Hemispheric Policy Forum on Women’s Rights and Gender Equality

[Mexico City, 5 November 2010] This week, the Inter-American Commission of Women (CIM) held its 35th Assembly of Delegates from November 3rd to 5th in Mexico City, Mexico. This biennial meeting brings together Commission delegates from the 33 OAS member states to discuss key issues of concern for women of the Americas and establish policy positions, support strategic planning and results-based management processes, and to elect new members of the CIM Executive Committee.

Rocio García Gaytán (Mexico), currently serves as the Director of the Mexican Institute of Women (Inmujeres), was unanimously elected as CIM’s President for the next two years. Historically, during this Assembly the CIM Statute was modified to allow for the election of three vice-presidents, who were also elected unanimously: Magdalena Fallace of Argentina, Irene Sandiford-Garner of Barbados and Sonia Escobedo of Guatemala. Finally, the Assembly elected the five-member CIM Executive Committee for the 2011-2012 period, which will be composed of Brazil, Costa Rica, Panama, Paraguay and Trinidad & Tobago.

One of the main results of the Assembly was the Declaration of the Inter-American Year of Women (2010), which recognizes that, in spite of the advances achieved, effective equality does not exist between women and men in terms of the exercise of political citizenship and that legislative and institutional reforms and public policies are needed in order to guarantee the full exercise of women’s political rights. The Declaration calls for action in a number of areas, including electoral legislation reforms and affirmative action measures, political harassment of women, leadership and political participation of indigenous and Afro-descendant women, and elimination of the obstacles faced by women in political party activities and electoral campaigns.

As the main hemispheric policy forum for gender equality and women’s rights in the Americas, the Assembly of Delegates also included interactive panel discussions such key topics as political participation and good governance, and gender violence, justice, and human rights. These discussions brought together representatives from government, civil society and academia in order to discuss how public policy can be used effectively to translate women’s rights on paper into a daily reality.
The Organization of American States (OAS) is the world’s oldest regional organization, dating back to the First International Conference of American State (October 1889 to April 1890). It was established in 1948 with the aim of achieving among the States of the Americas “an order of peace and justice, to promote their solidarity, to strengthen their collaboration, and to defend their sovereignty, their territorial integrity, and their independence.” The OAS prioritizes four pillars - democracy, human rights, security, and development – that support each other and are intertwined through political dialogue, inclusiveness, cooperation, and legal and follow-up instruments that provide the OAS with the tools to maximize its work in the Hemisphere.

Established in 1928, the Inter-American Commission of Women (CIM) was the first inter-governmental agency established to ensure recognition of the human rights of women. CIM is made up of 34 Principal Delegates, one for each member state, and has become the principal forum for debating and formulating policy on gender equality and women’s empowerment in the Americas.