

*Annual Gathering of the Group of  
Women Parliamentarians (2013)*

# ***Women in Power: Recent Changes in the Political Arena***

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16-17 May 2013



**ParlAmericas**  
***Group of Women Parliamentarians***



Canadian International  
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Agence canadienne de  
développement international



**Suriname**



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Finally, we would like to extend special thanks to the delegates from throughout the Americas for attending the 2013 Gathering.



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Annual Gathering of the Group of Women Parliamentarians (2013)



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# ABOUT PARLAMERICAS AND THE GROUP OF WOMEN PARLIAMENTARIANS

## ParlAmericas

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ParlAmericas is an independent network composed of the national legislatures of 35 states in North, Central, and South America, and the Caribbean. Members of ParlAmericas are committed to promoting parliamentary participation in the inter-American system. They are also engaged in developing inter-parliamentary dialogue on relevant hemispheric issues. Through meetings and training opportunities, year-round discussion, and follow-up action, members of ParlAmericas uphold their commitment to improving hemispheric dialogue, and advancing the objectives of the organization.

## Objectives

ParlAmericas' objectives are:

- To contribute to the development of inter-parliamentary dialogue in dealing with issues on the hemispheric agenda
- To increase the sharing of experiences, dialogue, and inter-parliamentary cooperation on issues of common interest to member states
- To help strengthen the role of the legislative branch in democracy, and in the promotion and defense of democracy and human rights
- To promote the harmonization of legislation, and development of legislation among member states
- To contribute to the process of integration as one of the most appropriate instruments for sustainable and harmonious development in the hemisphere





## What We Do

ParlAmericas aims to contribute to strengthening democracy and governance in the hemisphere, to confronting threats to hemispheric security, and to defending the rights of the citizens of the region.

ParlAmericas' member states are also committed to reducing poverty and achieving economic development. Specific issues discussed to date include citizen security, crime, democracy, the economy, gender, migration, poverty, terrorism, natural disasters, and trade.

Among other activities, ParlAmericas organizes capacity building workshops that are closely aligned with issues of current hemispheric importance, and with those tasks that parliamentarians have identified are essential to honouring their obligations. These capacity building opportunities offer attendees the chance to delve into these issues with experts from renowned organizations, share best practices, and develop plans of action.

## The Group of Women Parliamentarians

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The Group of Women Parliamentarians is a permanent working group within ParlAmericas. The Group includes representatives from each sub-region in the Americas; namely, North America, Central America, South America, and the Caribbean. It meets twice a year, once during the annual ParlAmericas Plenary Assembly, and once at an annual Gathering that brings together men and women parliamentarians from throughout the continent. The Group's meetings and activities strengthen the work of women parliamentarians by providing a space to share and exchange experiences and knowledge from a gender perspective.



## Objectives

The objectives of the Group of Women Parliamentarians are:

- To strengthen the leadership of female politicians through ongoing regional exchange
- To promote the creation of conditions for equal opportunities, prioritizing the fight against poverty and the elimination of employment discrimination
- To strengthen democracies in the countries of the Americas in an effort to achieve respect for human rights and conditions that promote equitable and sustainable social development
- To promote the creation of mechanisms that encourage the participation of women in politics
- To strengthen women's active participation at all ParlAmericas meetings, incorporating a gender perspective into each of the topics analyzed by the organization

## 2013 Executive Committee

- President of the Group of Women Parliamentarians: Linda Machuca Moscoso, Member of the National Assembly of Ecuador (on extended leave)
- Acting President of the Group of Women Parliamentarians and Vice-President of the Group of Women Parliamentarians: Dr. Jennifer Simons, Speaker of the National Assembly of Suriname
- Secretary to the Group of Women Parliamentarians: Mónica Zalaquett, Member of the Chamber of Deputies of Chile







# ANNUAL GATHERING OF THE GROUP OF WOMEN PARLIAMENTARIANS (2013) — *WOMEN IN POWER: RECENT CHANGES IN THE POLITICAL ARENA*

## 1. Overview

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The Annual Gathering of the Group of Women Parliamentarians of ParlAmericas (2013), entitled *Women in Power: Recent Changes in the Political Arena*, focused on the leadership and political participation of women and the progress made in these areas in the Americas in recent years. The Gathering drew attention to the recent phenomenon of women occupying leadership roles in national legislatures, and to the strategies and tools that facilitated women's entry into these roles. The objectives of the 2013 Gathering were to discuss achievements in the political participation of women, the passing of laws related to women's rights, and female leadership in the region, and to propose actions to maintain and further progress.

A total of 53 parliamentarians, 38 women and 15 men, from 23 countries attended the 2013 Gathering. In addition to these official delegates,



*Patrick Kensenhuis (Suriname), Jenny Warsodikromo (Suriname), Jennifer Simons (Suriname), Refano Wongsoredjo (Suriname), Martha Djojoseparto (Suriname)*

non-parliamentarian technical experts in gender equality and women's leadership were also invited to enrich the discussion and provide a variety of viewpoints during the Gathering's sessions.

The Gathering began with inaugural addresses on the topic of *Women in Power: Recent Changes in the Political Arena*. The first session, *Women Presidents of National Legislatures*, followed, during which women presiding over parliamentary chambers in the Americas shared their experiences. Invitations to speak at the session were extended to female heads of chambers in Antigua and Barbuda, Barbados, Bolivia, Dominica, Grenada, The Bahamas, and Suriname. The Speaker of the House of Representatives of Antigua and Barbuda and the Speaker of the National Assembly of Suriname accepted the invitations and acted as the session's main presenters. In the second session, *Leadership and Political Participation of Women of African Descent*, Beatriz



Berthia Parle (Saint Lucia),  
Cheryl Bazard (The Bahamas)

Ramírez Abella, Director of the National Women's Institute of Uruguay, shared her knowledge of issues concerning the rights of Afro-descendant women in Latin America. In the third session, *The Effects of Women's Participation in Politics*, Cynthia Barrow-Giles, Senior Lecturer in Politics at the University of the West Indies, contributed her expertise regarding the political participation of women in the Caribbean and Latin America.

In each session, the expert's presentation was followed by regional perspectives on the topic presented by regional rapporteurs; i.e., parliamentarians from each of the four regions of the Americas (North, Central, and South America, and the Caribbean). The floor was then opened to attending parliamentarians to ask questions, comment on the information presented, and share experiences and practices from their countries. Recommendations were formed which were later presented, discussed and approved in the Gathering's final session.



A keynote address was delivered by Maureen Clarke Clarke, President of the Inter-American Commission of Women, Minister of the Status of Women of Costa Rica, and Executive Director of the National Women's Institute of Costa Rica.

The Gathering came to an end with closing remarks by Dr. Jennifer Simons, Speaker of the National Assembly of Suriname. She summarized the main lessons learned from the Gathering's discussions and presented the key recommendations for legislators issuing from the 2013 Gathering.

This report summarizes the presentations and interventions of parliamentarians and participating experts during the 2013 Gathering. The report provides insight into the issues and challenges that national legislatures of the Americas face in their struggle to promote gender equality in the political sphere. The report is intended to disseminate the knowledge and information brought forward during the Gathering, share the best practices discussed, and promote parliamentarians' own recommendations for future action.

## 2. Official Inauguration

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The Gathering began with several inaugural addresses, as summarized below.

**Dr. Jennifer Simons**  
**Acting President of the Group of Women**  
**Parliamentarians, ParlAmericas**  
**Speaker of the National Assembly of Suriname**

Dr. Jennifer Simons expressed her gratitude to the parliamentarians and experts present and voiced her happiness at the large attendance at the Gathering. She commented that the presence of parliamentarians was a token of support not only for the Group of Women Parliamentarians and its cause, but also for her country, which has been facing a steep decline in the number of women parliamentarians in the National Assembly since the 2010 elections. Dr. Simons shared her hope that the Gathering would provide an opportunity to exchange ideas, and would serve as inspiration

to parliamentarians to start or continue their work on issues related to women's rights and the representation of women in parliament, and in national decision making processes.

**Linda Machuca Moscoso (video address)**  
**President of the Group of Women Parliamentarians,**  
**ParlAmericas (on leave)**  
**Member of the National Assembly of Ecuador**

After welcoming participants to the Gathering, Linda Machuca Moscoso reflected on the value of providing such a forum to women and men parliamentarians from the region, and the importance of the discussions that would be held. She acknowledged that while women are gaining increased political participation and in some countries in the Americas, are even close to formally achieving equal representation, this participation is frequently constrained by social, political and identity factors. In many countries, women's political involvement is still incipient. Ms. Machuca Moscoso recognized that much progress has been made in the past one hundred years, and that the first decade of the twenty-first century bears witness to the endeavours of parliamentarians to make a substantial contribution to legislation for gender equality and equity, based on the human rights of both men and women. She noted that these laws may help build democracies in the hemisphere, respect the Rule of Law, and build a world of peace and solidarity. She called upon parliamentarians to participate in forums such as the current Gathering, and to continue to work harder and better for their parliaments, peoples and nations.

**Mónica Zalaquett**  
**Secretary to the Group of the Women**  
**Parliamentarians, ParlAmericas**  
**Member of the Chamber of Deputies of Chile**

In her welcome speech, Mónica Zalaquett acknowledged the fact that the status of women in the world and in the Americas has greatly improved in the last decades. She recognized the achievements that have been made





in closing the gaps in education, political inclusion in electoral processes, and the integration of women into the workforce. However, she noted that there are still many grey areas: women are working in the informal sector, cannot access higher levels of education, and receive lower pay than men for doing equal work. Problems such as violence against women and children, human trafficking, enslavement and sexual exploitation continue to plague societies. Ms. Zalaquett explained that it is impossible to achieve greater development without recognizing that men and women are equal, in both rights and responsibilities. She noted that women's roles in the twenty-first century have become crucial in assuring that development processes be inclusive of all citizens of our countries, and that we move from words to actions and proposals to facts.

### **3. Session 1—*Women Presidents of National Legislatures***

The objective of this first session was to analyze the experiences of women who have reached formal positions of power, and to share lessons learned in the hope that they will be used as an example and as inspiration to other female politicians. The session also sought to highlight the importance of having women exercise formal politics from a female perspective without resorting to traditional, patriarchal models. This session examined the struggle of groups committed to gender equality, as well as other factors that have contributed to progress, how progress can be stepped up, how changes can be measured, and the results of such an evaluation. Two female Speakers of Parliamentary Houses spoke on their experiences to shed light on the challenges that women face when entering politics. They focused on why female leadership is necessary, and strategies for increasing women's presence in positions of political power.

