



Annual Gathering organized by the Group of  
Women Parliamentarians of ParlAmericas:

# **Action Plan for Preventing Political Harassment and Violence Against Women**

**BUENOS AIRES AND TERMAS DE RÍO HONDO, ARGENTINA**

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We express our thanks to all **guest speakers, panellists and delegates** for their thoughtful and active participation, as well as to the parliamentarians who participated virtually in the gathering.

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# A message from the President of the Group of Women Parliamentarians of ParlAmericas

Dear colleagues,

Regardless of the varied cultural and political landscapes we navigate, as women we experience politics differently – and negatively so. One of the primary obstacles to women’s empowerment in the political sphere is harassment and violence. While the term “political harassment” is seldom heard in the mainstream, it is clear that women are subjected to violence where the gender gap is greatest, such as in the competitive arena of parliamentary politics. We have come a long way in the fight for equality, yet politically ambitious women are still perceived as a threat to many men.

In June, legislators from across the continent gathered to discuss the urgency of legal sanctions and electoral reforms to address political harassment.

More importantly, they discussed how to prevent it in the first place, examining the underlying causes of gender discrimination and how it is reproduced in our societies. Through these exchanges facilitated by ParlAmericas, we uncovered common struggles and developed new ideas to put forth in our legislatures.

For more than a decade, our Group of Women Parliamentarians has carried out this type of work to revitalize our region’s legislatures in favour of human rights and to make our members – men and women alike – champions for gender equality. We believe that men in power must share responsibility for creating more and better spaces for women’s decision making, and that they must respond meaningfully to women’s policy concerns.

While I regrettably could not attend the gathering in person, the message that resonated clearly, if from afar, was that we are ready to coordinate efforts to combat political harassment. The way forward is our Action Plan and support for one another in fulfilling the commitments made. I invite you to circulate this report and the resources on ParlAmericas’ website among your peers, and to continue to share with us progress made towards eradicating gender-based violence.

Politics needs women’s full, autonomous participation. The problems facing our countries and the region at large require women’s perspectives, leadership and bold solutions.



Sincerely,

*Jennifer Simons*

Speaker of the National Assembly of Suriname

# About ParlAmericas

ParlAmericas – the network of the national legislatures of member states of the Organization of American States (OAS) – serves as an **independent forum for parliamentarians** of the Americas dedicated to cooperative political dialogue and participation in the inter-American system. Since 2001, ParlAmericas has created a supportive **professional community** for parliamentarians through regional forums, training opportunities, year-round discussions, and follow-up actions. ParlAmericas is a space to share experiences and best practices on issues of hemispheric concern and to strengthen the ties between the countries of the hemisphere through parliamentary diplomacy.

ParlAmericas is managed by parliamentarians for parliamentarians, with a current board of directors representing 16 member legislatures from North, Central and South America and the Caribbean.



# About the 2015 gathering organized by the Group of Women Parliamentarians



This year's annual gathering organized by the Group of Women Parliamentarians convened more than 75 participants including parliamentarians, former parliamentarians, civil society activists, and other parliamentary stakeholders from Argentina, Bolivia, Canada, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, El Salvador, Jamaica, Mexico, Nicaragua and Panama (see the appendix for the participants list). The central topic of this gathering, titled ***Action Plan for Preventing Political Harassment and Violence Against Women***, was selected after political harassment surfaced as a top concern in the strategic planning session held during the Group's 2014 gathering (see the appendix for the strategic plan).

**“The persistent issue of political harassment against women is a barrier and a problem which must urgently be eradicated. This is an imperative if we are to make progress towards exercising all of our political rights and bridging the gap so that other women may also do so. This is our task for the historic moment in which we are currently living.**

MARCELA GUERRA,  
President of ParlAmericas and  
host of the 2014 gathering

The Group of Women Parliamentarians is a permanent working group of ParlAmericas. Since 2003, it has promoted respect for women's human rights and inclusion of a gender lens on the legislative agendas of member parliaments. The Group provides inter-parliamentary spaces to exchange knowledge from a gender equality perspective, and its activities strengthen the political capacities of women and men parliamentarians committed to advancing women's empowerment.



# What is political harassment?

Political harassment, a form of gender-based violence committed against people active in public and political life, is a fundamental barrier to women's participation in decision making. This violence reinforces traditional gender roles and male-dominated political structures, and it undermines the quality of democracy, development and human rights. From municipalities to national parliaments, political harassment or violence is a widespread yet under-examined problem.

## Examples of political violence:

- Pressuring or forcing women to resign from elected office
- Acts of sexual, physical or psychological violence against women active in politics

- Politically-motivated abuse of authority over women professionals in public office
- Threatening the security of the families of women political leaders
- Slander and libel, especially of a sexual nature
- Femicide of women political leaders

In May 2012, Bolivia passed the Law against Political Harassment and Violence against Women, result of more than a decade of advocacy by women's groups and political leaders. This groundbreaking legislation has been influential in the drafting of bills in other countries of the Americas region.



## BOLIVIAN LAW 243 DEFINES:

**Political harassment:** An act or set of acts of pressure, persecution, harassment or threats committed by one person or a group of persons, directly or through third parties, against women who are candidates, elected, designated or exercising a public/political role or against their families, with the purpose of reducing, suspending, preventing or restricting the functions inherent to their positions, to induce or oblige them to carry out, against their will, an act or omission in the performance of their functions or in the exercise of their rights.

