

**Commission on the Status of Women**  
Forty-ninth session  
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**PANEL VII**

**The role of regional and intergovernmental organizations  
in promoting gender equality**

Written statement\* submitted by

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\* The paper has been reproduced as submitted.

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Panel Statement: Ms. Carmen Lomellin  
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March 10, 2005

Thanks you Madame President and a very good afternoon to all here present, the delegates to the U.N. Commission on the Status of Women, the observers and the representatives of civil society. I especially want to recognize the Principal Delegates of the Inter-American Commission of Women who are here, especially its President, the Honorable Nilcea Freire of Brazil, the Vice-President, the honorable Maria Jose Argana, of Paraguay, and the Principal Delegate of the Executive Committee, Argentina, Canada, Chile, Mexico and Suriname. Acting Secretary General of the Organization of American States, the honorable Luigi Einaudi would have liked to be here but, unfortunately he had other commitments out of the United States this week. He has asked me to relay his sincerest regrets at not being able to join you this afternoon, and has asked that I congratulate you on his behalf for the outstanding work being accomplished at this meeting.

Madame President, Distinguished Delegates, it is indeed a pleasure to be here this afternoon to address you at the 49th Session of the Commission on the Status of Women. The ten year anniversary of that momentous meeting in Beijing marks a major milestone for the human rights of women. For it was at this meeting that the women of the world came together, government and civil society, together in partnership, to draft and agree on a Plan of Action that has completely redefined our common agendas, that has clearly established the importance of the role of civil society and that clearly stated that **Women's Rights are indeed Human Rights.**

I am honored to have the opportunity to share with you the work of the Inter-American Commission of the Organization of American States and of the work that we are doing in the regional context, in the ongoing dialogue on Women's Human Rights and Gender Equity and Equality. I am the Executive Secretary of the Inter-American Commission of Women of the OAS, or, the CIM, as it is known by its Spanish acronym. The CIM was established in 1928 as the first inter-governmental organization in the world created to ensure the political and civil rights of Women. Comprised of Presidentially- appointed Principal Delegates from the member States of the OAS, the CIM is the oldest regional organization dedicated to improving the status of women in the Western Hemisphere. Throughout its 76-year history, the CIM has been active in promoting the human rights of women, promoting their advancement in all spheres and, supporting a system that promotes equity and equality and access for both men and women, to the benefits of democracy. Throughout its history, the Inter-American Commission of women has addressed the issue of women's human rights and gender

equality taking into account not only the position of OAS member states, but also the input of civil society, and the agencies of the multilateral system. Within this context, we are actively working on the issues of the human rights of women, such as gender-based violence and the trafficking of women and children for the purposes of exploitation. Through the development of policies that integrate gender into major areas, such as education, labor, justice and science and technology, we actively promote increasing the capacity of women to take on positions of leadership and decision-making within their countries. I truly believe that it is in the integration of gender into institutionalized policies that we will begin to empower women and begin to see real progress, at all levels.

Within the last decade, there have been major advances in the status of women. The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), the OAS's Convention on the Prevention, Punishment, and Eradication of Violence Against Women, better known as the Convention of Belém Do Pará, and the Beijing Platform for Action have all had a definite impact in all of our ongoing efforts to guarantee the advancement of women and have completely changed the landscape of our work. As we celebrate the anniversary of the Beijing World Conference of Women, it is important to recognize that, with greater opportunities, there are great responsibilities. At the OAS, and in light of this new direction, the CIM has completely reoriented its focus and mandates in order to ensure that its functions are aligned with the changing needs of the region. It has created a new Ministerial process, directly integrating itself into one of the core OAS functions: the Summit of the Americas process.

The Summit of the Americas process, which was revitalized in 1994, brings together the Heads of State and Government of the Western Hemisphere in order to, “discuss common concerns, seek solutions and develop a shared vision for their future development of the region.”<sup>1</sup> This undertaking is no small feat, and it is within this forum that the CIM has sought to ensure that the rights of women and gender equity and equality are included and recognized. In fact, the Summit of the Americas process has recognized the CIM as the principal hemispheric forum for promoting women's human rights and gender equity and equality. Within this context, a major mandate for the Commission is to ensure that gender remains a cross-cutting theme in the Summit process.