#### **Presenters:**

- Dr. Jennifer Simons, Speaker of the National Assembly of Suriname
- Gisele Isaac-Arrindell, Speaker of the House of Representatives of Antigua and Barbuda

**Moderator:** Dr. Jennifer Simons

**Regional Rapporteurs:**

- Susan Truppe (Canada)
- Delfina Elizabeth Guzmán Díaz (Mexico)
- Martha González Dávila (Nicaragua)
- Clarissa Marín de López (Paraguay)

## **Presentations**

### **Dr. Jennifer Simons**

Dr. Simons began her presentation by asking participants to reflect on the importance of having more women in politics. She insisted that true democracy cannot exist if all members of society are not represented. As women make up half of any society, they must be present in all decision making processes. Dr. Simons explained that while progress has been made in recent years, women are still often victims of violence simply because they are women, they receive less pay than men for doing equal work, and girls in some countries do not even have the right to be born and are aborted by families who wish to have sons. These situations reflect the necessity to continue to discuss these issues and look for solutions.

Dr. Simons noted that given the great economic and environmental challenges that the world is facing, it is becoming clear that the current political and economic systems are not sustainable. At the 128th Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) Conference in Quito, discussions centred on the theme of “unrelenting growth versus purposeful development: new approaches, new solutions”. Women, she insisted, must be a part of this new approach, not only because they have the right to participate, but because they have much to contribute in the way of solutions. Every day, studies show the benefits of women’s contributions to decision making in local, national and international forums. These studies and discussions need to lead to the implementation of concrete plans with a focus on developing new models to help solve problems.





Dr. Simons spoke of how she has observed other women in leadership positions. She was interested in learning about their experiences and the conditions that allowed them to occupy positions of power when so few women had been involved in politics. She remarked that it is the role of parliamentarians and those in leadership roles to work toward increasing the number of women in decision making bodies by coaching and inspiring other women.

Dr. Simons pointed out that while there was agreement at the IPU Conference in Quito that more investment be put toward increasing the representation of women in parliament, the amount of investment differs greatly between countries and regions. She observed that quotas have played an important role in increasing women's representation, and noted that there are only 15 female presidents in 198 countries in the world, and that as of April 1st, 2013, only 39 Speakers in 189 parliaments were women.<sup>1</sup>



*Gisele Isaac-Arrindell (Antigua and Barbuda), Jennifer Simons (Suriname)*

Dr. Simons related that she had never actively planned on getting involved in politics because she had had a negative image of politics. She referred to her own experience and observed that while women may not hold formal political functions, it does not mean that they cannot serve their countries. She stated that it is necessary to question how election lists are made. In Suriname, lists are created by a small group in the political party, but women are deterred by the fact that they are actively banned from the top positions on the candidate list. She pointed out that it is important to have quotas so that women are placed on candidate lists. Additionally, women must have more of a voice in the making of these lists.

Dr. Simons concluded by stating that increased involvement of women in politics and in decision making roles adds to the quality of democracies

<sup>1</sup> Statistics from Inter-Parliamentary Union database.



and societies, and helps address the lack of sustainability in political and economic systems. Increased female perspective in parliament is necessary to improve governance and to adjust the present economic model that is currently centred on maximizing gains and growth, so that space is made for other issues such as the environment.

### **Gisele Isaac-Arrindell**

Ms. Isaac-Arrindell shared with participants the current situation in Antigua and Barbuda: women comprise 50% of the population; secondary school and university graduation rates for girls are more than double that of boys; female permanent secretaries and principals outnumber their male counterparts; and church congregations, regardless of denomination, are overwhelmingly female. Despite these facts, only one woman has ever been elected to the House of Parliament. She pointed out that that is why her role as Speaker (an appointed position according to the Constitution of Antigua and Bermuda) is so important: it gives women the visibility they need and reminds men that the inclusion of women is critical to the success of democracy.

Ms. Isaac-Arrindell went on to explain a situation that plagues the women of her country, one which women themselves continue to perpetuate: women's role as "helpmeet". The two major political parties have a "women's action group" that carries out actions, from door-to-door campaigning to fish-frying, with the tacit intention of getting male candidates elected. Conversely, the power-brokering—namely, the soliciting, collecting and managing of political contributions and donations—remains men's work. The premise behind this, shared Ms. Isaac-Arrindell, is that elective politics is dirty business, in which no "decent woman" would want to become involved. Hence, women are rewarded for allegiance to the winning party by being appointed to "ceremonial roles" such as the President of the Senate and Speaker of the House.

Ms. Isaac-Arrindell shared this information so as to provide context for her position as a woman heading the House of Representatives. As appointed Speaker, there is an expectation that she will preside in an objective non-





partial manner. Since taking the chair, she has striven to make objectivity and adherence to the rules the benchmark of her tenure. Nevertheless, she explained that it has been challenging because of the divisive nature of small island politics. As a woman, she has been the subject of many personal attacks from other Members of Parliament and from the media. These attacks are based solely on the grounds that she is a woman in a position of authority over men, in a place widely accepted as a boy's club and in a country that is male-centred. Ms. Isaac-Arrindell admitted that while she has become accustomed to the personal attacks, they have been very effective in undermining women's interest in entering politics.

Ms. Isaac-Arrindell commented on another adverse effect of the negative portrayal of women in the media and the attacks on women in politics: the division of women along socioeconomic lines, painting female politicians as "haves" who have nothing in common with women who are "have-nots". She explained that while women have the right to vote, many do not have the political savvy to vote in a way that would be most meaningful to them. Many do not realize that having more educated and more enlightened women in elected office would likely redound to their benefit by putting their issues (e.g., affordable child care and elder care, improved health facilities, consistent support from children's fathers, safer neighbourhoods and wider business opportunities) at the front of the agenda.

Ms. Isaac-Arrindell observed that while the laws in Antigua and Barbuda deem men and women equal and while there are no legal or physical barriers, many psychosocial and financial barriers exist that obstruct women's participation in politics. She recommended capitalizing on the advantages that women have. Because women have wide access to secondary and university level education, it is important to begin tailoring aspects of the curriculum towards women in leadership roles. She pointed to the need for more activism by women of all ages and backgrounds. She suggested that women who are in the position to inform and educate work towards closing the knowledge gap. In addition, she insisted that younger women must work on getting the word out via the routes they know best, such as radio and the Internet, including social networks.

In closing, Ms. Isaac-Arrindell reminded parliamentarians that power is never conceded and must be taken, which is why leadership education and information must be firmly hitched to activism.

## Regional Perspectives

Regional rapporteurs from Canada, Mexico, Nicaragua and Paraguay addressed the strategies that have been adopted in their countries to encourage women in leadership roles and the challenges that effectively prevent women from reaching the highest positions in parliament. The rapporteurs were asked to reflect on the following questions based on the experience of their country or region:

- How difficult is it, if at all, for women to become Speakers of Chambers in your country?
- What are the challenges, if they exist?
- Has the presence of women in formal leadership positions increased in recent years? Do women in your country still struggle to attain leadership positions?
- If there has been progress, to what is this progress due? If there has not been progress, what can be done to improve this situation?

The following are highlights from the rapporteurs' testimonies.

### Susan Truppe (Canada)

Ms. Truppe explained that in Canada, there are no rules, laws, or institutional barriers that prohibit women from being candidates for Speaker of the House of Commons, and that there are also a great many role models for inspiration in Parliament. She noted, however, that in reality, women continue to be under-represented in key decision making roles in politics and business in Canada. She explained that some women may be discouraged from greater participation because they have a young family or other obligations.





Ms. Truppe commented that the Canadian Government starts from the premise that all Canadians benefit when women and girls are full participants in every aspect of daily life, from the grassroots level all the way to the boardroom, and including government at every level. The government has therefore increased funding for the Women's Program at Status of Women Canada (the principal government institution responsible for promoting and advancing equality for women in Canada) to its highest level ever, supporting more than 600 projects at the community level. This includes more than \$21 million in funding approved for projects that promote women's leadership and democratic participation. She added that through Status of Women Canada, the government is supporting projects that engage young women and girls in being leaders from the start.

### **Delfina Elizabeth Guzmán Díaz (Mexico)**

Ms. Guzmán Díaz informed participants that in an historic achievement, more than a third of the positions in the bicameral legislative Congress of Mexico are occupied by women, thanks to the legal obligation that was the subject of a two-decade struggle requiring political parties to aim for 40% of its members to be women. Activists of different ideologies appealed to the Federation's Electoral Tribunal of Judicial Power (TEPJF) to oblige parties to comply with the 60:40 quota for the male to female ratio in Senate and Chamber of Deputy candidacies. The obligation was passed in what is called *sentencia 12624*. Ms. Guzmán Díaz insisted that it is now time to follow up on the hard work that has been achieved in Congress, and work toward promoting a gender-oriented agenda. Quotas, she explained, are not enough: women must be protagonists in decision making processes so that they are more visible to the population and can work to fight against the macho culture. Ms. Guzmán Díaz added that the presence of women in leadership positions, in addition to being a fundamental part of gender-related justice, increases the probability that women's priorities will be present in decision making at the national level, will inspire other women to strive for these positions, and will motivate men and women to bring forward the agenda for gender equality as a central axis of democracy.

### **Martha González Dávila (Nicaragua)**

Ms. González Dávila explained that 40.2% of the National Assembly of Nicaragua is composed of women. In 2012, the Municipal Law was reformed at the initiative of the Executive branch so that 50% of electoral lists are registered by women. In 2008, the government approved the Law on Equal Rights and Opportunities in order to give women a protagonist role. Despite all these advances, women continue to face many challenges, such as lack of consciousness about defending and promoting women's rights; discrimination from certain groups or sectors that block the emergence of female leaders, such as political parties, religious groups, and even certain feminist groups; and insufficient technical, professional, and political training for women.

Ms. González Dávila acknowledged that the political will of the Nicaraguan government and positive discrimination have been crucial in promoting women's leadership. The government and the National Assembly have approved laws to promote programs with economic impacts such as productive, food, and credit packages, and zero usury programs. These have improved women's productive and purchasing capacities and have also contributed to a reduction in poverty levels.

### **Clarissa Marín de López (Paraguay)**

Ms. Marín de Lopez explained that the political participation of women in Paraguay is very recent. It is therefore very difficult for a woman to become the president of a chamber because there must first be an internal agreement amongst political parties that are represented in Parliament at the leadership level, followed by a plenary vote of two-thirds. In the history of Paraguay, women have only attained the position of Vice-President of the Chamber.

Ms. Marín de Lopez emphasized that change has to occur not only at the legal level, but also at the cultural level. She described existing challenges such as the need for greater women's empowerment, political party openness, financing for women's candidates, shared family responsibilities, and women's own commitment. She observed that while there has been an increase in the presence of women in elected and





*Martha González Dávila (Nicaragua), Susan Truppe (Canada), Gisele Isaac-Arrindell (Antigua and Barbuda), Jennifer Simons (Suriname), Clarissa Marín de López (Paraguay)*

appointed positions in recent years, this presence has not been constant and has not increased in ministries such as that of industry or finance. Key elements to ensure the consistency of changes and to avoid moving backward are training, negotiation, activism within political parties, and a service vocation.