**Political violence:** Physical, psychological or sexual actions, conduct and/or aggression committed by one person or a group of persons, directly or through third parties, against women who are candidates, elected, designated or exercising a public/political role, or against their families, to reduce, suspend, prevent or restrict the exercise of their position or to induce or oblige them to carry out, against their will, an act or omission in the performance of their functions or in the exercise of their rights.

For more information, including legal frameworks, studies and videos, visit the [political violence resource hub](#) on the [ParlAmericas website](#).



# Inauguration in Buenos Aires

June 11, 2015

The gathering's official inauguration was carried out at the Congress of the Argentine Nation and featured welcoming remarks from Member of the Chamber of Deputies of Argentina **Aída Ruiz** (host of the gathering); Senator of Mexico **Marcela Guerra** (President of

ParlAmericas); Member of the Chamber of Deputies of Chile **Claudia Nogueira** (Vice-President of the Group of Women Parliamentarians); and Member of the Chamber of Deputies of Argentina **Juliana Di Tullio** (head of the Frente para la Victoria party bloc).





“The debate over parity [representation] is evidence that citizens are not neutral, that citizenship is built from masculine models, and that access to representation occurs within a sexualized context fostering women’s structural – not accidental – exclusion. Political violence against women brings to light this tension of a hegemonic order of things clashing with a new, underlying order. As an expression of that new order, we are carrying out this event in a country with a woman president, and in a province that is also governed by a woman.

- AÍDA RUIZ



“When dealing with an issue as sensitive as political harassment and violence, legislation is insufficient. Action is what is required to banish this affliction of the political world. That action is what has convened us in Argentina since, as you know, during this gathering we are discussing an Action Plan with five concrete points which, aside from orienting our legislative tasks, will also be of great use in transforming entirely the political arena of our societies.

- MARCELA GUERRA



“In a world dominated by men, there are high costs associated with raising our voices and carrying out active roles in politics. But our efforts come with great rewards, since democratic institutions benefit from the decision making of an important and representative sector of society. We must not forget that the electorate is composed of large numbers of women from many spheres, facing similar problems but also distinct ones. This enriches our discussions of the legislative issues.

- CLAUDIA NOGUEIRA



“We know it more than anyone: the media is the most opportune sphere for women exercising a political role ... [to be] discredited on the grounds of our political speech and action, and on our role as women. The President of the Republic ... has been victim ... of ongoing disqualification and ongoing violence ... Eradicating [this violence] depends not only on us and our lawmaking, but rather on a much deeper cultural change. We know this cultural change is difficult, but it requires our personal commitment.

- JULIANA DI TULLIO

# Welcome to Termas de Río Hondo, Santiago del Estero

June 12, 2015

The program of the first day opened upon the delegates' arrival in the city of Termas de Río Hondo, where the **governor of Santiago del Estero province, Claudia Ledesma Abdala**, welcomed them.

“As a woman, I would like to underscore the importance of the theme that has brought you together today: the prevention of political harassment against women. This will involve confronting great challenges and showing great commitment. It is very important that we are able to dialogue and exchange experiences, cooperating across the continent from the different places where you carry out your parliamentary duties. I think we should not only approach this theme from a gender point of view, but rather approach it as the fundamental building block of democracy and human rights.

- CLAUDIA LEDESMA





# Keynote address on Bolivia's Law 243



In her keynote, former parliamentarian **Ingrid Zabala** provided a behind-the-scenes look at Bolivia's Law 243 and the persistent efforts leading to its historic passing in 2012. She described some of the favourable circumstances that helped mobilize support for the bill, such as a political climate of social inclusion, and the swiftly growing representation of women in parliament.<sup>1</sup> Ms. Zavala noted, however, that the law's advocates were originally confronted with strong generalized resistance from fellow legislators. Among the primary claims were that such a law was

unnecessary, and that criminalizing political violence against women would be discriminatory to men. Ms. Zabala described the strategies she employed to extend the bill's debate on the floor of the lower chamber, and the positive impact of alliances with women in the opposition in addition to members of her own party.

In the months and years before the bill was passed, its supporters in parliament worked alongside the tireless feminist groups that raised awareness across the country. Among the earliest advocates was ACOBOL, or the Association of Women Councillors of Bolivia.

ACOBOL also led the efforts to document hundreds of occurrences of political harassment. Though more than 400 formal complaints had been filed, Ms. Zavala noted that the pivotal shift in public opinion and political positions occurred following the tragic deaths of two councilwomen.

“As a reaction to the loss of absolute political power by patriarchal society ... various new forms of violence have emerged, including political harassment ... We want to put a stop to the deaths of women who venture into public spaces.

- INGRID ZABALA

Ms. Zabala observed that a number of challenges remain with regards to the effective implementation of Law 243. For instance, a set of regulations corresponding to the law have yet to be passed, and systematic follow-up on hundreds of complaints is also pending. Greater participation by male allies is essential to accelerating progress towards the goal of eradicating political harassment, and finally, she stressed the importance of collaborating with other parliaments

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<sup>1</sup> In 2012 the speakers of Bolivia's senate and chamber of deputies were women.



and international actors to better coordinate work in this area.

Before concluding, Ms. Zabala presented ParlAmericas' Action Plan, the primary working document for the gathering. The document outlines promising practices corresponding to five areas of activity.