In April of 2000, under the technical coordination of the Inter-American Commission of Women, the Organization of American States convened the first ever *Meeting of Ministers or of the Highest Ranking Authorities Responsible for the Advancement of Women in the Member States*. This meeting, followed four years later by a Second Ministerial, has completely reoriented the work of the CIM. It was at this meeting that the Ministers drafted and approved the **Inter-American Program on the Promotion of Women's Human Rights and Gender Equity and Equality (IAP)**. It was subsequently adopted by the General Assembly of the OAS as a hemispheric mandate and endorsed by the 2001 Quebec Summit of the Americas as an effective tool

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<sup>1</sup> [www.summit-americas.org](http://www.summit-americas.org)  
Summit of the Americas webpage, Introduction.

for gender mainstreaming. This is CIM's primary tool for advancing gender equity and equality in all spheres of public policy, both within the Inter-American system and in the member countries. Just as the Beijing Platform acknowledged the importance of gender mainstreaming in 1995 as one of its global strategies, the CIM has adopted a regionally focused process, which addresses the need for gender mainstreaming within the Inter-American system.

Since its adoption, the IAP has reoriented the work of the CIM and changed its modus operandi. As we are firm believers that change must start at home, it is with pride that we note that the IAP has taken effect within the OAS. With the support of the government of Canada, the CIM has coordinated the training of 200 professional program and policy officials on integrating a gender perspective within the OAS. In light of this success, the government of Canada has generously offered to continue funding a second part of the gender mainstreaming program, which will build on the success of the first phase. This is but a first step in guaranteeing that gender becomes truly integrated as a crosscutting issue in all OAS policies and programs.

We have also worked extensively to bring the IAP to our member states. The second facet of the IAP's implementation has entailed mainstreaming gender within the OAS Ministerial processes. CIM has worked at length with gender experts, both governmental and civil society, from all sectors throughout the hemisphere in order to develop and present specific recommendations and suggested lines of action on gender mainstreaming to the Ministers of Labor, Justice, Education and Science and Technology, through a process known by its Spanish Acronym, SEPIA, which stands for "Follow up to the Inter-American Program".

Another area where we have begun working in integrating a gender perspective is in the area of women, peace and security. In fact it has only recently become a priority issue for the CIM, with the approval of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 that mandates the full participation of women into all peace processes. The CIM, with the civil society organization, *Women Waging Peace*, has been active in promoting the participation of women and the inclusion of a gender perspective in matters related to peace and security in the Americas.

As a result of these efforts, the Inter-American Committee on Hemispheric Security has incorporated language regarding gender and security in the Declaration of the Special Conference on Hemispheric Security that took place in Mexico in November 2003. Additionally, the 2004 CIM Assembly of Delegates adopted the resolution "Promoting the Role of Women in Conflict Prevention, Management, and Conflict Resolution and Post Conflict Peace Building." This mandate addresses the need to promote UN Security Resolution 1325 in the Hemisphere, especially in countries where there is or has been a history of conflict. Currently, in collaboration with *Women Waging Peace* and the OAS Department of Democratic and Political Affairs, the CIM is proposing the training of stakeholders who work on peace and security issues on how to integrate a gender perspective in conflict and peace building situations.