## Discussion

This section summarizes interventions made by parliamentarians during the session.

*Note: the comments shared reflect the views of individual participants and do not necessarily reflect the views of their countries or those of ParlAmericas.*

### Trinidad and Tobago

A Member of Parliament raised the issue of the impact of women’s presence in positions of power. She commented that while it is important to strive to occupy these positions, it is necessary to question what women do once they are in power. She questioned whether or not women have had the political will to be different and if they have excelled in certain areas. She also asked whether women have been able to pilot and perhaps influence particular types of legislation. The parliamentarian remarked that while there is a female prime minister in Trinidad and Tobago, there is no committee on gender affairs. She was interested to

know if the panellists had parliamentary committees on gender affairs in their respective countries.

### **Canada**

A Member of Parliament shared her opinion that women's struggles have not yet been won. While Canada has very progressive laws and regulations, there is still much to be done. She related how colleagues from other parties, who agree with her on many women's rights issues, are obliged to follow their parties' objectives when they are in the spotlight. The parliamentarian asked the panel to shed light on how to create awareness so that these women can summon the courage to oppose their own parties.

### **Antigua and Barbuda**

A parliamentarian observed that Antigua and Barbuda does not have a quota system at the party level, and that this system is not widely embraced. She noted that women will vote for a woman if she proves herself worthy, and men claim that they will vote for a woman if she is the best person for the job. The result, however, is that mediocre men are promoted by the party while women must be two or three times as qualified as men to be promoted. This can create a situation where women are then perceived to be overqualified and not able to connect with the people. This translates into a "lose-lose" situation for women.

### **Jamaica**

A parliamentarian noted that although Jamaica has a female prime minister, often, women are not encouraged by other women when they are promoted to certain positions in parliament. She expressed her opinion that it is necessary to socialize and re-educate women so that they can carry other women up the ladder.

### **Chile**

A parliamentarian suggested that a quota law is necessary but not sufficient. She observed that Chile has had a female president, yet this achievement has not translated into an increase in the number of women in parliament. Today, she noted, women represent 15%







of parliamentarians despite the fact that they compose 53% of the population. She asked panellists what other measures they believed should be promoted parallel to the law on quotas in order to have a greater number of women in positions of representation.

### **Honduras**

A parliamentarian explained that women have been given sufficient openings in the national political party in Honduras to become deputies. However, many women start the political process and make it halfway through, but retreat just when they arrive at the final stage. She asked the panel what strategies can be developed so that women can make it to the final process and become deputies.

### **Mexico**

A parliamentarian suggested that one of the resolutions of the session be that parliamentarians return to their respective legislatures demanding parity. She noted that parity is the mechanism that renders concrete substantive and effective equality, which is the guiding principle of women's civil and political rights.

### **Dominican Republic**

A parliamentarian made three recommendations. Firstly, she urged countries to continue to advance the quota issue, not only when political parties present candidates but also in the election process. This is necessary because countries will often respect the established quotas when presenting female candidates, but far fewer women are elected than men. Her second recommendation was to define lines of action which will encourage legislative agendas that reflect the rights of women within parliaments and in civil society. Finally, she recommended that ties be developed with the media to instil these themes into national public opinion.

## 4. Session 2—*Leadership and Political Participation of Women of African Descent*

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The objective of this session was to reflect on areas in which legislation recognizes the double discrimination against women of African descent and to support their struggle for space within women's movements. The session also sought to bring about discussion on the implications of positive discrimination for the Afro-descendant community. The topic of this session had been highlighted as an area of interest in a previous Gathering of the Group of Women Parliamentarians. In general, significant progress has been made in Latin America in incorporating women into formal politics. However, there are strong indications that the situation of Afro-descendant women has not improved to the same extent as for other women in the region. The expert for this session was asked to reflect on how the leadership roles, styles, and traditions among women of African descent are constructed, and what strategies can be used to develop a political vision that can place their specific and strategic demands on the national and international agenda.

**Expert:** Beatriz Ramírez Abella, Director of the National Women's Institute of Uruguay (INMUJERES)

**Moderator:** Mónica Zalaquett (Chile)

**Regional Rapporteurs:**

- Angélica de la Peña Gómez (Mexico)
- Guadalupe Valdez San Pedro (Dominican Republic)
- Vernella Alleyne-Toppin (Trinidad and Tobago)
- Marcela Revollo Quiroga (Bolivia)





## Presentation

**Beatriz Ramírez Abella, Director of the National Women's Institute of Uruguay (INMUJERES)**

*The full text of Ms. Ramírez Abella's presentation is provided below.*

First and foremost, we would like to thank the organizers of this important event for giving us the opportunity to discuss and reflect on 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 in 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 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 and 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 intersectionality, 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 us to avoid 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 in 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, oftentimes 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 also allowed us to survive the dominating hegemonic culture, and they have redefined the common values established by the determining principle of cultural internationalism, which constitute a central axis of the fight and struggle against racism and all forms of discrimination.

This is what gathers us all together and what has brought us to Suriname today. We have come here with a single purpose: to join efforts and establish ties of solidarity and cooperation that will contribute to the transformation process that Latin America must necessarily undertake



*Expert Beatriz Ramírez Abella  
(INMUJERES)*

in order to achieve sustainable social, productive and human development. Only then will Latin America be able to overcome its status as 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 the first generation of rights: legal and civil rights. First, the abolitionist processes and later, 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 allowed 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 studies by acknowledging their contribution to our nations. Moreover, all political platforms include 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, indigenous peoples, the LGBTQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer) community, the disabled, as well as marginalized


groups (the Dalit, Roma). All of these groups have gradually appropriated these principles and further enriched these concepts and analyses in a virtuous search for utopia, in 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 and mandatory for nation states. It was international pressure that brought 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 significant regression, and political and religious fundamentalist movements marked by intolerance and authoritarianism strove to establish themselves. It is against this backdrop that this conference took place, thus becoming a turning point in the history of mankind. The clash between single thought and intersectionality constituted a new plural, dialogical paradigm. The State, the market, and the community have taken on new roles in this era.

Latin America has been devastated by poverty and inequality, and in this context, Afro-descendant and indigenous populations have been the majority of the poor in the continent. Dictatorial regimes have tried to establish themselves through violence, and through the cultural and material exploitation of people. Despite the powerful structures supported by current imperialism, these development processes are entering a new dimension, in the same way that processes of legitimacy have restored democracy to our countries. Identity, ethnicity, gender, all 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, in 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 is concerned, they have lived in the city outskirts, in the "traditional" Afro-



*Volda Lawrence (Guyana)*

descendant boroughs. This group became actively involved in the struggle for independence. One of its members was 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, later to be caught and imprisoned by Dictator Franco. This Afro-descendant lived with Artigas until his death, survived him, and finally died in Paraguay.

The introduction of the Afro-Uruguayan population into our society has been marked by racism and different forms of discrimination. Uruguay may be considered to be in 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.

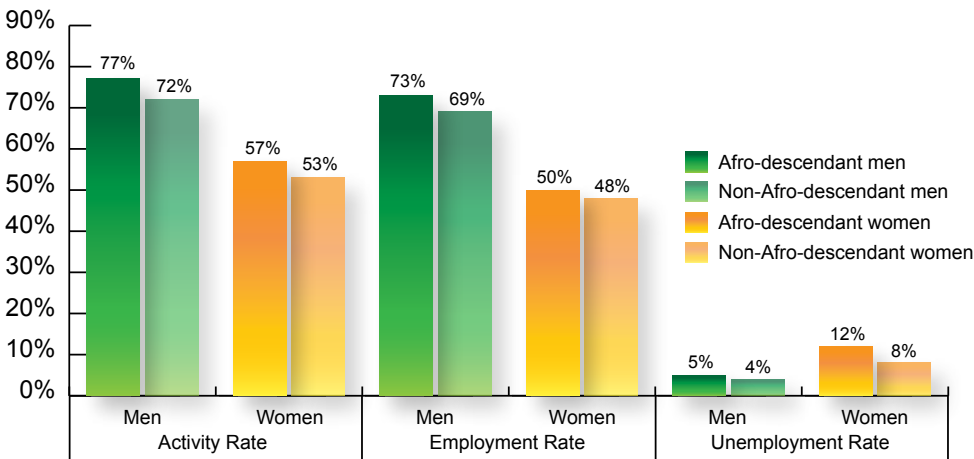
The selected tables on the following pages present figures that bear witness to this situation:<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> All figures can be found at the website [www.inmujeres.gub.uy](http://www.inmujeres.gub.uy)



Labour Market:

Table 1: Activity, Employment and Unemployment Rate, by Gender and Ethno-Racial Group (Country Total, 2011)



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



Guadalupe Valdez San Pedro (Dominican Republic), Marcela Revollo Quiroga (Bolivia), María Jeannette Ruiz Delgado (Costa Rica)



**Table 2: Afro-descendant and Non-Afro-descendant Employed Population Distribution, 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	60	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.



*Djaouida Sellah (Canada), Suzanne Fortin-Duplessis (Canada)*



*Marcela Guerra Castillo (Mexico)*

## Education:

**Table 3: % Distribution of People >24, by Gender and Ethno-Racial Group and 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 (Bachillerato)	13.7	16.3	19.0	20.4
<b>Technical Education:</b>				
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
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>

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

**Table 4: 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 (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
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>

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



**Table 5: Attendance at Educational 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
<i>Source: INMUJERES – Gender Information system, based on ECH-INE 2008.</i>		

## Income & Poverty:

**Table 6: Extremely Poor and Poor People, 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
Extremely Poor	3.9	1.3	1.5	3.3	1.3	1.5
Poor	40.6	17.9	20.2	38.6	18.2	20.4
<i>Source: INMUJERES – Gender Information system, based on ECH-INE 2008.</i>						



*Diana Pokie (Suriname),  
Patrick Kensenhuis (Suriname)*



*Francisco De la Cruz (Haiti),  
Jean-Baptiste Bien-Aimé (Haiti)*

**Table 7: Income Gap between Afro-descendants and Non-Afro-descendants (per hour, by Occupation)**

Executive Power and other Civil Servants	55.7
Professionals, scientists, intellectuals	82.5
Technicians and Professionals	82.7
Blue-collar workers	83.5
Service providers and salespersons	84.2
Farmers and skilled workers (farming and fisheries)	67.0
Officers, workers and craftsmen (mechanics and other trades)	95.4
Machinery operators/assemblers	80.2
Non-skilled workers	91.9
Armed forces	68.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>71.5</b>
<i>Source: INMUJERES – Gender Information system, based on ECH-INE 2008.</i>	

**Table 8: Income Gap among Afro-descendants and Non-Afro-descendants (per hour of work, by Literacy Level)**

Literacy Level	Income Gap per hour of work (main occupation)
Illiterate/Primary level education	88.0
Basic high-school education (incomplete)	87.8
Basic high-school education (finished)	91.1
Secondary school	76.9
College and university level	78.4
<b>Total</b>	<b>71.5</b>
<i>Source: INMUJERES – Gender Information system, based on ECH-INE 2008.</i>	



**Table 9: Average Income per hour of work, and income gap in the Afro-descendant and Non-Afro-descendant population, 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 (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
<b>Total</b>	<b>38.0</b>	<b>51.4</b>	<b>72.5</b>	<b>41.5</b>	<b>58.8</b>	<b>70.6</b>

*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 nations to develop policies, programs and actions to respond to this issue. It also confronted 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 saw racial equality mechanisms created at a central and departmental level within the Uruguayan state, marking the start of a process of institutionalization of racial issues in Uruguay. Witness to this was the enactment of several pieces of legislation, such as Law No. 17817 on the fight against racism, xenophobia and discrimination; Law No. 18059, the National Law on Candombe, 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 policies relating to gender and promotion of racial equality.

