

95
YEARS



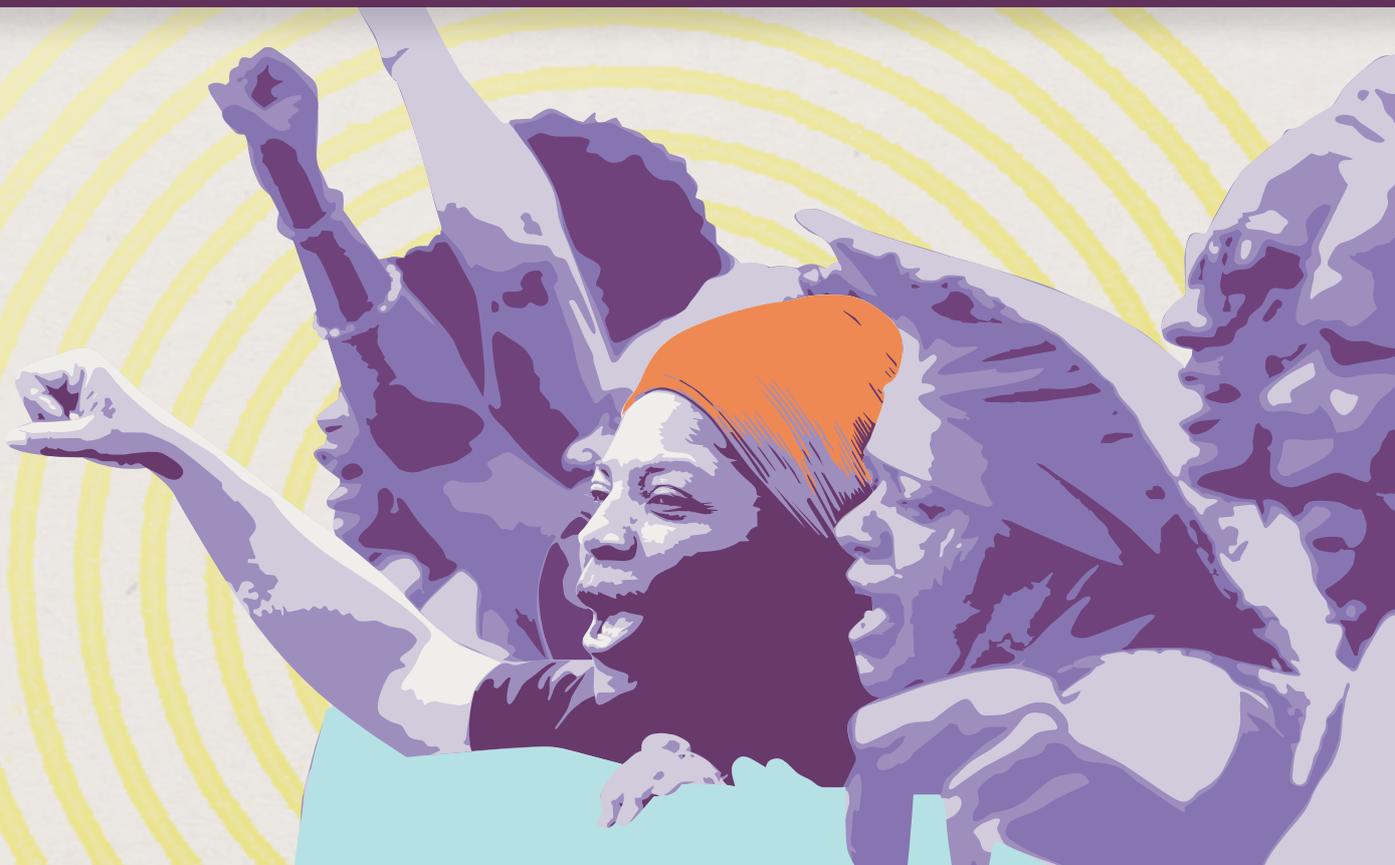
OAS
CIM



Forging Paths, Building Equality:

95 YEARS

of the Inter-American Commission of Women (CIM)



The Organization of American States (OAS) brings together the nations of the Western hemisphere to promote democracy, strengthen human rights, foster peace, security and cooperation and advance common interests. The origins of the Organization date back to 1890 when nations of the region formed the Pan American Union to forge closer hemispheric relations. This union later evolved into the OAS and in 1948, 21 nations signed its governing charter. Since then, the OAS has expanded to include the nations of the English-speaking Caribbean and Canada, and today all of the independent nations of North, Central and South America and the Caribbean make up its 35 member states.

