



Organización de los
Estados Americanos



INTERNATIONAL DAY FOR THE ELIMINATION OF VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

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In 1994, American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment and Eradication of Violence against Women (Belém do Pará Convention) first established the right of women to a life free of violence, both in public and in private. This historic agreement - until recently the only legal instrument to specifically address the issue of violence against women- has laid the ground work for the CIM over the past twenty years, as well as the creation in 2004 of the Follow-up Mechanism to the Belém do Pará Convention - MESECVI.

During the last 20 years of the Belém do Pará Convention, the Americas has positioned itself in the region with the highest set of legal norms regarding the right of women to live free from violence, with strong integrated laws at national levels which in some cases have developed beyond the provisions of the Convention. The adoption more laws on the various manifestations of violence against women; femicide, rape and sexual harassment, trafficking in women and girls, political, economic and symbolic violence, among others - is a clear indicator of political will and commitment to strengthen the response to this violence from a human rights perspective.

Over the past 10 years The Follow-up Mechanism to the Belém do Pará Convention (MESECVI) - and its Committee of Experts has been discussing how and why violence against women occurs, how to prevent it and how it is being sanctioned and legislated to protect women and girls in the region. For the first time, the MESECVI is working based on a set of 'progress indicators' for measuring the implementation of the Belem do Pará Convention, a process adopted by the Committee in 2013. This set of indicators seeks to measure the States' efforts to guarantee women live a life free from violence through concrete tools to assess the status of women's rights in each State Party.

Broadly, the set of indicators has allowed us to identify significant progress and persistent challenges in all countries of Latin America and the Caribbean. Here is some promising information:

- Nine countries have comprehensive laws on violence against women;
- Twenty countries have national plans to address violence against women;
- There has been specific progress in the provision of specialized services for women victims of violence, particularly the establishment of shelters, refuges and hotlines, the provision of free legal support and campaigns have been launched to publicize the existence of these services ;
- There have been more and more entities set up to receive complaints of violence and protection measures have been strengthened, but we still have a poor understanding of the actual impact of these measures on women's access to justice

- An increasing number of States have conducted national surveys and have better data on the rate and extent of violence against women.

However:

- As regards access to justice, we still lack timely and reliable information on: a) the number of complaints reported by women, b) the outcome of these complaints from investigation, the presentation of a case, judicial ruling, and sentencing;

- We lack reliable, generalizable and timely data on the number of women victims of violence disaggregated by age, ethnicity and social background, particularly if it has not been a case of domestic, family or sexual violence. Of particular concern is the lack of data on women's access to justice; and

- Although most countries have informed us on the allocation of budgetary resources to combat violence against women, they have not yet specified what percentage of public expenditure this represents, how it would be managed, nor if it responds directly to the demand by women for specialized health, justice, and other services.

The above reveals that while there has been significant progress, particularly in the areas of legislation and public policy, major challenges remain to ensure the right of women to live free of violence, particularly in the areas of access to justice, public budgets allocated to prevention, treatment and sanctioning of violence, and information about its scale and extent. In short, the gap between standards and policies and the reality that women face in their daily lives remains significant.

The commemoration of the twentieth anniversary of the adoption of the Belém do Pará Convention coincides with the celebration of other historic moments of key importance to gender equality and women's rights in the region - including 20 years of Program of Action at the International Conference on Population and Development (Cairo, 1994) and the Declaration and Platform for Action of the Fourth World Conference on Women (Beijing, 1995) and 15 years of the Millennium Development Goals.

In the last 15 years eliminating violence against women has been cited many times as the missing Millennium Development Goal- because violence constitutes a barrier against the achievement of any of the other development goals. In the field of international and hemispheric cooperation, it is time to set out concrete commitments and goals to advance the prevention of violence. The Organization of American States would gladly support this process.

In the context of the 20th anniversary of the adoption of the Belém do Pará Convention, the and discussion on a new global post-2015 development agenda we must ask what impact have all these discussions and processes made on women's rights and on our daily lives? It remains a oppressing task for all States to focus efforts on the roots of violence against women, in the power structures that perpetuate gender inequalities and which then reproduce discrimination and violence. Progress means taking charge as a State and as a society-of the serious and widespread consequences that violence -in all its manifestations- has on the lives of women, affecting not only their right to life, personal integrity and freedom, but moreover in their ability to develop with autonomy, actively participate in decision-making, make informed choices about their bodies, their time and their endeavors. In other words, progress means taking the initiative to guarantee women their status as equal citizens in terms of their rights and in their sense of dignity. The time is now.