Under the new powers granted to it by law, the *Instituto Nacional de las Mujeres* (National Women's Institute) created a department to address Afro-descendant women issues (the *Departamento de las Mujeres Afrodescendientes*). This institute is a mechanism that promotes gender and racial equality and encourages actions to make gender and racial/ethnic equality a cross-cutting issue in government agencies. It also promotes actions geared toward empowering Afro-descendant women, with the objective of generating a qualified critical mass that is able to demand that its rights be respected. Since 2007, the conditions required for public policy design have been created, including the gathering of data to identify the inequalities endured by Afro-descendant women through the institute's Gender Information System. 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 gender discussions at the level of *La Escuela Nacional de Administración Pública* (the 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. These include 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. This constitutes an 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.

## Regional Perspectives

Regional rapporteurs from Mexico, Dominican Republic, Trinidad and Tobago, and Bolivia reflected on the session topic in light of the situation in their respective countries. Their presentations touched on the following questions that were presented to them:







- What is the status of the integration of women of African descent in formal leadership positions in your country?
- How is the issue of the political participation of women of African descent treated in your country?
- What challenges exist, if any? Does the legislation in your country recognize the double discrimination that women of African descent face?

### Angélica de la Peña Gómez (Mexico)

Ms. de la Peña Gómez expressed her belief that a nation's legal framework is the backbone of its democracy, which is why a country's legislation must be concordant with its adoption of international treaties on human rights. She noted that the legal framework must be defined so that it guarantees these precepts not only by definition, but in action. In Mexico, there is legislation that prevents and sanctions discrimination, and which recognizes that people of African descent, similarly to indigenous peoples, suffer multiple forms of discrimination. Ms. de la Peña Gómez proposed that participants recognize that women of African descent suffer multiple forms of discrimination, including discrimination on the basis of ethnicity, gender, age, religion, and economic status.



*Angélica de la Peña (Mexico),  
María Elena Barrera Tapia (Mexico)*

Ms. de la Peña Gómez also insisted that those in charge of guaranteeing the implementation of the law be held accountable. This means that parliamentarians must be accountable to those who elect them, especially to the women who elect them, and to organized civil society more generally. She called on fellow parliamentarians to reflect on the actions they have taken as women in positions of power to help improve the situation of other women in their societies. Finally, Ms. de la Peña Gómez called for legislation that promotes the representation of indigenous groups and Afro-descendant groups in parliament.

### **Guadalupe Valdez San Pedro (Dominican Republic)**

Ms. Valdez San Pedro noted that in Latin America, censuses show that only 1% of all legislators are of African descent and only 0.03% are women of African descent. The reality is completely different from the discourse on equality in constitutions and equality of opportunity in laws. In the majority of Latin American countries including the Dominican Republic, “We are rendering populations of African descent invisible,” she said.

Ms. Valdez San Pedro called for integrated public policy with a focus on equality of opportunity that will render these women visible. Public policy must take into account these populations in the areas of health, education and agriculture. The struggle of women of African descent must be articulated with the struggles for economic rights and for inclusion more generally. She stated that it is necessary for women of African descent to develop an agenda, and that this agenda should be at the centre of discussions on the economy. Mrs. Valdez San Pedro also insisted that the struggle of women of African descent be linked with the struggle for education, climate change, and food security so that a legislative agenda can be created that includes legal frameworks to guarantee equality of opportunity through concrete actions.

### **Vernella Alleyne-Toppin (Trinidad and Tobago)**

Ms. Alleyne-Toppin informed participants that in the Caribbean, independence has sharpened the contradictions in gender relationships. While blacks now enjoy political power, few black women enjoy this same power. She further noted that once elected or appointed to Parliament, female Members of Parliament face additional barriers and limitations to their equal participation in political decision making.

Political barriers include:

- The historical domination of politics and the political environment by the male gender
- The prevalence of male political networks (both formal and informal)
- The traditional political power structure and its bias against women





Cultural and economic barriers include:

- The perception of women's subordination to male control and the necessity of male "permission" to participate in public life
- Lack of support from the family (emotional and sharing of domestic responsibilities) and the burden of having to successfully manage domestic responsibilities and professional obligations
- Lack of adequate financial support

### **Marcela Revollo Quiroga (Bolivia)**

Ms. Revollo Quiroga asserted that the American identity is strongly marked by the presence of people of African descent, which count for a population of 150 million. She noted, however, that this massive presence has not translated into their effective inclusion in political, economic, and social decision making processes in most countries. This reality is exacerbated when it comes to women of African descent, whose experience of exclusion, subordination and access to public services is even worse.

Ms. Revollo Quiroga stated that countries such as Bolivia have approved and incorporated into their constitutions the "Law against Racism and All Forms of Discrimination". She noted, however, that the large percentage of indigenous populations has been the centre of almost all the interest of the government and of social institutions. Therefore, incorporating women of the Americas into the political agenda implies shifting our focus to the poorest women who are almost absent from public policy and who do not receive social and cultural recognition. In order to recognize women of African descent in countries where they are a minority, it is necessary to analyze the hierarchized conception with which female politicians look at women's agenda without identifying those women who suffer multiple forms of discrimination.

## **Discussion**

This section summarizes interventions made by parliamentarians during the session. While the session generated much discussion, only the

interventions that related directly to the session topic are included below.  
*Note: the comments shared reflect the views of individual participants and do not necessarily reflect the views of their countries or those of ParlAmericas.*

### **Dominican Republic**

A parliamentarian shared with participants that the Chamber of Deputies in the Dominican Republic had recently set forth a resolution to create a commission to study electoral boards in which there is discrimination against both Dominican men and women of Haitian origin. She mentioned her belief that it is necessary for women parliamentarians to develop a common agenda so that women can achieve their goals step by step. She noted that if women want parity, they must all go to their respective congresses and commissions speaking of parity.

### **Saint Lucia**

A parliamentarian noted that the topic of Afro-descendant women's leadership did not fully apply to the Caribbean region because the great majority of people are of African descent. For her, the greater issue is the lack of gender equality in parliaments. She also spoke on the importance of engaging youth in the conversation about women in politics. In addition, she suggested engaging the media so as to communicate these issues more widely and generate more general public support.

## **5. Session 3—*The Effects of the Participation of Women in Politics***

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The objective of this session was to discuss progress in the drafting of laws made possible by the participation of women in politics and the specific characteristics of their participation, and to analyze the contribution of women's participation in raising awareness on issues related to gender and women's rights.





The growing presence of women legislators in the Americas has not only produced visible progress in the kind of laws being enacted but also in the will to include a gender approach in existing laws. In this final session, parliamentarians were challenged to ask themselves the following questions:

- What concrete results have the laws against trafficking and violence towards women, and against sexual harassment produced?
- What changes have occurred with the introduction of laws on quotas, equality of opportunity, equal pay between men and women, and affirmative action in creating jobs for women?
- How does female presence contribute to raising awareness on gender and women's rights and to the commitments made in preparing national budgets?

**Expert:** Cynthia Barrow-Giles, Senior Lecturer in Politics, University of the West Indies

**Moderator:** Mónica Zalaquett (Chile)

**Regional Rapporteurs:**

- Djaouida Sellah (Canada)
- María Jeannette Ruiz Delgado (Costa Rica)
- Volda Lawrence (Guyana)

## Presentation

### *Women's Political Representation in the Commonwealth Caribbean and Latin America—A Preliminary Analysis*

**Cynthia Barrow-Giles, Senior Lecturer in Politics, University of the West Indies**

*The full text of Ms. Barrow-Giles' presentation is provided on the following pages.*



*Volda Lawrence (Guyana), María Jeannette Ruiz (Costa Rica), Expert Cynthia Barrow-Giles (University of the West Indies)*

## **REPRESENTATIONAL POLITICS: GENERAL OVERVIEW**

It is assumed that increasing the number of women in positions of political power will automatically lend itself to the reproduction of public policies and political procedures that favour women and in the process remove the intentional and unintentional biases that exist. Certainly, it is anticipated that as women are better represented in government, the agenda setting of parliamentarians will be informed by women's priorities.

The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) regards 33% as the critical mass of women required for meaningful decision making. By 2008, 24 countries surpassed the 30% target. These included Argentina, Bolivia, Costa Rica, Cuba, and Ecuador. In so far as the Caribbean is concerned, only Guyana, under its proportional representation system, comes close to this goal. In the Commonwealth Caribbean, a total number of 2,736 persons contested general elections between 1992 and 2005 (excluding Guyana). Of that total, 2,374 of them were males, with 362 females.

Given the present configuration and composition of parliaments in the Commonwealth Caribbean, women acting in their own spaces have been unable to exercise or exert much leverage with regards to the myriad of





issues that require action. Unfortunately, given the strategic institutional context of party government in the Commonwealth Caribbean, parliamentarians have been very limited. Indeed Guyanese Political Scientist, David Hinds sums up the negatives and dysfunctionality of Westminster parliamentary arrangements in this way:

*Because Westminster model in the Caribbean confers on the winning party absolute power and the losing party no power, and because the winning party is unlikely to incorporate the interests of the losing party, the stage is set for permanent conflict. Ruling parties contain or marginalize opposition parties while opposition parties try to sabotage the work of the ruling parties. This antagonism is total, because what is at stake is the power of governments to control almost every aspect of the society. This has led to a crisis of governance that is reflected in the inability of the governmental system to transform formal democracy into substantive democratic outcomes and advance the cause of nationhood (Hinds 2008).*

Latin America itself is also defined by multiple alliances which do not lend themselves to concentrated and collective action on the part of women. For example, in that regard, political differences continue to divide women in Chile today and conservative women rarely identify themselves with the work of SERNAM (National Women's Service: the women's policy machinery) or the women's movement in the country.<sup>3</sup>

### **Gaining a Foothold in Parliament**

While there are multiple sites from which women have sought to transform and set the policy agenda, parliament remains a critical area for action. Certainly at a political level, it is anticipated that the greater inclusion of women in political parties and government would bring to the political agenda their specific interests which it is claimed cannot always be represented by men. Consequently, it is expected that the larger the share of parliament seats that women occupy the greater the representation of specific women's concerns which will translate into policy action.