1. Apply multisectoral approaches to the prevention of gender-based political harassment/violence
2. Engage men in the empowerment of women in politics at all levels
3. Hold political parties accountable for gender equality
4. Create an enabling environment to raise the issue of political harassment/violence for public and parliamentary debate
5. Present policies, bills or reforms on political harassment/violence, and once passed ensure compliance by the corresponding institutions

See the appendix for the full text of "Preventing Political Harassment and Violence Against Women: An Action Plan for Parliamentarians."

## Delegation progress reports

Following the keynote, a representative of each parliament in attendance at the gathering updated the Group on gender equality matters in their country over the previous year. Their reports centred on legislative work on the three priority areas identified

in the strategic planning at the previous gathering: **prevention of violence against women, women's labour and economic empowerment, and women's political leadership.**

### IN THE WORDS OF THE DELEGATES

*"Reflecting on the question ... Why do we need women in politics? I have never [been asked], why do we need men in politics? We are always asking these types of questions about women. The truth is that parliaments need to reflect the composition of our citizens. And that is not happening at all.*

- MAYA FERNÁNDEZ ALLENDE (CHILE)



# Women and politics in the Americas: A presentation by UN Women's Irune Aguirrezabal



making alongside men at all levels of government, contributes to good governance and the achievement of sustainable development. Furthermore it a requirement to advance towards real democracy that is effective and inclusive.

- IRUNE AGUIRREZABAL

## IN THE WORDS OF THE DELEGATES

“I learned about forms of political harassment and violence that I thought no longer occurred so frequently in 2015. The review of Bolivia's law was helpful for me, I better understand its implications and that allows me to better think through these topics to combat [the problem].

- LAURA TUÑON (ARGENTINA)

June 13, 2015

To open the second day of the gathering, **Irune Aguirrezabal** unpacked the strategic approach to women's political empowerment developed by UN Women's Regional Office for the Americas and the Caribbean. Ms. Aguirrezabal began by posing a question that was being analyzed at the gathering: **why do we need women in politics?** She stated that first,

women's quantitative and qualitative representation in politics signals justice and democratic legitimacy. Second, it ensures more perspectives are included in decision making, resulting in better public policies. Third, it has a multiplying effect whereby women leaders inspire other women to follow their path.

“Women's political empowerment and equal participation in political decision

## The good and the bad

Ms. Aguirrezabal shared encouraging regional data: at 26.3%, the percentage of women in national parliaments is higher than the global average of 22%, and the Latin American and Caribbean region boasts the highest percentage of women ministers, aside from the Nordic countries. Additionally, there are five women heads of state and four women speakers of legislative chambers. The region's relative success in increasing women's political participation, Ms. Aguirrezabal explained, can be attributed to feminist movements and political networks (e.g. all-party women's caucuses), international conferences and agreements (e.g. CEDAW and Belem do Pará), and affirmative action policies (particularly gender quotas).

Despite these advances, most legislatures are far from achieving parity. Furthermore, progress is uneven within countries, with some of the starkest inequalities in political participation occurring in municipalities. Ms.

Aguirrezabal pointed out that while women are highly visible and influential leaders in their communities, it seems they are unable to transition from informal to formal politics. The obstacles to women's participation in politics vary and must be considered within historic, socio-economic, political and cultural contexts; yet certain structural factors transcend borders:

- Sexist stereotypes that reinforce political/public life as masculine
- Lack of equitable distribution of house and care work between men and women
- "Men's club" attitudes within political parties
- Limited access to gender-sensitive support networks
- Lower levels of self confidence and experience in public administration (actual or perceived, due to social norms and expectations)
- Political harassment and violence



## A theory for change: Towards parity democracy

UN Women's vision for a new social order is premised on **parity democracy**. The objectives of parity democracy are: 1) to promote parity representation (through affirmative action), 2) to mainstream

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*“Often we women do not know how to recognize it. Or we are products of the society we have been raised in, and we become accustomed to seeing it and not saying anything, of being complicit in the silence until we come to think it is normal. Fortunately, today the problem is made visible and ... we carry the struggle forward that unites us. Hopefully soon the day will come when this fight will cease to exist, because the problem no longer exists.”*

- VERÓNICA RODRÍGUEZ (ECUADOR)



gender in policies, actions and institutions, 3) to strengthen women's leadership, 4) to promote substantive equality in political parties, and 5) to fight discrimination, gender stereotypes and political violence.

In her discussion of political violence, Ms. Aguirrezabal remarked that some studies indicate the phenomenon may in fact be worsening in correlation to the success of gender quotas. Though the theory has not been proven unequivocally, she noted that the parliamentary seats occupied today by women were not empty; rather, they used to be held by men, who may be reacting aggressively against the loss of political power

"[The Quito Consensus recognizes that] parity is one of the key driving forces of democracy, that its aim is to achieve equality in the exercise of power, in decision-making, in mechanisms of social and political participation and representation, in diverse types of family relations, and in social, economic, political and cultural relations, and that it constitutes a goal for the eradication of women's structural exclusion."

– 10<sup>TH</sup> SESSION OF THE REGIONAL CONFERENCE ON WOMEN IN LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN, ECLAC, 2007

and control. Whether harassment is in fact on the rise in the region, or whether it is reported with greater frequently as a result of awareness raising – now is the time to put an end to it. If we cannot extinguish political harassment, she advised, legislation on gender quotas or parity representation is of little value.