The Inter-American Commission of Women (CIM) is the main hemispheric policy forum for the promotion of women's rights and gender equality. Created in 1928 - in recognition of the importance of women's social inclusion to democratic strengthening and human development in the Americas - CIM was the first inter-governmental organization established to promote women's human rights and gender equality.

Forging paths, building equality: 95 years of the Inter-American Commission on Women (CIM)

This document was prepared by Yadira Calvo Fajardo, whom the CIM acknowledges and thanks for her work. This publication is an initiative of the Inter-American Commission of Women (CIM), coordinated by Alejandra Mora Mora, the Executive Secretary of the CIM, with comments from Ana Garita and María José Pinto.

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Preface

Alejandra Mora Mora

Executive Secretary of the Inter-American Commission of Women (CIM)

The Inter-American Commission of Women (CIM/OAS) is turning 95 years old. Ninety-five years have passed since suffragette feminists in the American States demanded their place in the political and civil integration process that the continent was undergoing. They demanded a voice, participation and, above all, equality in decision-making bodies that were created without them, but which had an impact on their lives. They defended the need to address the issue of gender equality in a specialized manner in all the countries of the Americas.

The CIM is part of the history of women's struggles; it has influenced and built spaces, tools, instruments, recommendations, support, and multi-actor and multi-sectoral articulations that have an impact on all dimensions of women's lives. This document recognizes all the actions and milestones in which the CIM has played a part, the role of women protagonists who we recognize today as our ancestors, who achieved an enormous victory for women's push to have a room of their own in multilateralism, for the defense of their rights, as well as the path to the 100 years of the CIM.

The CIM as a child of this path towards the enforceability of feminist demands, made in the political and intellectual history of the region, has been a pioneer in placing equality within the regional agenda since it made the first call to the States to *"establish greater equality between men and women in the possession, enjoyment and exercise of civil and political rights"* (VII International Conference of American States, 1933). Later, this agency drafted the Inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment, and Eradication of Violence (Belém do Pará, 1994) which established that violence against women is a violation of human rights and fundamental freedoms of our time, and today it innovates once again with the drafting of the Inter-American Model Law on Care to *"recognize, redistribute, regulate, promote and generate new forms of care for unpaid care and domestic work"*.

Ninety-five years of being part of the peaks and valleys of women's needs, of the mechanisms for the advancement of women's rights and of the American States, of mainstreaming gender needs in global transformations, of listening to the collective influences of the Green Tide or #MeToo, and of working in alliances, and moving the agenda of women forward so our Americas become pioneers in placing the equality agenda in the highest levels of the regional agenda.

From the Pan-American Union 95 years ago and today, through the Organization of American States (OAS), the CIM renews its commitment to equality, to women's lives. With their voices and needs to continue walking and responding, and building bridges to make international coincidences, alliances and capacities for advocacy, as a motor of change, on national and local issues.

This historical document (in its short version) shows that CIM has been in the history of the region. I want to deeply thank the writer Yadira Calvo Fajardo, who accepted the challenge of reconstructing the history of CIM with her literary magic. Also, the people who were interviewed, and the Specialists and the CIM team that contributed to the construction of the document and the entire CIM team that are an active part of the story that is being told. A special recognition to the Ministers of Women who are the Assembly of this organization, to those who have integrated the Executive Committee and above all, to the CIM Presidents who make political representation, as well as to the Executive Secretaries who have overseen the processes and actions, and to the members of all the OAS bodies that have engaged in the CIM processes. Each of these individual and collective leaderships were and are necessary today to continue forging paths and building equality.

A Little History as the Crow Flies

The history of the CIM is part of a long struggle of women for their rights, which goes far back in time. Their first major demonstration took place in 215 B.C., when, against the norm, Roman matrons took to the streets around the forum. The purpose was to press for the repeal of a law that forbade them to carry more than half an ounce of gold, wear colorful clothes, and travel in horse-drawn carriages in cities or fortified squares or at a distance of less than a mile, except to attend a religious act.