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3 Discussed below.



An evaluation of the bills that women parliamentarians pilot through national legislators is therefore one of the major tools that can be used to make a determination of the impact that women legislators make in advancing the cause of women nationally. However, this in itself is a daunting task as it is not easy to make a direct connection between legislation and the outcome of such legislation to women's participation in the legislative process.

In a study on agenda setting and legislation outcome, Sue Thomas argued that in legislatures where women constituted at least 20%, there was a greater tendency for women to introduce/sponsor legislation concerning women, families, and children than their male counterparts.<sup>4</sup> Where women constituted less than 10%, Thomas concluded that women and men did not differ in their sponsorship. This was further corroborated by the work of Christina Wolbrecht who found that between 1953 to 1992, women legislators in the U.S. House of Representatives, substantially changed the congressional agenda concerning women's citizenship in a number of ways.<sup>5</sup> Not only were these women pivotal to the introduction of specific legislation designed to fundamentally address women's rights, but they were also instrumental in advancing bills that diversified the scope of solutions to women's rights problems. Where such sponsorship was impractical, women worked with key male counterparts in co-sponsoring more legislation to empower women.

However, the political assumption that women in politics always represent specific women's interests is, however, far from the truth. Indeed, as the work of several persons writing on American and European politics show, political parties fundamentally shape the pursuit of women's policy issues. In a 2012 publication, Tracy L. Osborn argues that political parties do not only organize alternatives on women's issues problems, but they also create the legislative structure through which these alternatives are considered.<sup>6</sup> According to her, women run for political office as

4 Sue Thomas, *How Women Legislate*. New York: Oxford University Press.

5 Christina Wolbrecht, *The Politics of Women's Rights, Parties, Positions, and Change*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000.

6 Tracey L. Osborn, *How Women Represent Women: Political Parties, Gender and Representation in the State Legislatures*. Oxford University Press, 2012.





partisans and precisely because of that partisan identity, women enter the legislative process with ideas about how to represent women that are shaped and often limited by the party under which they sought election.<sup>7</sup> Further, Osborn contends that as legislators, women parliamentarians encounter the second effect of parties which she defines as “institutional partisan structure”, which can either enhance or reduce partisan inclinations.<sup>8</sup>

Certainly in parliamentary democracies like the Commonwealth Caribbean, given the requirement of strong party line, and collective responsibility, it is difficult for women to deviate from the party line and to influence the Cabinet of Ministers given the few women who are part of the inner circle of government. It is this which has led to the very strong view that the increased presence of women in parliament has not been sufficiently translated into changes.

What, however, have Caribbean parliamentarians been able to advance in terms of concrete proposals and legislation in areas such as human trafficking (both drug and prostitution), domestic violence legislation, sexual harassment legislation, Equal Employment Bills? Not only have such issues not been a significant part of the national conversations in several jurisdictions, but there has been little to no debate in parliaments regionally on a number of these issues. Indeed, given this under-researched area in the Commonwealth Caribbean, it is difficult, nearly impossible at this time to empirically conclude that women parliamentarians sponsor more bills dealing with the substantive areas in which it is assumed that women ought to be invested. In conversation with Judith Soares, Head of the Women and Development Unit (WAND) of the Consortium for Social Development & Research (CSDR) in Barbados, on the role and impact of female parliamentarians in pushing through that agenda, she stated, “Nothing Really. Them don’t do nothing”.<sup>9</sup> Comments like these reflect the general cynicism that many Caribbean people feel towards women parliamentarians but fail to capture some of the leg breaking work that a few Caribbean female parliamentarians

7 Tracey L. Osborn, *ibid*, 2012.

8 Tracey L. Osborn, *ibid*, 2012.

9 Cynthia Barrow-Giles, Telephone Interview Judith Soares, April 29, 2013, Barbados.

have done to advance legislation in areas such as aging. For example former parliamentarian and Minister of Social Development in Trinidad and Tobago, Penelope Beckles, is associated with the establishment of the Division of Ageing which is charged with the overall responsibility of improving and transforming the lives of the senior citizens.<sup>10</sup> Indeed, where action has been undertaken by Caribbean governments, they have been fuelled in large part by commitments to international obligations.

In Latin America, there is a growing tendency to be proactive and to increasingly place women's issues at the forefront of the policy agenda with the agenda being set by some powerful women and women's movements. For example, Michelle Bachelet's election campaign in 2005 itself focused on reform of the pension system in Chile, promoting the rights of women and indigenous people and reducing inequality in the country. The women's movement in Chile, for example, did not only play important roles in the return to democracy and its consolidation but has also been instrumental in pushing forward the agenda on the full achievement of citizenship for women. Indeed, the movement was successful in getting some of their demands incorporated into the agenda of the *Concertación de Partidos por la Democracia* (Coalition of Parties for Democracy). SERNAM, which is supposed to collaborating with the executive branch in achieving equality for women, is a concrete illustration of that success.<sup>11</sup> SERNAM's existence is largely responsible for the creation of the Equal Opportunities Plan for Women that stipulated the obligation of all state agencies to establish programmes and policies that would lead to greater equality between women and men.<sup>12</sup>

### **The Status of Domestic Violence in Latin America and the English Speaking Caribbean**

According to the United Nations report on Drugs and Crime in Latin America and the Caribbean Region of the World Bank, gender-based

10 Kerry Thomas and Cynthia Barrow-Giles, "Penelope Beckles: A Life of Social and Political Activism" in Cynthia Barrow-Giles, *Women in Caribbean Politics*, Ian Randle Publishers, 2011.

11 Patricia Richards, *Pobladoras, Indigenas, and the State: Conflict over Women's Rights in Chile*, p.48

12 Richards, *Ibid*, p.55.





violence in the region is pervasive.<sup>13</sup> Domestic violence legislation is therefore an absolute necessity. In that regard, nearly 30 countries have enacted legislation against domestic violence. But unfortunately it continues to be pervasive. According to the Saint Kitts and Nevis NGO, Change Centre (NGO: Domestic Violence-related):

*Domestic violence is very prevalent. It tends to be swept under the rug because the society tends to consider it a private family issue, and parents are generally embarrassed when children are abused and normally will not say anything. There may be pockets of outcry, but generally only from organizations and not individuals. The country is a very small island, and there is a high degree of fear and embarrassment.*

*Since the Domestic Violence Bill, awareness has been heightened and people are more likely to speak out. However, perpetrators are generally being let go. Charges may be brought against some, but of those, few come to the court because there is either some kind of bribery within the family, cover-ups, etc.<sup>14</sup>*

In 1991, Trinidad and Tobago became the first English speaking Caribbean country to pass a Domestic Violence Act. Among other things the Act grants victims the right to petition courts for orders of protection against their abusers. An amended Act of 1999 broadened the categories of persons to whom the domestic violence law applied. In Jamaica, the enactment of such legislation has also led to the establishment of The Centre for Investigation of Sexual Offences and Child Abuse. This is a special investigative unit within the police force, whose major role is to help foster an enabling environment that seeks to encourage victims of domestic violence to report sexual victimization, undertake efficient and effective investigation of allegations of sexual abuse, provide rehabilitation of victims and increase public education on the issue of sexual victimization.

<sup>13</sup> Report No. 37820, *Crime, Violence, and Development: Trends, Costs, and Policy Options in the Caribbean*, March 2007. A Joint Report by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime and the Latin America and the Caribbean Region of the World Bank.

<sup>14</sup> Change Centre (NGO: Domestic Violence-related), retrieved April 29, 2013.

Ecuador has been one of the main countries leading the charge to end domestic violence and has not only succeeded in passing effective legislation but has also established a number of public awareness programmes and female-run police stations. Police stations known as *Comisarías de la Mujer y la Familia* (Police stations for Women and Families) were established in 1981.

**Table 1. Status of National Legislation on Domestic Violence in Latin America and the Caribbean**

Country	YEAR PASSED	National Legislation/ Year of Enactment
Anguilla		2011
Antigua and Barbuda		1999
Argentina		1994
Bahamas	1991	1991 (amended in 2007)
Barbados		1992
Belize		1992 (amended 2007)
Bolivia		1995
Brazil		(included in the federal constitution, 1988 and a specific legislative decree, 1995)
Chile	1993	1994
Colombia		1996
Costa Rica	1994	1996
Dominica		2001
Dominican Republic		1997
Ecuador		1995
El Salvador		1996
Grenada	2001	2001 (replaced 2010)
Guatemala	1990	1999
Guyana		1996
Honduras		1997
Jamaica	1995	1996 (amended 2004)
Mexico		1996
Nicaragua		1996
Panama		1999

Paraguay (2000)		2000
Peru (1997)	1993 and 1997	1993 (strengthened 1997)
Puerto Rico (1995-1996)		1989
Saint Kitts and Nevis	2001	2005
Saint Lucia		1995 (revised 2005)
Saint Vincent and the Grenadines		1995
Trinidad and Tobago	1991	1991 (strengthened 1999 )
Uruguay		1995

### Status of National Legislation on Sexual Harassment

In 1991, the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) developed model legislation for the member states which was aimed at addressing the growing problem.<sup>15</sup> The model legislation addresses sexual harassment as a labour relations problem and provides civil remedies for those harassed at work. The legislation extends to educational institutions, as well as to sexual harassment in relation to accommodation. It remained, however, for the individual Caribbean countries to carry forward legislative action. In that regard Belize was one of the first countries to enact specific legislation with the Protection Against Sexual Harassment Act, 1996, followed by Jamaica in 2007, when the government enacted its Anti-Sexual Harassment Bill. Other CARICOM countries like the Bahamas address this issue under the Sexual Offences and Domestic Violence Act, 1991, which makes sexual harassment a criminal offence. Elsewhere in the region, the common law can be used to provide remedies to persons who are victims of sexual harassment in the workplace by reliance on the law of torts (duty of care) and the law of contract (breach of implied trust/constructive dismissal). Barbados, however, is currently in the process of designing a sexual harassment bill which is being sponsored by Minister of Labour, Esther Byer-Suckoo, herself a former elected parliamentarian under the 2008-2013 Democratic Labour Party administration. In 2011 Byer-Suckoo publicly stated that the draft legislation was in the making for 15 years but had not yet moved beyond the Executive level, largely because there, the political opportunity structure was absent both institutionally and environmentally. According to her:

<sup>15</sup> CARICOM model legislation on sexual harassment, CARICOM Secretariat, Georgetown, Guyana.