**“In order to combat political violence and harassment against women, legislation is important but insufficient. More measures, the political will to apply them, resources and sanctions are lacking.**

- IRUNE AGUIRREZABAL

In conclusion Ms. Aguirrezabal underscored that the concept of parity democracy extends beyond politics. It requires a transformation of gender relations based on substantive equality and shared responsibilities in public and private life. On a policy level, its fulfillment will necessitate a comprehensive, long-term vision and strategic synergies.

To learn more, consult [UN Women's Political Empowerment of Women: Framework for Strategic Action in Latin America and the Caribbean, 2014-2017.](#) (See p. 64-65 for more on political harassment.)





# Grounding the debates: An exchange with local women's groups

Next, the delegates heard from members of civil society and gained a better understanding of how the issues under debate impact the lives of women in Santiago del Estero. In a panel discussion moderated by Ms. Aguirrezabal, representatives of women's organizations from rural and urban areas shared firsthand knowledge of the status of local women.

The president of the *Asociación de Fomento de Villa Robles*, Dora Corvalán, spoke first of the challenges facing *campesinas*. The association's work with agricultural forums has revealed that traditional gender roles and family responsibilities hinder the participation of *campesinas* in public decision making, especially in remote communities where many women struggle

to negotiate household work with their husbands. In Ms. Corvalán's view, authorities could help improve this situation by facilitating opportunities for women's economic advancement and dignified employment. Furthermore she believed the media should be regulated to prevent reinforcing pejorative stereotypes about women's roles and responsibilities.



## IN THE WORDS OF THE DELEGATES

“It is clear to me that we must raise awareness broadly, across all sectors of society ... Although we have made good progress in my country, there is much to do before the day women's participation is seen as truly natural, and men do not resist this participation ... [This is] a very important topic and more work must be done on it.

- JUAN MANUEL FÓCIL PÉREZ (MEXICO)



Cecilia Sampaolesi, president of the organization *Liberar*, agreed with Ms. Corvalán and gave examples of similar difficulties in the urban neighbourhoods of Ciudad La Banda. Ms. Sampaolesi was encouraged by the province's progressive legislation against gender violence and by the more methodical documentation of violence against women in recent years. The next steps for state authorities, in her opinion, would be to follow through on action plans and ensure that women who choose to report violence are accompanied throughout the legal process. Lastly, she called for sustainable financial support to organizations working directly with women to promote their wellbeing in public and private life.

“In our talks there are always a few men and they speak proudly of how they help

with housework, and how everything has changed, and that women can work [outside the home] ... But the word ‘help’ says it all: there is no shared sense of responsibility.

- CECILIA SAMPAOLESI

In the dialogue that followed, parliamentarians expressed their agreement with the panellists and affirmed that laws must be “socialized” – or widely accessible and comprehensible to the general public – in order to succeed in empowering women and deterring gender violence. The delegates also prioritized legislative action to foster respect and equality in primary school curricula, and they shared the concerns regarding media portrayals of women.

# Preventing political harassment: Parliamentary perspectives

Next, five delegates participated in another dynamic panel session, moderated by **the gathering's facilitator Keila González**. The panel featured legislators and former legislators known for their strong stances against gender violence and political harassment: **Ligia Fallas Rodríguez**, Member of the Legislative Assembly of Costa Rica; **Diego Vintimilla**, Member of the National Assembly of Ecuador; **Sheila Copps**, Former Deputy Prime Minister of Canada; **Sandra Generoso**, Judge of the Court of Appeals and former provincial legislator of Santiago del Estero, Argentina; and **Margarita Flores**, Senator of Mexico. The panellists initiated their conversation by reflecting on the problem and why they are passionate about eradicating it.

## Background on the struggles to overcome political harassment

To begin, Ms. Fallas recounted the resistance she encountered when she wanted to join the national leadership of the trade union movement in which she had long participated in Costa Rica. Even after

securing a senior position on the board, her male colleagues singled her out and expected her to make them coffee. This sort of minimization of her leadership continued once she reached the legislative assembly as well, she said, where women are neither viewed nor treated as equals.

Next, Mr. Vintimilla said that ending political harassment is important because democracy is simply not viable without women. He envisioned a profound and just democracy in which everyone intrinsically values women's participation, and he opposed a narrow-minded focus on representation, as it runs the risk of women being viewed as place fillers or adornments. He observed that one of the innumerable contributions of women's leadership is that it drives new ways of doing politics.

**“Greetings to *todas*. Generally when women are the majority – in the same way that when men are the majority we say “*todos*” and it is assumed to refer to “*todas*” – let us speak of everyone as “*todas*” to see how this exercise helps generate new language forms.**

- DIEGO VINTIMILLA



In her remarks Ms. Copps emphasized that gender inequality and harassment are questions of negotiating political power. The tiny group at the top of the pyramid, she said, is composed of men of primarily white/European, urban backgrounds and class privilege; groups in power attempt to divide minorities because they understand the potential of collective



power to sweep away sexism, racism, classism, and all the other –isms. “Nobody will give you power. You take power,” Ms. Copps asserted, “because the people who have power over the media, power over education, and power in politics do not want to give it up.”

