

**Report on the Eight Annual Gathering on Gender
Equality
Organised by the
Group of Women Parliamentarians of ParlAmericas**



Theme: *“Diversifying Political Power to Build Inclusive Societies”*

Convened in Quito, Ecuador,

June 1 -3, 2016

Report on the Eight Annual Gathering on Gender Equality
Organised by the Group of Women Parliamentarians of ParlAmericas

Convened in Quito, Ecuador, June 1 -3, 2016

Theme: “*Diversifying Political Power to Build Inclusive Societies*”

CONTINGENT FROM TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO:

- Minister Ayanna Webster Roy, Minister of State in the Office of the Prime Minister
- Mrs. Gomatee Lakhram, Librarian III, Office of the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago

The contingent departed Trinidad on Tuesday May 31st, 2016 via Caribbean Airlines Flight to Miami with onward connection to Ecuador on COPA Airlines. The staff at the consulate in Miami facilitated the delegation on both the outgoing and the return journey on Saturday June 4, 2016. Representatives of the Ecuadorian Parliament received the delegation on their arrival in Ecuador. However, similar courtesies were not extended on the return journey.

Accommodation was provided at the NH Collection Quito Royal in the hub of the business district. This was also the conference hotel.

THE GATHERING

The *Eighth Annual Gathering on Gender Equality* took place in Quito, Ecuador, from June 1 to 3, 2016. The theme “*Diversifying Political Power to Build Inclusive Societies*”. This meeting was organized by ParlAmericas’ Group of Women Parliamentarians. ParlAmericas is a network of national legislatures of the member states of the OAS. Parliamentarians from 29 countries across the Americas and the Caribbean participated in the gathering with the objective of exchanging experiences and promising legislative practices in support of the rights, political participation, and social equity of women.

During the gathering, co-organized with the National Assembly of Ecuador, parliamentarians participated in various sessions addressing topics of relevance, including parity democracy, the representativeness of parliaments, Indigenous women's leadership, labour rights and women's economic empowerment, as well as the participation of men in efforts to promote gender equality.

PRE-CONFERENCE ACTIVITIES

Training Session on Gender and Intersectionality in Parliamentary Work for ParlAmericas Anglophone membership.

On Wednesday June 1, Tonni Brodber, Deputy Representative of UN Women facilitated a training Session on gender and intersectionality in parliamentary work for ParlAmericas Anglophone membership. The premise is that Caribbean countries are faced with a number of inherent development challenges across the various dimensions of sustainable development. The proposition is that gender equality and intersectionality are critical in addressing these challenges. Discussions centred around the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to which all countries in the region are signatory.

It sought to raise awareness of how intersectionality affects leadership and would affect the implementation of the SDGs as well as why increased women's political participation will contribute to more equitable implementation of the SDGs. It also aimed to demonstrate that measures to promote women's political participation and remove discrimination are critical for the successful implementation of the SDGs. Measures and tools to support an intersectional approach to the work of political leaders, enhance women's political leadership and support the pursuit of substantive equality were identified.

OPENING CEREMONY

The Opening Ceremony on June 2, 2016, was a grand affair. Held at the National Assembly Building, the red carpet was rolled out and a guard of honour was in place for the entrance of the delegates. The media was in full attendance. Opening remarks were given by Ms Gina Godoy, member of the National Assembly of Ecuador and President of the Group of Women

Parliamentarians, Mrs. Marcela Guerra, Senator of Mexico and President of ParlAmericas and Mrs. Gabriela Rivadeneira, President of the National Assembly of Ecuador and President of Parlatino.

Ms Otilia Lux de Cotí, a Guatemalan educator, human rights activist and former minister delivered the keynote address. She stressed that democracy was an inclusive system that aimed for excellence, in which respect for the fundamental principles of equality and non-discrimination was the basis for the development of the society.

- All persons, despite their differences should be accorded equal consideration and respect as they all faced common issues.
- All social interest groups should be included in political decision making including those who have historically been eliminated or under represented.
- She cited international conferences and treaties that sought to further the rights of women e.g. The Vienna convention in 1993, the Beijing conference in 1995, CEDAW and the Belem do Para Convention.
- She articulated the right of indigenous women to participate in politics and noted mechanisms and strategies for political participation in indigenous institutions at both the municipal and national levels.