*I do not have as much support as I would like to have with this legislation as there are still a lot of people who are afraid of this legislation. They think that it would disrupt our society, that it is going to threaten every man and the way he relates to any woman and they think it will threaten the viability of small businesses by bringing tension in the workplace.<sup>16</sup>*



Denise Daley (Jamaica)

In this very candid comment, Byer-Suckoo summed up the general inability of female parliamentarians in the Commonwealth Caribbean to advance women's issues without the necessary alliance of male counterparts. In explaining the lack of a more aggressive progression of the legislation, Byer-Suckoo pointed to the tendency of the agenda setting for policy debate to be determined or co-sponsored by key male political figures. According

to her, a male champion of the legislation was necessary in order to take the discussion "out of the realm of that combative nature of men against women".<sup>17</sup>

Although most Latin American countries prohibit sexual harassment in the workplace, up to the late 1990s, similar situations were obtained in most Latin American countries. Costa Rica, however, was quite proactive in this regard with a comprehensive law that extends beyond the workplace. The Costa Rican legislation penalizes sexual harassment both in the workplace and educational establishments. Of note too is the legislation on sexual harassment in El Salvador which makes provision for penalties of imprisonment of up to two years.

In the last decade, however, several countries in Latin America have sought to both strengthen existing legislation and enact specific legislation on sexual harassment, most notably Chile in 2005.

<sup>16</sup> "Suckoo: Join me in push for sexual harassment law," posted 4/9/2011, retrieved 30 April 2013, The Barbados Advocate (online).

<sup>17</sup> Ibid, The Barbados Advocate (online).





**Table 2. Status of Sexual Harassment Laws in Selected Latin American Countries**

Country	Law	Year
Belize	Protection Against Sexual Harassment Act	1996
Chile	Law 20.005 on Sexual Harassment in the Workplace	2005
Costa Rica	Law no. 7476 on Sexual Harassment in Employment and Teaching	1995
Jamaica	Anti-Sexual Harassment Bill	2007

### **Status of Legislation on Human Trafficking**

Several Latin American and English speaking Caribbean countries serve as sources, transit, and destination country for people (including children) trafficked primarily for the purposes of sexual exploitation and forced labour.<sup>18</sup> In Guyana, for example, the majority of trafficking appears to take place in remote mining camps where both Amerindian girls and boys are trafficked to brothels near the camps and to coastal areas for sexual exploitation and domestic servitude and mine workers respectively. In addition, the trafficking of Guyanese women and girls for sexual exploitation to other CARICOM countries such as Barbados, Trinidad and Tobago, Brazil, Suriname, and Venezuela occurs quite frequently. Only quite recently in Barbados, three individuals (one of whom is a female in her 70s) were charged with human trafficking in relation to five young Guyanese girls who were brought into the country for “the purpose of exploitation”. These young women were apparently working in a brothel in the capital city. While the president of the Barbados Workers Union has voiced his concerns, I do not recall any female politician/parliamentarian commenting on the issue.<sup>19</sup>

Young Guyanese males are also exploited in several Caribbean jurisdictions. However, only two jurisdictions have enacted laws which are designed to address the issue. In 2003 Belize enacted the Trafficking in Persons Prohibition Act which was followed in 2007 in Jamaica when the government passed its Trafficking in Persons (Prevention, Suppression

<sup>18</sup> Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative (CHRI) London, Human Trafficking Concerns in the Commonwealth Caribbean: the 2009 U.S. State Department Trafficking in Persons Report in focus.

<sup>19</sup> Sir Leroy Trotman addressing the congregation at the BWU’s annual thanksgiving service 28 April 2013. See “Sir Roy be Wary of Human trafficking”, EL, The Advocate, Wednesday 01/05/2013, p.4.

and Punishment Act). Human trafficking is prohibited under Belize domestic law by the Trafficking in Persons Prohibition Act of 2003.

As vexing as the trafficking of women, girls and boys is, both for the purpose of sexual and labour exploitation, equally important is the use of girls and women as drug mules by narco traffickers. This, unfortunately, is an arena which has not been dealt with in any serious way and the criminal justice system appears to deal with such persons in a much more severe fashion than they do males.

## **Conclusion**

While the nation states of the region have signed on to a number of international agreements, action at the national level lags behind those stated commitments. Women parliamentarians have no doubt made a significant contribution towards the development of a more just society, however we must continue to devise strategies to not only consolidate those gains but also expand into areas that are still uncharted.

## **Regional Perspectives**

Rapporteurs from Canada, Costa Rica and Guyana discussed initiatives led by female parliamentarians in their countries and how these contributions have been effective in promoting gender equality and women's rights. The regional rapporteurs for this section were asked to reflect on the following questions:

- In your country, how is women's participation in politics influencing legislation?
- If women's participation is not having an effect on legislation, why is this?
- What are the concrete results of women's increased participation in politics?
- Is greater representation of women in politics synonymous with the passing of legislation that is more reflective of women's issues and promotes gender equality?





### **Djaouida Sellah (Canada)**

Ms. Sellah shared with participants that women are represented at the highest levels of provincial politics in Canada but gender equality, although a principle of the Canadian Constitution since 1982, has still not been fully achieved. Contrary to other countries, Canada does not have any quotas for the participation of women in political parties. The New Democratic Party is the only political party that has a policy in favour of under-represented groups, which includes women.

Ms. Sellah stated that the presence of women has had an important effect on public policy. She noted that each draft law in her party is analyzed through a gender lens. The prominence of women has allowed her party to put forward issues that would be otherwise forgotten, for example, in the study of economic policies or in the budget. She acknowledged that these visions are undoubtedly accentuated by the proportion of women in the different caucuses and that the increasing number of women in Parliament has allowed her party to advance causes that help women. Ms. Sellah also indicated that in order to be representative of the different perspectives of the population, parliaments must be diverse in terms of age, profession, ethnic origin, language, and of course, gender.

### **María Jeannette Ruiz Delgado (Costa Rica)**

Ms. Ruiz Delgado began by stating that the role of women in politics is not only a question of presence but of impact. Costa Rica has been at the forefront of the struggle for women to occupy decision making positions; however, there is still much to be done in the way of legislation. Costa Rica has a female president and recently, a woman was elected to be the President of the Judicial System, which further reflects the country's confidence in women leaders. Ms. Ruiz Delgado commented that 38.5% of the members of the Legislative Assembly are women, due to reform of the Electoral Code in 1996, which established that political parties must assure that women represent 40% of party structures as well as district, cantonal and provincial assemblies. In 2009, another modification to the Electoral Code was approved in favour of gender parity in representation. This modification will be in effect in the upcoming electoral period.

Ms. Ruiz Delgado explained that Costa Rica's Legislative Assembly has a gender unit which is the organ that coordinates the Women's Commission. Gender is also a cross-cutting theme in the country's Institutional Strategic Plan, whereby 80% of the annual operating plan of each department must have a minimum of one action related to gender. Political parties also have resources from the State for training, in which it is obligatory to discuss women's issues.

### **Volda Lawrence (Guyana)**

Ms. Lawrence expressed her belief that the increase in women's participation in Guyanese legislation is critical and that it has increased political stability in her society as well as the stability and continuity of political parties. She stated that there is absolutely no doubt that greater representation of women in politics is synonymous with the passing of legislation which reflects and supports women's issues. The growing number of women legislators in Guyana has produced visible progress not only in the kind of laws being enacted but also in the will to include a gender approach in existing laws. In Guyana, women legislators have piloted many bills and motions which address issues such as child care, salaries for nurses and teachers, subsidies for secondary education, public health immunization, children born out of wedlock, equal rights, domestic violence, medical termination of pregnancy, age of consent, and disabilities. Ms. Lawrence asserted that women legislators have played a significant role not only in passing laws but in highlighting issues that are important to women.

## **Discussion**

This section summarizes interventions made by parliamentarians during the session.

*Note: the comments shared reflect the views of individual participants and do not necessarily reflect the views of their countries or those of ParlAmericas.*

### **Antigua and Barbuda**

A parliamentarian explained that the pressure on female politicians is excessive and unfair and that there are many more male politicians that women themselves have put in office. The parliamentarian asked why





women do not pressure the male politicians for whom they vote and ask them what they are doing to earn their votes. She noted that women are giving away too much of their power, and putting all the responsibilities on the few female politicians that exist.

### Colombia

A parliamentarian stated that it is necessary to strive for women to compose 50% of Congress. While women should be present on electoral lists, the composition of Congress is even more important, so that women can have a greater impact on issues that affect them. The parliamentarian called for the State to be accountable in Colombia, and noted the importance of effective political accountability in the implementation and socialization of laws in society. She also called for the empowerment of women through education and she pointed out that the educative process must be carried out not only with women (women's daughters and granddaughters) but also with men.

### Cuba

A parliamentarian explained that in Cuba, women make up 48% of the National Assembly and women's involvement in politics is a government necessity. However, despite this situation, more focus needs to be placed on educating people. She commented on the need to work on preventing the perpetuation of stereotypes regarding the roles of men and women and on the importance of working with young people in order to transform the stereotypes.

### Mexico

A parliamentarian noted that empowerment and emancipation of women must also be economic. She shared with participants that Mexico has a law for specific gender-sensitive budgets which touch on different areas, including economics. The law offers soft loans and cheap credits to rural women so that they can start a business or a remunerated activity.

## **Jamaica**

A parliamentarian expressed the opinion that numbers do matter in parliament. She said she would like to see more women in Parliament and more ongoing training for these women. She stated that it is necessary for women parliamentarians today to look in their constituencies for potential younger female parliamentarians and to begin to encourage, mentor and train them.

## **Trinidad and Tobago**

A parliamentarian noted that her party, The People's National Movement, has established a party school where young promising adults, including females, are nurtured and schooled in ideology and party affairs so that they can rise to political stardom. It is at the level of the political party, said the parliamentarian, that political education must be formalized. She recommended that parliamentarians focus on policy that strives to narrow the poverty gap in order to ensure that women's economic and capital base is improved. In her experience, a good way to do so is through land redistribution which is not an expense to the State and opens up avenues for improving women's economic circumstances.


## **Suriname**

A Member of Parliament emphasized the importance of training all new parliamentarians. She shared with participants that Suriname has adopted a capacity building program for parliamentarians and held sessions on many subjects such as finance and accountability. Experts were hired to support this program. All parliamentarians regardless of party affiliation had access to the same information. The program included a strategy for improving the political participation of women, which has allowed them to obtain funding for activities. All parties, government and opposition alike are invited, and women are given the floor and the opportunity to address the nation so that they can be candidates in 2015. This program, she stated, has empowered women and given them political capital.