Like all the women panellists, Ms. Generoso related that she had been a frequent target of harassment while serving as legislator. Public commentary bypassed her ideas and the quality or quantity of her legislative projects, and instead focused on speculations about her sex life. On a related note, she said, the media has scrutinized and fixated on President Cristina Kirchner’s mental health, deeming her “crazy” in highly gendered terms. Ms. Generoso was unsurprised by these types of double standards aimed at undermining women, given that they come from the same root of patriarchy.

The other panellists’ accounts also illustrated the frequency and severity of political violence and the way it is routinely ignored or dismissed. Senator Flores shared an example from her country of the gender-based public critique of politicians. During a recent reform process, protesters targeted individual legislators, calling the men “traitors” and “thieves,” while the insults hurled at women were based on sex or sexuality. “You’re a public figure, a minority in a man’s world,” said Ms. Copps, who was the only elected woman from her party when she started her political career. “I have been called – in parliament – a slut. I have been called ‘baby.’ I have been called a



whore ... They do that to get you down. But do not get down, because you are the people that will make the changes by taking power.”

## Awareness and coordination inside and out of parliament

One of the predominant obstacles to addressing gender-based political violence, according to Ms. Fallas, is that generally speaking, fellow parliamentarians neither comprehend nor recognize the problem. She described how a male colleague harassed her at a

### IN THE WORDS OF THE DELEGATES

“I have been able to hear testimonies of so many women who have lived through violence in politics, and it has made me aware that the problem is not one of underdeveloped countries or nations but of the entire world.

- HUGH BUCHANAN (JAMAICA)



meeting of a commission to which he did not even belong. He continued to harass her until she filed a formal complaint. This parliamentarian confronted her in disbelief, and made comments implying that only rape attempts could be considered harassment. She pointed out the absurdity of such thinking, and that the sexualized verbal harassment with which she had been targeted would never have been directed at someone like the male speaker of the assembly. Ms. Fallas said

that we desperately need broader awareness within parliaments and in society at large.

From her past experience as director of the National System for Integral Family Development (known as DIF) in Nayarit state, Senator Flores recalled how approximately 90% of the women who come forward to report violence ended up withdrawing their report. The issue of victim safety is therefore also paramount.

She said that Mexico's General Law on Women's Access to a Life Free of Violence has guided her country's efforts to coordinate with other sectors for holistic responses. Today, for instance, there are service centres to support women through the reporting process.

Ms. Generoso elaborated on the critical need to mainstream gender equality in institutional settings. She mentioned that Law 26.485 is considered



progressive, and it criminalizes various types of violence (such as “symbolic violence”); administrative penalties have also been established, for example, for failure to respond swiftly to victims. As she noted, however, “Equality cannot be built by laws alone unfortunately.” Ms. Generoso recommended greater investment in gender-sensitivity training in the police force, where reports of violence are received, and

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“Despite the large obstacles faced on a day to day basis, as parliamentarians from diverse chambers in Latin America, we will not give up the struggle for a just and egalitarian society. It is interesting to learn of the distinctive approaches and to have engagement reflecting very opposing ideological views. We recognize that this is a structural issue and that it comes from the same root problem.

- LIGIA FALLAS (COSTA RICA)

within the judicial branch, where laws are upheld. After all, people aren’t born “machista” – it is learned, and therefore possible to unlearn.

“We can have the best laws in the world but if we do not work on gender-sensitivity among judicial and law enforcement authorities, we will never achieve this.

- SANDRA GENEROSO

Mr. Vintimilla added that embracing feminism as liberation could set the foundation to dismantle patriarchy and build a better world, free also from patterns of colonialism. He illustrated connections between patriarchal violence and the global economic model. Ms. Copps agreed but remarked on the complications of fighting on economic grounds in our current globalized world where international bodies can make decisions impacting the lives of the most vulnerable populations, bypassing national legislatures.

The influence of the media was another of the complexities debated by the panellists. There was widespread agreement on the fact that traditional and social media can simultaneously be breeding grounds for political violence, and also an ideal platform from which to denounce it and reshape discriminatory societal views. Ms. Copps recommended moving the fight of media representation out of feminist circles and taking the issue directly to the ministries responsible for communications. As an example, she described an impactful Canadian policy developed in the late 1990s

that requires television stations to detail long-term plans on inclusivity in studio production and programming, in order to renew their broadcasting license. She proposed that something similar could be done in other countries to ensure more positive and realistic portrayals of women, Indigenous peoples and minorities.

## Cross-party solidarity among women in parliament

Another recurring stream of conversation was the solidarity among women from opposing political parties who put aside ideological differences to take joint action against gender discrimination. Ms. Fallas had recently united efforts with a colleague to tackle the issue of political harassment, despite that, as she explained, “I am from the political left – and my party is the farthest left. And my colleague here, she is from the libertarian movement of the extreme right.”

“The patriarchy of the right is the same as the patriarchy of the left.

- LIGIA FALLAS

Senator Flores added that there is a negative stereotype of women as being unsupportive of other women’s leadership. “I have heard it said that women do not vote for women. That is a myth,” she remarked, citing the results of the recent legislative elections in Mexico.





“Women *do* support other women.

- MARGARITA FLORES

“[This is] not to disrespect men who support women, but I think we women spend a lot of time applauding men who support women. We do not spend enough time applauding women who support women.