Members and representatives of Parlatino (Parlamento Latinoamericano y Caribeño), UN Women, Promundo, and other national and international experts also participated in the event. The meeting provided opportunities to engage with community leaders from across Ecuador, in keeping with ParlAmericas' commitment to building civil society dialogue and participation.

THE SESSIONS

***Session 1: Legislative advances to promote representative Parliaments:
Feminist perspectives***

Facilitated by Tonni Brodber of UN Women, the panel comprised representatives of Costa Rica, Suriname, Brazil and Mexico. The premise was that as key institutions for strengthening democracy, parliaments must aim to reflect the diversity of the societies they represent, both in descriptive terms through the composition of members as well as in substantive terms through political influence and tangible political gains. In order to advance the political representation of women, minorities and other historically marginalized groups, it is essential to make national parliaments accessible and responsive. Steps should be taken to break the status quo, recognize the plurality of interests within groups and broaden the pathways leading into formal politics. It was felt that within recent years there has been some advances made in embracing feminist perspectives in parliamentary work.

The panellists shared initiatives that were being undertaken in their respective parliaments to help redress exclusionary practices.

- **Costa Rica** reported that since 1994 attempts were being made to pass laws for social equality. Measures to ensure political parties included mechanisms for women to be involved did not work. However, in 1999 a special election tribunal which stipulated that 40% of the list be women served to improve the conditions for women. In 2002 and 2006 there were 21 women in the General Assembly while in 2010 there were 23. In 2014 there were 20 women in the National Legislative Assembly. Legislation is being brought for legislative parity and there is the recognition of the need to fill gaps in political parties.
- **Suriname** gave a historical overview of the involvement of female legislators between 2005 and 2015. While in 2010 there were 7 females, in 2015 there were 13. This increase in the number of women was attributed to the non-quota measures that were implemented. There has also been increased visibility of women through the increased allocation of air time. 30% of candidates must now be female. In terms of minority representation there were 6 Amerindian women. She iterated the difficulties in women being involved in politics as follows: politics takes place in public spaces while women operate in private space, men not wanting their

partners to be away for long periods, the need for family support. For the indigenous peoples, it requires them to move to the city where accommodation is insufficient or expensive.

- **Brazil** representative reported that in 2012 a mixed Commission had been set up to address women's rights and violence against women. Prison sentence was increased to 30 years if a victim of rape was also murdered. A new law was passed in March 2015 making violence against women a crime. There were also laws to address online crimes against women.
- **Mexico** also recounted the initiatives that were undertaken in promoting the rights of women. In 2014 an amendment to Article 41 of the Constitution introduced gender parity. There was now a National Institute for Women set up to generate public policies in favour of women. A Human Development and Family Commission was also set up. Education of children must now be taken care of by the state. Anti-corruption and transparency laws are now being dealt with by the Parliament.

Ms Brodber raised some further questions for discussion:

- how does violence affect the number of women in Parliament
- how do they feel about working with men rather than with women who are not supportive of equality
- how women movements have helped to promote greater representation of women in politics and how has civil societies contributed.

It was suggested that greater education of both men and women was essential and there should be a greater effort at both genders working in committees to change societal norms with regard to women's value and capacity.

Persons in the audience were invited to respond to the question:

- what law, reform or practice in your country has had the greatest impact on increasing opportunities for women and minority groups to have their voices heard in parliamentary decision making?

Session 2: Men's participation in gender equality work

The panel comprised representatives from Brazil, St Kitts, Canada and Argentina. The proposition was that gender equality benefits all members of society and it should therefore be the concern of both men and women. The participation of men in politics as allies is especially important because of the unique position they have to directly contribute to the advancement of policies for women's rights and the creation of more equitable societies. Men can aid by supporting gender sensitive legislation, participating in the work of gender committees, providing mentorship, motivating other men and boys to challenge harmful gender norms, stereotypes and violence. It was felt that there was still resistance to men's participation in gender equality initiatives and persistent beliefs in reinforcing traditional gender roles.