## **Haiti**

A parliamentarian highlighted the need to continue to fight for the rights of vulnerable people. This fight, he stated, cannot be led by women alone.





Men must take part, and must be conscious that their mothers, wives, and daughters are women. The parliamentarian further stated his belief that the support of men parliamentarians is required to pass the legislation proposed by women that seek to offer more space to women. The fight for women's rights, he insisted, is not simply a fight for a quota, but a fight for the environment, for health, for human rights, and for improving the lives of women, men, and children and especially those that are vulnerable.

## 6. Keynote Address

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### ***Women in Power: Recent Changes in the Political Arena—A Vision from the Latin American Experience***

**Maureen Clarke Clarke**

**President of the Inter-American Commission of Women (CIM)**

**Minister of the Status of Women of Costa Rica**

**Executive Director of the National Women's Institute of Costa Rica**

In her keynote address, Ms. Clarke Clarke stated that from a gender perspective, it is clear that women in patriarchal societies are kept from fully enjoying their rights due to the sociocultural system which discriminates against them. Similarly, she noted, the diverse groups of organized women have raised their voices to show that they are the victims of multiple forms of discrimination. Women of African descent, in some countries, suffer from a triple discrimination where they are not able to access economic resources, which places them in a situation of vulnerability and disadvantage compared to other women.



*Expert Maureen Clarke Clarke  
(National Women's Institute of  
Costa Rica)*

Ms. Clarke Clarke explained that in order to discuss the recognition of rights, we must start at the construction of new social, political, cultural, and economic articulations that recognize all citizens as equals starting



from their diversities. We must overcome the tendency to see power as neutral, as though the formal recognition of equality automatically situates everyone in the same space of rights and opportunities. She insisted that the State's inclusion of new subjects must take place through affirmative actions such as quotas, which have proven to be positive for the political participation of neutral majorities.

Ms. Clarke Clarke explained, however, that the quota system has not facilitated parity of racial participation, which in her opinion is the result of the neutrality of these policies. The political participation of women in general is urgent, she commented, but so also is the participation of women of African descent. It is therefore necessary for the agenda of Afro-descendant women to be taken into consideration in decision making processes and for their voices to be heard. As indicated by the United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (CEPAL),

*The remaining challenge is to look back at the treaties, the pacts and the international declarations, relating the dimensions of ethnicity, race and gender in order to collect the accumulated knowledge that exists, and integrate these contributions into public policies that address poverty.<sup>20</sup>*

Ms. Clarke Clarke shared some of the research compiled by the Inter-Parliamentary Union on the opinions and experiences of men and women parliamentarians at the international level:

- While the number of women in parliaments has increased in the last decade, in 2008, women occupied less than 18% of all parliamentary seats.
- Women parliamentarians are not a homogeneous group but they can share interests. There is a tendency to emphasize social problems, the elimination of gender-based violence, poverty reduction, development including human development, and the provision of services. However, many women parliamentarians are interested in areas that were previously considered to be in men's domain, such as fiscal and exterior policies.

<sup>20</sup> <http://www.eclac.cl/mujer/noticias/paginas/8/29198/InformePobrez.pdf>



- Cultural prejudices and perceptions of the role of women, as well as the lack of financial resources, continue to present themselves as obstacles to the political participation of women.
- It is necessary to advance on themes that have direct implications for the effective political participation of women at all decision making levels, such as the issue of caring as a social responsibility.
- Harassment and political violence discourage the political participation of women, yet there are no mechanisms that prohibit these situations.
- It is necessary to engage male parliamentarians and political parties to commit to equality in their principles as well as in practice.
- The link between women parliamentarians and women's groups and citizens must be encouraged.
- It is important to continue encouraging women parliamentary networks and policies that transcend individual party interests and visions and promote instead the construction of a multi-party agenda.

Democracy, Ms. Clarke Clarke stated, is indebted to women, especially women of African descent. Sustainable human development cannot exist if women's contributions, interests and demands continue to be rendered invisible.

In her final statement, Ms Clarke Clarke issued the following demands:

*We demand greater participation at all levels. We demand that the prejudices and stereotypes that render us invisible and situate us in a private sphere and men in the political and public spheres be eliminated. We demand policies with a gender focus and we demand that we advance from a position that allows us to make the specificities of our societies visible so that they include us democratically in all the forms we exercise our rights.*

## 7. Closing Remarks

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Dr. Jennifer Simons delivered the closing remarks for the Gathering. She thanked participants for having contributed to the discussion on women's participation in politics and the direction and sustainability of our current democratic systems and economic models. She noted that the Gathering put to the table, especially for countries in which the percentage of women in parliament has reached or surpassed 30%, the questions "Where do we go from here?" and "What are the next steps?"

Dr. Simons asked participants to keep in mind two fundamental issues that are important for communities at large, but more specifically for women. In her words, these are as follows:

1. We will have to create a more sustainable political, economic system with more room to achieve well-being for all. We can start by using new ways to evaluate our economies. Tools like the genuine progress indicator could be useful as a first step in that direction.
2. It is necessary to strengthen democracy through the participation of citizens in public decision making and by improving the transparency of political parties specifically with respect to the processes by which they put forward candidates for election to parliament or to the executive presidency.

Dr. Simons commented that it has become clear that it is necessary to have enough women in parliament in order to have a chance for change, but that this in and of itself does not guarantee change. It is very important, she noted, for other conditions to be in place, such as cooperation between men and women. "To be able to fly we need both wings," she said. Dr. Simons explained that both female and male perspectives are necessary in order to have a complete picture of humanity, but cooperation is also very important on a practical level, just to get the votes necessary for change.



Dr. Simons closed her speech by noting that parliamentarians have work to do. While discussion is important, more important still is that ideas be translated into action plans and that the actions that have been marked as important for each country be implemented.

## 8. Recommendations

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At the end of each session, the moderators invited parliamentarians to propose recommendations based on the information presented to guide future legislative action. All draft recommendations were translated and distributed to participants for their comments. The recommendations presented below incorporate the input of participants and were approved during the final session of the Gathering.

### Women Presidents of National Legislatures

#### We recommend:

1. Encouraging ParlAmericas member states to support legislation that sets effective quotas for electing or appointing women to parliaments, and that establishes effective, transparent and gradual processes toward parity, ensuring women obtain competitive spaces on election lists. States should take measures to have a critical mass of women in parliaments so that they are in a position to impact the decision making processes of their countries. States should not rely on quotas alone, which are necessary but insufficient to achieve the stated goal, but should do so to facilitate gender parity in parliamentary representation.
2. Encouraging female politicians to take assertive action to increase and maintain the representation of women in parliaments, in order to support one another within political parties. Further, that action be taken to ensure that women who are elected or appointed receive on-going support from their parties, and from other parliamentarians, and have access to training programs.

3. Holding a summit to consider the new challenges and current realities facing women and develop strategies to address these realities through a focused hemispheric agenda.

## **Leadership and Political Participation of Women of African Descent**

### **We recommend:**

1. Ensuring the institutionalization of gender equality public policies, which includes proportionally women of African descent, and where such institutionalization exists, it be adequately strengthened through laws, norms, and decrees in order to generate the necessary social, cultural, and economic changes. Sufficient budgetary resources must be allocated to the institutionalization process in order to bring forward the changes.
2. Seeking more open and transparent gender equality processes, and defining strategies to achieve the stated objectives, while demanding governmental accountability in order to combat the perpetuation of the patriarchal system.
3. Asserting that the contribution of this political vision guarantee that all women be the subjects of rights, particularly women of African descent, who are the target of multiple forms of discrimination.
4. Creating formal mechanisms of support to promote cooperation and collaboration between civil society organizations and elected representatives.

## **The Effects of Women's Participation in Politics**

### **We recommend:**

1. Encouraging political parties to give women incentive to join their parties in order to promote women's political empowerment. Striving to attain 50% representation of women in parliament in order to move forward an important new agenda.





2. Engaging the cooperation of all women and men, including leaders, as strategic allies in order to achieve the cultural and social transformations, where women, who comprise more than 50% of the population of the Americas, see their rights taken into consideration by public policy and government programs. In order to advance, it is crucial that women occupy decision making positions within parties and that a stable majority be created with men.
3. Educating and training men and women from all regions of ParlAmericas, and providing orientation in parliamentary processes, building capacity and training those who are not aware of the various dimensions of their position.

Further, influencing the educational systems of our countries so that they are based on a form of education free of sexist and patriarchal stereotypes which prevent the recognition of men and women as equals.

4. Fostering that our parliaments dedicate national resources to the economic empowerment of women, promoting credit programs for women who wish to undertake business actions, and allocating financial resources within the Budget to programs that support women's participation in the productive processes of their countries.

# APPENDICES

## Appendix 1 – Meeting Agenda

### Annual Gathering of the Group of Women Parliamentarians “Women in Power: Recent Changes in the Political Arena” Paramaribo, Suriname – May 16-17, 2013

#### May 15

19:00 - 21:30	Welcome Reception
	Welcoming words by the Secretary of the GoWP, Mónica Zalaquett (Chile) – <i>Member of the Chamber of Deputies</i>

#### May 16

08:00 - 09:00	Accreditation of Participants
09:00 - 09:45	Official Inauguration
	Words from the Acting President of the GoWP and Host of the Gathering, Hon. Jennifer Simons (Suriname) – <i>Speaker of the National Assembly</i>
09:45 - 12:45	<b>Session 1:</b> Women Presidents of National Legislatures
	Hon. Jennifer Simons (Suriname) – <i>Speaker of the National Assembly</i>
	Hon. Gisele Isaac-Arrindell (Antigua and Barbuda) – <i>Speaker of the House of Representatives</i>
12:45 - 14:15	Lunch







14:15 - 17:15	<b>Session 2: Leadership and Political Participation of Women of African Descent</b>  Expert: Beatriz Ramírez Abella (Uruguay) – <i>Director of the National Women’s Institute of Uruguay (INMUJERES)</i>
17:15 - 17:30	Official Photograph
19:00	Dinner

## May 17

09:00 - 12:00	<b>Session 3: The Effects of Women’s Participation in Politics</b>  Expert: Cynthia Barrow Giles (St. Lucia) – <i>Senior Lecturer in Politics, University of the West Indies</i>
12:00 - 13:00	Keynote Speaker: Maureen Clarke Clarke (Costa Rica) – <i>President of the Inter-American Commission of Women (CIM); Minister of the Status of Women of Costa Rica; Executive Director of the National Women’s Institute of Costa Rica</i>
13:00 - 14:15	Lunch
14:15 - 17:00	<b>Review draft conclusions and agree to final document</b>
17:00	Closing Remarks