Addressing women's human rights has been an ongoing priority for the CIM, especially in the area of violence against women. One of the key achievements in CIM's 76 year history has been the drafting and adoption of the landmark convention, the *Inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment, and Eradication of Violence against Women*. To date, the treaty has been ratified by 31 of the 34 OAS member states and is the only instrument of its kind which focuses specifically on violence against women. The adoption of this treaty sent a powerful message to the region – that there is a strong commitment to fighting violence against women. In 2000, CIM coordinated a follow up study entitled “**Violence in the Americas: A Regional Analysis Including a Review of the Convention of Belém Do Pará.**” This study points out that there have been positive trends in the fight to eliminate violence against women. In addition to greater public awareness regarding the problem, many countries have made progress in criminalizing gender based violence, and in some cases, family courts have been established to handle such cases. However it concluded that despite a greater understanding of the phenomenon of violence against women as a human rights violation, the OAS member states have yet to make significant inroads in eliminating the problem.

However, the OAS General Assembly has called for a stronger implementation of the Convention of Belem do Para.

With the support of the government of Mexico, the OAS recently convened a meeting of experts in drafting the statute of a follow-up mechanism to this convention. The member states are currently in the process of identifying experts in the area of violence against women that will comprise this ongoing effort to implement the convention and to eradicate violence against women.

CIM has also been actively working to combat another egregious violation of the human rights of women – and that is the Trafficking of Women and Children for purposes of exploitation. In 1999, The CIM initiated phase I of a research project on the trafficking of women and children for sexual exploitation in Central America, Brazil, and the Dominican Republic. This research project was the first wake up call that, in addition to violence against women, there was another very real violation of women's human rights that was occurring with near impunity. A quote taken from a New York Times editorial reads “Around the world, about one million women and children are seduced into leaving their homelands every year and forced into prostitution or menial work in other countries. Most are duped with promises of good jobs in more prosperous nations. These cases are not confined to remote parts of the world.” Our work has expanded to other countries of the region, primarily Mexico, Bolivia and the English-speaking Caribbean.

In confronting the trafficking issue, one of the first obstacles that the CIM had to deal with was the lack of awareness of this problem. Many government officials sincerely believe that the trafficking of human beings is not a problem in our hemisphere.” Research has proven that this, indeed is a serious problem, globally and it has a devastating impact on many impoverished women, adolescents and children in the Americas. We are pleased to say that, because of our efforts, the Ministers of Justice of the Americas have taken on this issue in their deliberations and the OAS will convene later on in 2005, a conference of national authorities to begin to place this issues squarely

on the agendas of the member states. In addition an Anti-Trafficking Coordinator has been appointed to begin coordinating anti-trafficking activities, not only at the OAS but throughout the region.

Today more than ever, it is accepted that the best way to build, maintain and sustain democracy, reduce conflict and attain full and equitable development is to ensure the full and equal participation of all of a nation's citizens, both men and women. Thus, the second theme of the forty-ninth session: "the advancement and empowerment of women and girls" is particularly relevant to making progress socially and economically. We must acknowledge that women still do face barriers in our societies. Worldwide, women earn two-thirds of what men make, and they spend twice as much or more time on unpaid work than men. Three ILO indicators highlighted the areas where gender equality remains "inadequate:" there remains a "glass ceiling (fewer women in management positions), a gender pay gap, and a "sticky floor" (women in the lowest paying jobs).<sup>2</sup>

Yet, the opportunities for empowerment continue to present themselves and it is up to organizations such as ours to create the climate, the programs and the policies that will help women to help themselves and their families. Our work with the CIM has aimed at not only promoting women's human rights, and gender as a crosscutting policy issue, but also assuring that women succeed as individuals. Shortly, we will witness an historic election in Chile, where for the first time, two of the front running candidates are women. In a recent Gallup survey of 2,000 Latin Americans on Women and Leadership, statistics showed that 85% of the respondents agree that women are good decision makers and 66% feel that women are more honest than men.<sup>3</sup> As these findings make clear, we are making progress, but, if we are to level the playing field, we need to encourage women to take positions of leadership and we must ensure that we mentor talented young women. Women must continue to stay on the forefront, and not only promote their own careers, but those of all the women who will come after them.

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<sup>2</sup> "Facts ON *Women at Work*." ILO

<sup>3</sup> Gallup Poll Report "Latin American Women Leadership Study." November 2000.  
<http://www.iadialog.org/publications>