- **Brazil** spoke in Portuguese and no translation was available.
- **St Kitts** indicated that gender equality is a new terminology and as yet the masses do not understand it. Thus far it has been seen as a woman's issue with women and girls being the main target groups. She stressed the need for men to get involved at the forefront of this movement as this will serve to achieve the following: improve relations of men and boys with other men and women, give a new understanding by men of gender role in the home, improve communication skills and break gender stereotypes, improve the lives of women and girls.
- **Canada's** male representative cited his own experience as a parliamentarian to highlight the need to have a spouse who is willing to make sacrifices to facilitate the other spouse's involvement in Parliamentary work. He underscored the need to make Parliament more family friendly especially for women. He spoke about shortening the sitting weeks, expanding childcare, simplifying house procedure so that less time will have to be spent away from families.
- **Argentina** proposed that there should be equal participation by both men and women. Even though the quota law was passed more than 25 years previously there was need for more affirmative legislation.

Questions were posed by Mexico, Guatemala, Mexico, Jamaica and Guyana. In their final comments all panellists stressed the importance of education as the key to women's success. There was the need for recognition of women in economic terms also with equal

pay being given for equal work. The advantages of pursuing a 50/50 agenda was also reiterated.

Session 3: Advancing indigenous women's leadership

The evidence is that across the Americas and the Caribbean region, indigenous communities face widespread human rights violations resulting from histories of colonization. The panel comprised representatives from Guyana, Honduras and Ecuador who sought to give an overview of the situation in their respective countries in guaranteeing indigenous rights, and more specifically those of indigenous women.

- ***Guyana*** reported that there were 212 indigenous villages. There was the Amerindian Act 2006 which recognised the rights of these communities. There was also the Indigenous Peoples Commission, the National Toshias Council, the Ministry of Indigenous Peoples Affairs(MOIPA). There were representatives on many commissions and boards including the University of Guyana. In the hinterland there were scholarship programs, school feeding programs, school uniforms programs, and presidential grants given to villages. There was the Amerindian Development Fund, Amerindian Land Titling, Hinterland Employment and Youth Service, Amerindian hostels in the city and other regions, the MOIPA welfare program to assist with funerals and adverse circumstances.
- ***Honduras*** reported that out of a population of 8 million, 57% were women. Even though they were a signatory to CEDAW in 1983, it had not yet been ratified. While there was a framework on paper the reality was different. There was a Gender Equality Commission but there was delay in representing women. There was also strong violence against indigenous women leadership.
- ***Ecuador*** reported that there was triple discrimination i.e. against women, the indigenous and the poor. In 1929 only literate women could vote but all indigenous peoples were illiterate. By 1979 there was the possibility for illiterate women to vote. In 1937 there was a law for communes. In 1945 a bilingual school was established. Before this all efforts at education was clandestine as it was forbidden for indigenous people to learn to read or write. There was the need for education

and a good economy to achieve women leadership. There was also the need to legislate the participation of indigenous women in parliamentary elections. In fact, persons in rural areas should be given the same opportunities as those in the urban areas.

The panel discussion was followed by roundtable discussions of the following questions:

- What is the best way for politicians to support indigenous women who are leading movements for equity?
- Which strategies have been most effective for facilitating indigenous women's leadership?

Session 4: Policies and reforms to guarantee women's labour rights

The proposition is that while much progress has been made in the area of labour rights, women still face insufficient legal protection and unequal access to the job market. National laws can have the effect of restricting full participation. Inequitable access to resources and technical training can also affect their chances of employment. Women's current and potential family responsibilities may also be a deterrent to their being employed. In addition, women's work is undervalued and a great deal of time is dedicated to unremunerated domestic and care giving activities. A panel comprising representatives from Peru, Trinidad and Tobago, Mexico, and Uruguay gave insight into the current situation in their respective countries.

- **Peru** suggested that for women to experience real autonomy they must be economically free. Women were currently entering the labour market with less pay. Many were engaged in doing chores at home while others were employed in jobs that were viewed as feminine jobs for example as teachers or clerks. There was also vertical segmentation with women occupying the lowest places on the scale. 43% of women were employed but they lacked rights in the working world. The salary gap was 34% but it was bigger in certain sectors. Women also engaged in a substantial amount of unpaid work e.g. household work. While women's wages became part of

the household income it was not the same for men. In some instances, women were the sole breadwinners for the family: they work outside the home and return home to find that men did not do any housework and family care. Furthermore, some employers prefer to employ men rather than women.