- SHEILA COPPS

The panellists considered it essential to coordinate efforts with other institutions, movements and organizations. Ms. Copps explained that in Canada, the organization Equal Voice serves as a multi-partisan

platform to advocate for electing more women to all levels of public office. Its advisory board includes a number of former women parliamentarians. As she stated, “It is easier to be more aggressive against political parties when you are no longer active.”

To share a local example of mobilization, Ms. Generoso spoke of the ***Ni Una Menos*** (“Not one less”) movement that had recently emerged to bring attention to the high rates of femicide and other gender violence across Argentina. The call is coming from below, she said, and is resonating in important spaces of articulation between civil society and political parties. Mr. Vintimilla spoke of another influential movement, HeForShe, which engages men to put an end to gender inequality. This UN campaign is

an opportunity for legislators to demonstrate to the electorate a lifelong, serious commitment to fulfilling the demands of equality in everyday life, and not in the context of voter outreach, he said.

In light of the difficulty of getting gender issues on the legislative agenda, Ms. Fallas considered incentives that might propel more action to end violence against women in politics and in all spheres of life. She suggested that one strategy would be to extend recognition once a year for the best work undertaken in legislative chambers. While there is no single recipe for success, Ms. Fallas was of the opinion that the focus on prevention as opposed to sanctions was vital. Ms. Copps also brought up the positive influence of political trailblazers. “We need to show our young women that they have leaders and models,” she said.

Senator Flores echoed these sentiments, and said women parliamentarians should pave the way for other women to join their parties and should recognize those who helped us get where we are. Each of us has stories to tell, she said, of challenges overcome. This could inspire and generate more opportunities among the younger generation.

## Plenary discussion

In the question and answer session that followed, the panellists and other delegates exchanged views on the topics broached. Several delegates took the opportunity to expose in the presence of their peers

specific instances of ongoing harassment against them in online and offline spaces. Others raised the importance of ParlAmericas as an independent forum where women parliamentarians could speak out against cases of harassment,<sup>2</sup> since their parties and legislative chambers are not always inviting spaces to do so. Delving into next steps and solutions, priority was placed on prevention-oriented outreach campaigns and primary education that promotes respect and egalitarian relationships. Discussions frequently referenced the media and political parties as key spaces for challenging the very discrimination that has historically been reproduced there.



## Developing solutions: Working group session

Following the panel, delegates engaged in rounds of discussion in working groups, with each of the groups focused on one of the five lines of activity presented in the gathering's Action Plan. They deliberated the concrete activities that could contribute to implementing the promising practices identified, the obstacles to implementing these activities, and the alliances necessary to make progress over the long term. A spokesperson from each working group reported in plenary on the opinions shared, the key recurring points and the conclusions reached.

During these multinational working group discussions, the delegates gained insight on vastly different experiences with addressing gender-based political violence – if it was being addressed within the legislative branch at all.

*“In my country sexual and workplace harassment is criminalized in the penal code, but not political violence specifically. The issue is not addressed at an institutional level, though feminist organizations are speaking out against political violence...”*

*“We have passed laws that criminalize it and there is*

*public policy programming being carried out to raise awareness...”*

*“It occurs often, but it is rarely spoken of.”*

*“In my opinion this problem is largely unknown, though that does not mean there are no relevant battles being undertaken...”*

*“In my country ... the gender quota has just recently been applied, so there is little sensitivity towards this topic...”*

Their discussions therefore revolved around the exchange of different legislative practices and lessons from both continuing struggles and concrete achievements. In spite of their heterogeneous national realities, the delegates were passionate about using their positions of influence to amplify the voices of women and other politically marginalized groups, which had been their common motivation for entering politics.

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<sup>2</sup> ParlAmericas is currently developing an interactive map with the video testimonies of parliamentarians from across the region sharing their experience with political violence and work aimed at eradicating it. At the gathering, participants filmed interviews which will be included on the map.



## Commitments: Ending political violence and strengthening ParlAmericas' network for gender equality

The delegates then developed commitments of individual and collective work to be carried out in line with the Action Plan. They posted these publicly so that everyone could take note of one another's commitments and offer support to their colleagues.<sup>3</sup>



<sup>3</sup> At the time of publication a number of delegates have already fulfilled their commitments. ParlAmericas will continue to monitor progress on these activities in collaboration with member parliaments.

"I commit to driving the debate forward on incorporating the crime of political violence in our electoral law."

"I commit to raising awareness on this topic among my male colleagues."

"I commit to promoting and training women on their political and social rights, and to also raising awareness about defending these rights."

"I commit to sponsoring a reform to the special comprehensive law for a life free from violence, to include political violence in the types of violence."

"I commit to organizing forums to bring to light what political harassment/violence is, and to publicly denounce it through a social media campaign."

"I commit to circulating information about the laws we have passed and to sharing how we are raising awareness about those that are under debate."

"I commit to participating in any ParlAmericas campaign on political violence in any country, by sharing my testimony."

"I commit to supporting ParlAmericas in compiling input, statistics and best practices in my city or country."

"I commit to disseminating the group's Action Plan and promising practices in my parliament, and also to disseminate these through interviews with the media."