The second great moment was during the French Revolution, when a significant group of women began to organize themselves in women's political clubs and fought, not only for the overthrow of the monarchical regime, but also to be understood within the ideas of Liberty, Equality and Fraternity that animated the Revolution. However, when the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen was approved in 1789, they were left out.

Adjunct to Man

“” The wife is a piece of property, acquired by contract; she is part of your furniture, for possession is nine-tenths of the law; in fact, the woman is not, to speak correctly, anything but an adjunct to the man [...]Don't accuse yourself of harshness. In the codes of all the nations which are called civilized, man has written the laws which govern the destiny of women in these cruel terms:

Vae victis! Woe to the conquered!

- *Honoré de Balzac.*

The marginalization of women established by the Napoleonic Code - which was in force in many European countries until well into the 20th century - put an end to the few gains of the revolutionaries and established the new principles of bourgeois society. But the most serious thing is that it did not remain only in France, since it served as a source for all Western legislation (except Anglo-Saxon) during the 19th century. Some countries simply translated it and others imitated it.¹

1 Ma. Gabriela Leret de Matheus, *ibid*, p. 185.

Property of Another

“” The wife who inherits no fortune has more or less the same legal position as the slave on a Southern plantation. She owns nothing, she can sell nothing. She has no right even to the wages she earns; her time, her person, her services are the property of another.
- Elizabeth Cady Stanton.

This was the setting for the third major milestone in the struggle for women's rights in the Western world, when women delegates were denied entry to the Anti-Slavery Congress in London in 1840. This grievance led Lucretia Mott and Elizabeth Cady Stanton to draft the *Declaration of Seneca Falls*, in 1848, in the state of New York, which was signed by 68 women and 32 men. The authors used the “Declaration of Independence of the United States,” drafted by Jefferson (1776) as a model, which listed among the natural and inalienable rights: life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. In their *Declaration*, Mott and Stanton denounce the lack of women's rights, of access to serious education, and their subjection to laws in whose elaboration they are not taken into account. According to the Declaration of Seneca Falls, women were civilly dead before the law; they were deprived of property; they were forbidden to run in elections, hold public office, join political organizations and attend their meetings; and they were required to obey their husbands, who were legally empowered to deprive them of their liberty and administer punishments. In fact, the worst situation was that of married women as they could not sign contracts, give testimony, choose their domicile, engage in commerce, control their income, manage the property legally belonging to them, or open checking accounts. They passed from the guardianship of their father to that of their husband.

In Latin America, at the end of the 19th century, the “explosive growth” of the population of the main urban centers and new educational opportunities for women, thanks to the creation of normal schools, contributed to the appearance of publications that advocated for women's rights and criticized discriminatory practices based on gender. Women teachers constituted the first formally educated female generation in Latin America and formed “the nucleus of the first groups [...] that articulated a critique of society, protesting against the unequal status of women and their limited access to education and to political and economic power.”² Women had realized that inequality was widespread throughout the hemisphere and “hoped that by addressing these issues at the international level they would gain greater leverage with their own governments.”³

2 CIM, “Brief History of the Inter-American Commission of Women”. Retrieved from <http://www.oas.org/es/cim/docs/BriefHistory%5BSP%5D.pdf> [Consultation: September 19, 2022].

3 *Ibid.*

For centuries, female intellectual education had been considered unnecessary. Rousseau's classic text of 1762, *Emile*, determined that women lacked the capacity for works of "vast genius," that their natural state was that of mothers, and that their "special destiny" was to please men. Therefore, all their education should consist of "pleasing them, being useful to them, making themselves loved and honored by them, educating them when they are children, taking care of them when they grow up, advising them, comforting them, and making their lives pleasant and gentle."⁴ Likewise, another of the great philosophers of the Enlightenment, Kant, affirmed that prolonged study and deep meditation "do not suit" women.⁵

The last decades of the 19th century saw the flourishing of public interest and government support for women's education in the Americas. Although the nature and purpose of such education was the subject of much debate, in several countries, large numbers of women were able to complete primary and secondary education.⁶

Feminism, the Power of a Word

“” We proclaim like you, citizens, the principle of human equality, by which we mean not only the equality of all men among themselves but also the equality of men and women. We want for them as for you, the whole education, the same facilities for physical, moral, intellectual and professional development. We want for women, as for men, freedom of conscience, freedom of opinion, freedom of action. [...] We want for women as for men, deliberative voice in the Municipality, in the State, or in the group; [...] because women, paying taxes have as many rights as men to demand a good distribution of these taxes.