- **Trinidad and Tobago**, represented by Minister Ayanna Webster Roy, spoke of the unique factors



that exist in Trinidad and Tobago. Not all categories of work are legislated and protected. The constitution guarantees basic human rights to all citizens. In addition, there are other legislation with specific reference to labour rights: The Industrial Relations Act, The Occupational Safety and Health Act, the Retrenchment and Severance Benefits Act, the Maternity Protection Act, The Minimum Wages Act, Sexual Harassment Act. Women make up 48% of the work force. However, there is a large disparity between women in high level positions and domestic workers. With the recent change in government, there are now a number of women in high positions: Minister of Labour, Minister of Planning, Minister of Trade, Minister of State in the Office of the Prime Minister with responsibility for Gender Affairs among others.

- **Mexico** indicated that equal access to education for both men and women will contribute to workplace equality. Laws have been approved giving women the right to vote and for improving the conditions for pregnant women and women with breast cancer.
- **Uruguay** stated that despite advances for women in education, this was not reflected in the workplace. There was legislation giving women 14 weeks maternity leave, 3-10 days paternity leave for fathers, and provisions for special leave of absence for women with handicapped children. A framework is being worked on for domestic workers. **ParLatino** is seeking for domestic workers to be unionized. She indicated that the ILO reported that there had been a decline of women in the workforce.

OTHER SEGMENTS

I. Delegation Reports on Accomplishments Towards Preventing Gender-Based Political Harassment - The Topic of the 2015 Gathering in Argentina

The gathering also provided the platform for a representative from each country to share a report on the progress made over the last year in their respective countries on the topic addressed at the 2015 gathering. Reports were given by Argentina, Bolivia, Canada, Chile, Costa Rica, Cuba, Mexico, Venezuela and Ecuador.

- **Argentina** - a permanent Commission to address women's issues was set up in 2012 and was dealing with laws to address femicide.
- **Bolivia** - laws were passed against political violence to women. There was recognition of all religions and the complementary roles of both men and women. Work is being done to enact laws for sexual and reproductive rights and human trafficking.
- **Canada** - The new Prime Minister has proposed a gender equal cabinet. However, no legislation has yet been put in place to address this. Only workplace sexual harassment policies are in place with a new code of conduct being enacted in the

last year. However, there is political violence against women in politics in the media and social media.

- **Costa Rica** - measures are on the way to have legislation by 2018 with regard to parity in electoral lists, teen pregnancy, sexual harassment, and domestic work of women.
- **Cuba** - there was 50% representation by women. Out of 10 Commissions, 5 were presided over by women. The labour code had been updated to include a chapter for women so that maternity leave and rights of women are not violated.
- **Mexico** - there was a change from quota to parity – both horizontal and vertical parity. In 2015 a protocol was created for handling political violence. A Commission was set up for supporting women.
- **Venezuela** - the creation of a Women’s Front to promote sensitization of all women in all the provinces and a move to pass sexual, reproductive and health laws and regulations.
- **Ecuador** - political harassment was not just a legal issue but a cultural one. There was the need to address the issue from a preventative viewpoint. They have sought to strengthen women’s leadership and encourage representation of LGBT groups. An agenda is being worked on with the communications media to facilitate press conferences, debates etc. There are plans to also include men in these initiatives. Ten laws are being put forward for gender equality. And there is a massive campaign to raise awareness of the need for gender equity.

A representative from the UN Women’s Regional Office for the Americas and the Caribbean also addressed the gathering. She stated that the debate should not happen only at national levels but at municipal levels also. She also reiterated the need to deal with the implementation of laws that are already passed and the formulation of regulations etc. that are authorized by legislation.

II. Meeting with Women Community Leaders from Ecuadorian Civil Society

Drawing on ParlAmericas commitment to promoting the active participation of civil society in activities to help inform and shape parliamentary best practices, a number of community

leaders and activists were invited to participate in the discussions. Those addressing the gathering were an indigenous woman, an indigenous youth and an afro representative.