## Appendix 2 – List of Participants

### PARLIAMENTARIANS

#### **Antigua and Barbuda**

Gisele Isaac-Arrindell, Speaker of the House of Representatives  
Winston Williams Jr., Senator and Acting Minister of Education, Sports,  
Youth and Gender Affairs

#### **Bolivia**

Marcela Revollo Quiroga, Member of the Chamber of Deputies

#### **Canada**

Suzanne Fortin-Duplessis, Senator  
Djaouida Sellah, Member of Parliament  
Susan Truppe, Member of Parliament

#### **Chile**

Ignacio Urrutia, Member of the Chamber of Deputies  
Mónica Zalaquett, Member of the Chamber of Deputies

#### **Colombia**

Nancy Castillo García, Representative

#### **Costa Rica**

Pilar Porras Zúñiga, Member of the Legislative Assembly  
María Jeannette Ruiz Delgado, Member of the Legislative Assembly

#### **Cuba**

Rosmeris Santiesteban Lago, Member of the National Assembly

#### **Dominica**

Gloria Shillingford, Representative and Minister of Social Services,  
Community Development and Gender Affairs





## **Dominican Republic**

Ysabel De la Cruz, Member of the Chamber of Deputies

Guadalupe Valdez San Pedro, Member of the Chamber of Deputies

## **El Salvador**

Marta Lorena Araujo, Member of the Legislative Assembly

Ana Vilma Castro de Cabrera, Member of the Legislative Assembly

## **Guyana**

Volda Lawrence, Member of Parliament

## **Haiti**

Jean-Baptiste Bien-Aimé, Senator

Francisco De la Cruz, Senator

## **Honduras**

Corina Alvarado Lagos, Member of Congress

Claudio Perdomo, Member of Congress

## **Jamaica**

Denise Daley, Member of Parliament

## **Mexico**

Consuelo Argüelles Loya, Member of the Chamber of Deputies

Delvim Bárcenas Nieves, Member of the Chamber of Deputies

María Elena Barrera Tapia, Senator

Angélica De La Peña, Senator

Marcela Guerra Castillo, Senator

Delfina Elizabeth Guzmán Díaz, Member of the Chamber of Deputies

Sonia Rincón Chanona, Member of the Chamber of Deputies

Laura Guadalupe Vargas Vargas, Member of the Chamber of Deputies

## **Nicaragua**

Martha González Dávila, Member of the National Assembly

## **Paraguay**

Clarissa Marín de López, Senator

María Roa Rojas, Senator

## **Saint Lucia**

Berthia Parle, Senator and Deputy President of the Senate

## **Suriname**

Marinus Bee, Member of the National Assembly

Carl Breeveld, Member of the National Assembly

Dipakkoemar Chitan, Member of the National Assembly

Martha Djojoseparto, Member of the National Assembly

Ramses Kajoeramari, Member of the National Assembly

Patrick Kensenhuis, Member of the National Assembly

André Misiekaba, Member of the National Assembly

Diana Pokie, Member of the National Assembly

Henk Ramnandanlal, Member of the National Assembly

Dr. Jennifer Simons, Speaker of the National Assembly

Lekhram Soerdjan, Member of the National Assembly

Jenny Warsodikromo, Member of the National Assembly

Ruth Wijdenbosch, Member of the National Assembly

RefanoWongsoredjo, Member of the National Assembly

Rudolf Zeeman, Member of the National Assembly

## **The Bahamas**

Cheryl Bazard, Senator

## **Trinidad and Tobago**

Vernella Alleyne-Toppin, Member of Parliament

Paula Gopee-Scoon, Member of Parliament

## **Experts**

### **Costa Rica**

Maureen Clarke Clarke, President of the Inter-American Commission of Women (CIM), Minister of the Status of Women of Costa Rica, Executive Director of the National Women's Institute of Costa Rica





## **Saint Lucia**

Cynthia Barrow-Giles, Senior Lecturer in Politics, University of the West Indies

## **Uruguay**

Angélica Beatriz Ramírez Abella, Director of the National Women's Institute of Uruguay (INMUJERES)

## **Observers and Others**

Reshma Alladin

Milton Castelan

Orlando Chicango

Guyanne Lalande-Desforges

Jacqueline Phillip-Stoute

## **Appendix 3 – Speaker Biographies**

### **Dr. Jennifer Simons**

#### **Speaker of the National Assembly of Suriname**

Dr. Jennifer Simons' compassion for people motivated her to study medicine, a discipline in which she has been active as a practitioner (MD), a university lecturer, and a policy maker in public health areas such as HIV and Dermatology. In addition, her involvement in education innovation and development includes the founding of EDUCONS, an NGO promoting ICT (Information and Communication Technology) in education and distance learning. It also includes the instalment of computers in schools and the training over 40,000 students and workers in basic to advanced ICT skills. She also introduced distance education in Suriname. In 1996 she entered politics as a representative of the National Democratic Party (NDP) and since then she has been elected to Parliament three times. In 2010, she was voted Speaker of the House, and used her previous experience as a member to initiate an ambitious Institutional Strengthening Program for Parliament. She also initiated the Association of Parliamentarians for the Development of Children and Youth.

### **Gisele Isaac-Arrindell**

#### **Speaker of the House of Representatives of Antigua and Barbuda**

Gisele Isaac-Arrindell is a full time advocate for women's rights in the classroom, and in her roles as part-time Speaker of the House of Representatives of Antigua and Barbuda, part-time lecturer in the University of the West Indies, and radio program host and newspaper columnist. In addition, she is employed as the Executive Director of the Board of Education, the financial arm of the Ministry of Education. She has authored a novel and two movie screenplays, and is an avid lover and commentator in the music genre of calypso. She holds a Master's degree in Government and Politics and a Bachelor's degree, summa cum laude, in Journalism from St. John's University in New York.

### **Beatriz Ramírez Abella**

#### **Director of the National Women's Institute of Uruguay (INMUJERES)**

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 focusing on the double discrimination faced by women of the Afro-Uruguayan community. She was the founder of the ACSUN Youth Groups (Black Cultural and Social Association, 1973) and cofounder of the Afro World Organization (1988). She also cofounded the Network of Afro-Latin and Afro-Caribbean Women (Dominican Republic, 1992) and acted as Coordinator of the Southern Cone Region between 1996 and 2006. In 2001, she founded the Strategic Alliance for African Americans (2001). In 2005, she joined Uruguay's National Women's Institute of the Ministry of Social Development (INMUJERES). Beatriz Ramírez Abella was named Head of the Department of Afro-Descendant Women in 2009 and Director of INMUJERES in 2010.

### **Cynthia Barrow-Giles**

#### **Senior Lecturer in Politics, University of the West Indies**

At the University of the West Indies, Cynthia Barrow-Giles served as Deputy Dean of the Faculty of Social Sciences (1994-1996) and as Head of Department of Government, Sociology and Social Work (2004-2006). She has authored, co-authored, edited and co-edited 4 books and numerous journal articles.





In addition to her scholarly work, she has participated in a number of Election Monitoring and Expert Groups in Asia, Africa and the Caribbean. She served as a member of the Saint Lucia Constitution Reform Commission and as a member of the International Advisory Board for the (Journal) Round Table (Commonwealth), and is a member of the Editorial Board of the Journal of Eastern Caribbean Affairs.

### **Maureen Clarke Clarke**

**President of the Inter-American Commission of Women (CIM)**

**Minister of the Status of Women of Costa Rica**

**Executive Director of the National Women's Institute of Costa Rica**

Maureen Clarke Clarke currently serves as the President of the Inter-American Commission of Women (CIM) (2013-2015), as Minister for the Status of Women and as Executive President of the National Institute of Women (INAMU) of Costa Rica (2011-2014), where she is responsible for the implementation of the National Policy on Gender Equality and Equity (PIEG) 2007-2017 and its Action Plan 2008-2012. Previously, she served as Deputy Mayor of San José (2007-2010), where she led the formulation of the Municipal Plan for Gender Equity, as Minister of Justice and Grace (1995-1996) and was the first woman Minister of Governance and Policy (1994-1995). During her tenure, she served as the President of the Centre for Joint Anti-Drug Intelligence (CICAD), whose aim is to fight against illegal drug trafficking and related crimes.



# SOCIAL PHOTOGRAPHS



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1. *Francisco De la Cruz (Haiti), Jean-Baptiste Bien-Aimé (Haiti), Martha González Dávila (Nicaragua), Marta Lorena Araujo (El Salvador), Ana Vilma Castro de Cabrera (El Salvador), Corina Alvarado Lagos (Honduras), Claudio Perdomo (Honduras)*
2. *Ysabel De la Cruz (Dominican Republic), Guadalupe Valdez San Pedro (Dominican Republic), Jennifer Simons (Suriname), Cheryl Bazard (The Bahamas), Gloria Shillingford (Dominica)*
3. *Paula Gopee-Scoon (Trinidad and Tobago), Vernella Alleyne-Toppin (Trinidad and Tobago), Jacqueline Phillip-Stoute (Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago), Expert Cynthia Barrow-Giles (University of the West Indies)*





4. *Ignacio Urrutia (Chile), Jennifer Simons (Suriname), Mónica Zalaquett (Chile)*
5. *Randy Hoback (Canada)*
6. *Randy Hoback (Canada), Martha González Dávila (Nicaragua), Jennifer Simons (Suriname), Marta Lorena Araujo (El Salvador)*

# SOCIAL PHOTOGRAPHS



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7. Jennifer Simons (Suriname)
8. Refano Wongsoredjo (Suriname), Ramses Kajoeramari (Suriname), Jenny Warsodikromo (Suriname)
9. Susan Truppe (Canada) and her husband Walter Truppe, Suzanne Fortin-Duplessis (Canada)
10. Mónica Zalaquett (Chile), Martha González Dávila (Nicaragua), Marcela Guerra Castillo (Mexico)







11. Orlando Chicango (Husband of Nancy Castillo), Jean-Baptiste Bien Aimé (Haiti), Francisco De la Cruz (Haiti), Ysabel De la Cruz (Dominican Republic), Guadalupe Valdez San Pedro (Dominican Republic), Claudio Perdomo (Honduras), Gina Hill (ParlAmericas)
12. Laura Gaudalupe Vargas Vargas (Mexico), Delvim Bárcenas Nieves (Mexico), Sonia Rincón Chanona (Mexico), Delfina Guzmán Díaz (Mexico)
13. Sonia Rincón Chanona (Mexico), Martha Djojoseparto (Suriname)
14. Martha Djojoseparto (Suriname), Guyanne Lalande-Desforges (ParlAmericas, Canadian Section), Gina Hill (ParlAmericas).



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