia López and attended by forty or so parliamentarians from fifteen countries in the Americas, on November 20 and 21, 2008, in Colombia.

This was the first major hemispheric parliamentary meeting since the collapse of the financial markets in October. Recognizing the importance of their role, the legislators from Bolivia, Brazil, Canada, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, Dominican, the Dominican Republic, Grenada, Guatemala, Haiti, Jamaica, Mexico, Peru and St. Lucia who met in Bogota spent an entire day on economic issues, bearing in mind that "women are the first ones hurt by the current crisis."

Lawmakers from each region offered their own observations on the current crisis, inspiring the

delegates in attendance to commit to working creatively so as to reach an "in-depth surgery" of the current world order.

On behalf of the Mexican delegation, representative Martha Tagle presented the 2008-2009 budget review,

during which members of the Bolivian, Guatemalan and Peruvian delegations drew participants' attention to the status of Aboriginal peoples and Indian women in particular, who too often face double discrimination based on their sex and ethnicity. A paper submitted by delegate

representatives from IDEA International, the Organization of American States and the United Nations Development Program on gender equality and political and electoral reform. Among the topics discussed was the need to work with the media to present a more balanced image of women's political participation.

Despite the diversity of opinions expressed, the Congress recommendations were unanimously adopted at the last working session, reflecting the lively debate that took place and the hopeful commitments made for all citizens of the Americas who are concerned about the current situation.

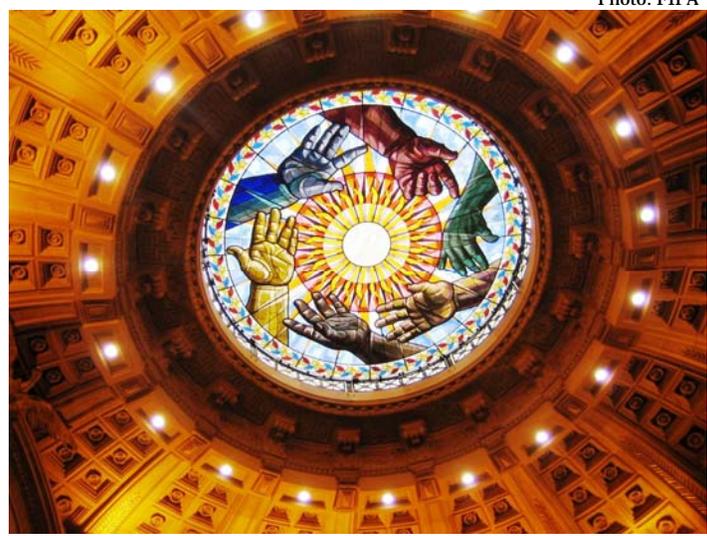


Photo: FIPA

The artistry of painter Enrique Grau as seen in the dome of the Colombian Senate.

which illustrates the inclusion of a gender perspective across the board in the budget exercise.

The second working day began with an examination of gender equality in social and environmental policies. Along with experts from the Inter-American Development Bank, the parliamentarians engaged in lively debate

Hilaria Supa Huamán called for the establishment of a stricter legal framework to protect biodiversity and prevent climate change, pointing out how environmental change hurts the rights of Aboriginal peoples, their culture and way of life.

The morning session ended with a panel of

### In this issue:

<b>The Challenges of Doha Round</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The Parliament of Grenada</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Forum on the Right to Food</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Executive Committee Meets in Miami</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Happy Holidays!</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>About FIPA</b>	<b>4</b>

# Doha Round: A Challenge for Parliamentarians

"It exceeded our expectations," concluded a pleased Mayi Antillón, chair of the International Relations Committee of the Legislative Assembly of Costa Rica, at the end of the three-day workshop called "The WTO, the Doha Round, and Development Challenges."

This workshop on international trade, held from November 6 to 8, brought together around 30 lawmakers from Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Canada, Chile, Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Mexico, Paraguay and Peru.