- The indigenous woman stated that there was discrimination against women especially indigenous women. The general feeling was that they did not possess the skill required to participate in the parliamentary process especially if you did not possess a professional degree. She contended that her university is the University of Life. Politicians presumed to offer people what is not theirs but the community's.
- The indigenous youth indicated that they were changing their minds and making the decision to contribute to development not only in their homes but in the parishes and provinces and the nation to achieve equality and for men and women to work together as a team.
- The Afro representative indicated the need to start working on an Afro-Ecuadorian history since the way the history is told is discriminatory. They were seeking to bridge the cultural gaps and work as a team for the common good.
- The last speaker stated that the reason for women in Parliament is because of the struggle of various women's organisations. She made reference to a number of laws that they had been instrumental in passing, among them the recognition of housework, social security rights for women and trade union rights for women. There was the need for work to be done in remote communities to sensitize women to their rights and for the creation of micro enterprises to assist in the development of these communities.

SOCIAL ACTIVITIES

I. Welcome Reception

The National Assembly of Ecuador organised a welcome reception for the participants on the evening of Wednesday June 1, 2016 at the National Assembly building. Ms Gina Godoy, Member of the National Assembly of Ecuador and President of the Group of Women

Parliamentarians of ParlAmericas, welcomed all participants. Participants were treated to song, dance and music from the country's leading cultural groups.

II. Dinner Hosted Courtesy UN Women

A dinner was also hosted courtesy the UN Women at the Hotel NH Collection on the evening of Thursday June 2, 2016. At this event the UN Women shared certain aspects of the work it was engaged in with regard to initiatives for parity democracy and sought the commitment of the delegates to further this agenda. Women were asked to sign a commitment to the following:

- Promote the values and principles of substantial equality contributing to a democratic process in our respective countries, in harmony with the sustainable objectives of the Post 2015 agenda
- Promote activities to disseminate the information and to create awareness about the objective and content of the Framework norm for the consolidation of parity democracy
- Motivate and take leadership in at least one proposal or reform from Government Institutions, which includes some measure to prevent, protect and/or which leads to ensure a substantial equality and parity, be it legal, institutional or by the adopting public policies
- Be part of the Forum for Leader Women in Latin America and the Caribbean in favour of Parity Democracy, coordinating with the support of UN Women.

Not all persons signed the letter of commitment and the way it was worded did not allow the men who were present to sign.

CLOSING CEREMONY

There was a brief closing ceremony where the proposed final declaration of the gathering was read. There were also comments from the floor on the contents of the declaration. The closing address was given by Senator Marcella Guerra, Senator of Mexico and President of ParlAmericas. Gifts were presented to Gabriela Rivadeneira, President of the National

Assembly of Ecuador and President of ParLatino and to Ms Gina Godoy, member of the National Assembly of Ecuador and President of the Group of Women Parliamentarians. They also made closing remarks to the Gathering. That brought the curtain down on the Eighth Annual Gathering on Gender Equality organized by ParlAmericas' Group of Women Parliamentarians.

ADDITIONAL ACTIVITIES

Board Meeting



A board meeting of ParlAmericas was scheduled for Saturday June 4, 2016 at the National Assembly building. Trinidad and Tobago is represented on this Board by the Honourable Speaker of the House of Representatives. Because of the inability of the Speaker to attend this meeting, Minister Webster Roy was asked to represent the Speaker at this meeting. To this she graciously consented and consequently, plans were put in place for her to do so and to be taken from there directly to the airport afterwards.

RECOMMENDATIONS

It will be prudent for Trinidad and Tobago to make an offer to host the next gathering as this will put our country and our CARICOM neighbours in a stronger position to bid for positions on the Executive and also provide an opportunity for issues relevant to our unique social and economic circumstances to be given priority on the agenda of the next gathering.

CONCLUSION

It was a very hectic four days with a packed program of activities. The objective of the Gathering was achieved in that a wide cross section of participants shared experiences and legislative advances from their respective jurisdictions in support of the rights, political participation, and social equity of women. Participants would have left the meeting more informed than when they arrived. Old acquaintances were revived as well as new connections established which would serve to engender greater networking across the region's parliaments.

Respectfully submitted

Minister Ayanna Webster Roy, Minister of State in the Office of the Prime Minister

Mrs. Gomatee Lakhram, Librarian III, Office of the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago

August 29, 2016.