# Pledge of commitment to UN Women's HeForShe movement

Before the conference drew to a close, the men in attendance participated in a **signing ceremony** to join UN Women's solidarity movement, HeForShe. The HeForShe campaign for gender equality was launched in 2014 to engage men and boys to be advocates and agents of change for the achievement of gender equality and women's rights. It encourages men to speak out and take action against injustices faced by women and girls, and to challenge gender stereotyping. The ceremony was led by Ms. Aguirrezabal of UN

Women, who spoke about the movement's impact in the Americas region and how legislators are ideally placed to mobilize the campaign back in their parliaments and communities.

As the HeForShe representative in Ecuador and in his assembly, Mr. Vintimilla also shared some reflections for the occasion of the ceremony. Throughout his speech, he quoted a number of women activists, scholars and philosophers; he did this, he mentioned,

lest we assume that men were or are the only great thought leaders. Recognizing women's invisibilized accomplishments is part of the campaign's mandate, he explained. The work that has been done from the bottom upwards is generally more significant than what is being done at the top.

Furthermore, gender discrimination does not solely victimize women. It constrains the freedom of all genders, and it hinders the development of our entire





societies. “The oppressor would not be so powerful if it did not have accomplices among the oppressed. And I am not referring to women. I am referring to men,” Mr. Vintimilla observed.

“Often we are told, even our mothers tell us: women themselves promote sexism. And I think that has such an aggressive connotation ... I think the possibility that there are men that can be vindicated as feminists may be a start, a tiny first step towards equity.

- DIEGO VINTIMILLA

He concluded by invoking the power of individuals uniting to form a larger collective consciousness to set the foundation of the world we all deserve to live in. His personal commitment to the campaign can be summed up from inspiration drawn from the movement’s global ambassador Emma Watson, who asked during the campaign launch, *“If not me, who? If not now, when?”*

**Learn more and join the movement at:**

[www.heforshe.org](http://www.heforshe.org)

#### THE HEFORSHE COMMITMENT:

“I am one of billions of men who believe equality for women is a basic human right that benefits us all. And I commit to taking action against gender discrimination and violence in order to build a more just and equal world.”



# Closing

The Gathering closed with remarks by Senator Guerra, who presented the outcomes of the gathering. Ms. Nogueira also shared closing remarks on behalf of the Executive Committee of the Group of Women Parliamentarians; and as the gathering's host, Ms. Ruiz concluded the official program.



“We concurred on the urgent need to bring attention to the issue and criminalize political harassment, either through a new law as in the case of Bolivia, or by amending sections of existing laws ... We agreed on the importance of involving the media in order to change the social behaviours that cultivate political harassment and stereotyping, [and] we secured the commitment of parliamentarians from all of the countries present to support our Action Plan and take it to their respective parliaments.

- MARCELA GUERRA

“The work undertaken allows us to advance towards the great challenge of completely eliminating this form of violence ... that all of us experience to a greater or lesser extent as decision makers or politicians. In most cases these are positions we have achieved through additional efforts, because in some way we have invaded masculine-dominated territory, forcing us to negotiate innumerable obstacles and factors that complicate our professional and family duties ... We must raise our voices against those who violate women's rights in all spaces.

- CLAUDIA NOGUEIRA

“I would like to pass on to you my vision for what will follow from this gathering. We will be the voices in our parliaments calling out for a life free of political, workplace, sexual or hierarchical harassment. A life free of harassment of any kind in which violence is displaced by fundamental respect for the uniqueness of every being. Our voices represent a wonderful opportunity life has given us to reflect the mind, heart and spirit.

- AÍDA RUIZ



#### IN THE WORDS OF THE DELEGATES

“I was able to learn about progress in other countries, and ... share the landmark work we are accomplishing in the Ecuadorian assembly which is sure to change our country's history. There is still much to be done; we must remain united. This is something we live through all the time and the examples that have been shared have made it visible.

- MARY VERDUGA (ECUADOR)

“It was important to learn about real situations of political harassment and gender violence from colleagues in other countries where these problems are experienced. We also examined applicable legislation and progress in matters of violence against women in other parliaments ... All the experiences allow us to work on this issue in a more committed and effective way.

- MIRIAM GALLARDO (ARGENTINA)

“There were things I had not before considered to be harassment but now it is clear to me.

- MANUEL HUMBERTO JUÁREZ (ARGENTINA)

“[It is] an issue that some of us have addressed. Now after this forum I have greater understanding and have become more committed to dealing with it. I believe it is right for this issue to be on our States' agendas.

- BAIRON PINARGOTE (ECUADOR)

If you are interested in participating in ParlAmericas' upcoming activities on preventing political harassment or attending another ParlAmericas meeting, please contact our International Secretariat.

# Appendix

## Preventing political harassment and violence against women: An action plan for parliamentarians

### 1 Apply multisectoral approaches to the prevention of gender-based political harassment/violence

Promising practices:

- a) Advocate for awareness campaigns to visibilize harassment against women in politics, to make all forms of gender violence (and the threat of violence) socially unacceptable, and to support legal literacy in the areas of civil and political rights.
- b) Promote early rights-based education and interventions to empower girls and guarantee their economic, social and political development.
- c) Establish effective sanctions – where appropriate – that are dissuasive, enforceable, and proportional to the offence committed.
- d) Adopt coordinated measures in the justice and health sectors to ensure immediate responses to complaints and the protection of victims and their families.
- e) Fund gender equality programs and prioritize considerations such as empirical evidence, community knowledge, and women's full participation in program design, implementation and evaluation.