The workshop was a joint effort between FIPA and the World Trade Organization (WTO), with financial support from Canada's Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade. It was a part of FIPA's training program, launched in 2007 with the goal of both enriching legislators' knowledge of international trade issues and encouraging the member countries to share their experiences in that area.

The sessions were led by specialists from the WTO Secretariat as well as a number of Costa Rican and international experts, including the former President of the Costa Rica Central Bank, Eduardo Lizano. They covered a variety of topics, ranging from basic questions such as how the WTO and the Doha

program operate, to specific topics, such as agricultural trade and dispute resolution services.

Development issues such as gender equality, fighting poverty and the food crisis were also important topics of discussion. The parliamentarians' concern was palpable, given their responsibilities to their people facing the imminent

opinions openly and honestly. Although they come from countries with different levels of economic development and different ideologies, they all agreed that parliamentarians need to participate actively in trade debates.

"It is essential that we increase our knowledge of international trade," said Bolivian legislator Ricardo

El Salvadorian legislator Manuel Menjivar, a member of the governing party, affirmed that "Today, the only choice parliaments have is whether or not to sign the agreement. A yes or a no is not good enough. There must be debate, and as parliamentarians, we must ask our governments to become more involved."

WTO Secretariat

Photos: Departamento de Relaciones Públicas, Prensa y Protocolo/Asamblea Legislativa de Costa Rica



Lawmakers from 11 countries participated in the workshop organized by FIPA, the WTO and the Costa Rican Assembly.

crisis. "It is hard to convince people of the benefits of free trade when agricultural land is being used for biofuel production," stated Marisol Espinoza, a Peruvian delegate, recalling that environmental issues were also central to the debate.

Participants used the roundtable forum at the end of each day to state their

representatives heard this call for a larger role for parliaments, and they pledged to continue working with legislative institutions. The workshop participants left Costa Rica ready to take on the challenges their countries will face, having acquired new information and new contacts.

Aillón Álvarez, without hiding the fact that his party and his government have reservations about free trade. His colleague from the opposition party, Senator René Zamora, expressed his desire to see a similar workshop held in Bolivia, so that a larger number of legislators could benefit from this sort of training.

# The Parliament of Grenada

Photo: Parliament of Grenada

The Parliament of Grenada came into being in 1974 when Grenada became an independent country. Parliament consists of the Queen, represented by the Governor General, the Senate and the House of Representatives. The Governor-General summons Parliament, brings its session to an end by prorogation, and formally assents to every bill before it can become law. In practice, he exercises all these powers on the advice of the Prime Minister and the Cabinet.



The Parliament Building before the passage of hurricane Ivan, in 2004. Work is still ongoing to rebuild the building.

The Senate consists of thirteen non-elected Members. All Senators are appointed by the Governor General on the advice of the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition. Senators come from different sources: seven are appointed on the advice of the Prime Minister, three are appointed on the advice of the Leader of the Opposition and three are appointed on the advice of the Prime Minister after he has consulted the organizations or interests that he considers the Senators should represent.

The Senate acts as a House of review with responsibility for expressing second opinion in relation to legislative and other proposals initiated in the House of Representatives, ensures proper consideration of all legislation, provides adequate scrutiny of financial measures and initiates non-financial legislation. Also, the Senate probes and checks the administration of laws to keep itself informed, to insist

on ministerial accountability for the administration of the Government and to provide effective scrutiny of Government, and enables adequate expression of debate about policy and government programmes.

The House of Representatives has 15 members, elected for a five-year term in single-seat constituencies. In any matter of procedure not provided for by its own rules and practices, the rules and practices of the British House of Commons are followed. Members of the House of Representatives are directly elected by the people and play the predominant part in the parliamentary system.

Parliament makes the laws and the House of Representatives plays the predominant part in making them. Any member can introduce bills, except bills involving expenditure or taxation, which can only be

introduced by the government. Most of the time of the House is spent on Government Bills. The Senate has the constitutional right to reject any bill, and keeps on rejecting it as long as it sees fit. It can also amend any bill, although it cannot initiate or increase the amount of any bill dealing with taxation or expenditure. Every bill must pass both Houses and receive the Royal Assent before it becomes law.

By law a general election must be held at least once every five years. However, Parliament may be dissolved and an election called before the statutory period has elapsed, and this is what normally happens. The power to dissolve Parliament is a royal prerogative exercised by the Governor General, normally on the advice of the Prime Minister.

## House of Representatives (2008–2013)

- ◆ 15 Representatives
- ◆ 2 Women
- ◆ 13 Men
- ◆ Main parties:
  - National Democratic Congress 73.3 %
  - New National Party 26.7 %

## Senate (2008–2013)

- ◆ 13 Senators
- ◆ 4 Women
- ◆ 9 Men
- ◆ Main parties:
  - National Democratic Congress 54 %
  - New National Party 23 %
  - Representatives from the Labour, Agriculture and Business sectors 23 %



# The Right to Food

On the occasion of the First Parliamentary Forum on the Right to Food, lawmakers from the continent met in Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic, to discuss issues related to food security.

On September 25 and 26 of this year, they exchanged experiences on laws on this matter in various countries, such as those already in existence in Ecuador, Panama and Guatemala, as well as on the draft laws on food security in Argentina and the Dominican Republic. The panels and discussions also included, among other topics, the exchange of debt for food and protection of natural resources and the environment.

Deputy María Estela de la Cruz, FIPA's vice-president for the Central American region, stated that parliamentary organizations such as FIPA could also contribute to promoting food security through regional cooperation. Along those lines, she referred to the possibility of using electronic and digital media, such as the FIPA blog, for exchanging ideas, better practices, points of view and



Photo: ©FAO/Ivo Balderi

Not everyone in the Americas has access to food.

common strategies for implementing legislation. She explained that a similar exchange could be carried out in pursuit of legislation aimed at eradicating hunger and poverty and achieving food and nutritional security in the various countries.

The Santo Domingo Declaration produced at the end of the forum instituted the Parliamentary Front against Hunger and Food Sovereignty of the States party to the Central American Integration System, which will be responsible for combining efforts on behalf of agricultural and livestock development and ensuring food and nutrition safety for the peoples of the region.

## 18th Executive Committee meeting in Miami

FIPA Executive members will meet in Miami on December 18.

The parliamentarians, representing the different

regions of the Americas, will discuss issues related to the Fifth Summit of the Americas and the Sixth Plenary Meeting, among others.

## About FIPA

The Inter-Parliamentary Forum of the Americas (FIPA) is an independent network made up of the national legislatures of the member countries of the Organization of American States (OAS) committed to promoting parliamentary participation in the inter-American system.

### Happy Holidays!

Best wishes and season greetings from everyone on the FIPA team.

Wishing you success in your endeavours for the New Year and hoping that 2009 brings peace, health, and prosperity.

Please note that the FIPA offices in Ottawa will be closed between December 22, 2008 and January 3, 2009.

See you in 2009!

### FIPA EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

#### President

- Deputy Luiz Carlos Hauly, Brazil

#### North America

- Senator Ricardo García Cervantes, Mexico
- Mr. James Bezan, MP, Canada

#### Central America

- Guatemala, vacant
- Deputy María Estela de la Cruz, Dominican Republic

#### Caribbean

- Senator Ann Peters, Grenada
- Mr. Stanford Callender, MP, Trinidad and Tobago

#### South America

- Deputy Iván Moreira Barros, Chile
- Senator Nancy Patricia Gutiérrez, Colombia

#### Former FIPA President

- Senator Céline Hervieux-Payette, Canada

#### President of the Group of Women Parliamentarians of the Americas

- Senator Cecilia López Montaña, Colombia

#### Plenary Meeting Host Country

- To be confirmed

FIPA  
500-165 Sparks St.  
Ottawa, Ontario K1P 5B9  
Canada  
Phone: +1 613 594-5222  
Fax: +1 613 594-4766  
info@e-fipa.org  
[www.e-fipa.org](http://www.e-fipa.org)

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Parliamentary Centre

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