### 2 Engage men in the empowerment of women in politics at all levels

Promising practices:

- a) Promote men's responsibility to advocate for gender equality and to combat all forms of violence, including political harassment.
- b) Seek out the expertise of civil society organizations that have made important gains through male-led campaigns that teach men to take a stand against gender violence.
- c) Use public platforms to demand nonviolence in both private and public spheres, as well as equitable distribution of domestic and caregiving responsibilities.
- d) Encourage men and women legislators to support women's political participation by mentoring and sharing access to decision-making spaces, and by speaking out against political harassment/violence in the media and through other public platforms.
- e) Engage male colleagues in UN Women's HeForShe movement.

### 3 Hold political parties accountable for gender equality

Promising practices:

- a) Provide financing, capacity building and professional development opportunities for women – whether candidates or already holding public office – to help overcome the barriers faced when entering or pursuing senior leadership positions in parties.
- b) Conduct a comprehensive review of internal policies and ensure that a formalized protocol and enforcement mechanism exist in order to respond



to cases of gender quota violations and violence committed within the parliamentary precinct or by male parliamentarians.

- c) Strengthen cross-party solidarity and collaboration by participating in relevant commissions, committees or caucuses that build continuity in legislative work to support women's political participation.
- d) Ensure that information about party policies is clear, accessible and communicated using inclusive language.
- e) Make political parties and parliaments parent-friendly workplaces through the provision of services such as onsite daycares and the institutionalization of policies such as flexible work schedules and paid parental leave.

#### **4 Create an enabling environment to raise the issue of political harassment/violence for public and parliamentary debate**

Promising practices:

- a) Work alongside civil society advocates to improve understanding of the spectrum of violence impacting women's lives.
- b) Propose or invoke national plans on violence against women to open up spaces for political dialogue.
- c) Utilize the media to denounce gender-based political harassment/violence and to draw attention away from women politicians' personal characteristics in favour of their contributions to policy issues.
- d) Include in public discourse the frequency and severity of political harassment/violence against women in rural areas and in subnational contexts.
- e) Collaborate with international and regional stakeholders, through forums such as the Follow-Up Mechanism to the Belém do Pará Convention (MESECVI), to foster the political will necessary to combat political harassment/violence and ensure it is taken into account in information gathering, monitoring and evaluation activities in the Americas.

#### **5 Present policies, bills or reforms on political harassment/violence, and once passed ensure compliance by the corresponding institutions**

Promising practices:

- a) Draw upon ratified international and regional women's rights conventions to support motions to criminalize all forms of gender violence (e.g. CEDAW, Belém do Pará Convention).
- b) Participate in regional networks and with organizations working on this issue from a legislative viewpoint, with an eye to tools such as the framework law (ley marco) currently being developed by the Inter-American Commission of Women (CIM).
- c) Open a combination of civil, penal, electoral and administrative avenues to receive, investigate and respond to complaints of political harassment/violence, as appropriate in the local context (e.g. through an ombudsperson's office or similar).
- d) Prioritize ease and safety of reporting and clarity of processes for survivors who choose to file formal complaints.
- e) Support ongoing gender-sensitivity training initiatives, particularly for service providers responsible for handling cases of political harassment/violence and supporting survivors.

# Strategic plan of the Group of Women Parliamentarians, 2014-2015

This strategic plan developed by the International Secretariat of ParlAmericas responds to the feedback from the 2014 Gathering of the Group of Women Parliamentarians. It will guide the direction of fundraising and programming over the next 12 months.

## Thematic Areas for Action

- Prevention of violence against women
- Women's labour and economic empowerment
- Women's political leadership

## Goals

- Maintain a line of communication among national parliamentarians of the Americas on issues of gender equality as they pertain to the above issues.
- Facilitate the acquisition of specialized knowledge and practical skills for women and men parliamentarians in order to mobilize positive change in favour of real gender equality. This is to be achieved electronically as well as in person at forums, conferences, and workshops.
- Support women's political activism and create learning opportunities for future political leaders in addition to new and/or young parliamentarians.
- Reaffirm and demonstrate commitment to engaging men in the fight for real gender equality and social development.
- Strengthen partnerships with civil society and other organizations working internationally for women's rights. Collaborate with partners on projects designed specifically for parliamentarians.

## Implementation

- Build an online platform to better disseminate information, facilitate communication, and provide inspiration for parliamentarians in member legislatures who are working on gender-sensitive laws and policies.
- Use parliamentarians' positions of influence to raise awareness and amplify efforts to prevent the spectrum of violence against women.
- Support women's economic independence and prosperity by advocating for immediate opportunities including access to resources and social services for caregivers.
- Seek mentoring opportunities to pair experienced or former women parliamentarians with aspiring candidates.
- Conduct consultations on how to better engage and educate male colleagues on gender equality and women's rights.
- Develop regional programming on women and the media, political harassment, and education systems that build inclusive cultures of respect and nonviolence.

# Participants

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**Alicia Marcela Comelli**, Member of the Chamber of Deputies  
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**Jimena Villavicencio**, Protocol

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**Marcela Guerra Castillo**, Senator

**Margarita Flores**, Senator

**María del Rocío Pineda Gochi**, Senator

**Martha Gutiérrez Manrique**, Member of the Chamber of Deputies (substitute)

**Roberto Ruíz Moronatti**, Member of the Chamber of Deputies

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