- *Hubertine Auclert, 1879.*

In 1880, the essayist and "pioneer of feminism" in France, Hubertine Auclert, coined the term "feminism" with a broader meaning than it had in the United States at the time, thus signaling, in Europe and America, a modern movement that demanded the emancipation of women through economic and social justice, control over their own bodies and "total

4 Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Emilio o de la educación*. Mexico, Editorial Porrúa, 1972, pp. 279, 282, 284, 305.

5 Immanuel Kant. *Lo bello y lo sublime. Fundamentación de la metafísica de las costumbres*. Mexico City: Grupo Editorial Tomo, 2004, p. 41.

6 CIM, "Historia en breve de la...", *op. cit.*

equality with men in all areas of life.”⁷ However, the early efforts of feminism focused on women’s suffrage, with the idea that once citizenship was obtained, the other rights would be much easier to achieve.

According to Katherine Marino, during the first half of the twentieth century, American feminism gave impetus to women leaders “and groups throughout the hemisphere, which led to the beginning of the struggle for women’s rights and human rights throughout the world.”⁸ It was succeeded in Europe by different suffragette associations, whose demands were interrupted by the advent of World War I (July 1914 to November 1918), which had specific consequences for women. On the one hand, it halted their work; on the other, being forced to perform jobs previously reserved for men, they realized their capabilities. Although after the war they were prompted to return to their domestic functions, nothing was ever the same again.

This does not mean that it was a homogeneous and unified current in their struggles and aspirations. While both in the United States and in Latin America, feminist leaders were enlightened, professional women from the middle and upper classes, the former sought greater parity with men, the latter tended more towards the idea of obtaining improvements within normative femininity.

Latin American Feminisms

“” Feminism, as one of the great social movements of the last 200 years, would experience its first boom after the Great War (1914-1918). It would be women’s struggle for the world that would explode spectacularly after 1918: for participation, access to education and profession, in the debate on power and gender dispositions, on femininity, masculinity and their intermediate levels.
- *Juan Carlos Tellechea.*

In her examination of Latin American feminisms, Karen Offen does a differentiation between American and French feminism. The first is characterized by “individualistic and liberal egalitarianism according to which every human being has natural rights, so that the aspiration of its members should be to equate those demandable by women with

7 Katherine M. Marino (2021). *Feminism for Latin America: an international human rights movement*, 2nd ed. Retrieved from https://books.google.co.cr/books?id=z_FEEAAAAAQBAJ&pg=PT375&lpg=PT375&dq=Eleanor+Roosevelt+-+contra+doris+stevens&source=bl&ots=fXAWk5yjTD&sig=ACfU3U0YaJJ_a8eAygjkwf9fNn-ilYYDZz4Q&hl=en&sa=X&ved=2a-hUKEwik1oqzjoj6AhU8l2oFHSdvDvDvwQ6AF6BAGgEAM#v=onepage&q=Eleanor%20Roosevelt%20against%20doris%20stevens&f=false [Accessed: September 9, 2022].

8 *Ibid.*

those already held by men.”⁹ The second was “denominated by difference”, and argued that, “as beings different from men in origin and potential, the rights and freedoms to which women aspired should be congruent with traditional femininities, without therefore discarding their maternal obligations, so that the traditional division of labor would not be threatened either”.¹⁰

In this sense, Manuel Rodríguez Chicharro mentions “it cannot be ruled out that, without falling into essentialism, the traditional division of labor that led them to work as caregi- vers may have had a significant impact” on their political initiatives “with respect to social issues.”¹¹ Ramírez Chicharro attributes this to the fact that, in the women’s congresses held in Latin America at the beginning of the 20th century, in addition to demanding the vote, they “requested socioeconomic reforms formulated from a feminized place of re- presentation,” related to prostitution, children’s schooling, housework, maternity wards, the consumer basket without attributing them to “natural predispositions”, but rather to “knowledge, sensibilities and experiences feminized by society.”¹²

Referring specifically to Cuba, Zaida Capote-Cruz affirms that there, “as in many other places,” feminist activism arose “from the vital practice of enlightened women,” of privi- leged social class, with social knowledge acquired in intellectual practice, in their trips abroad, who “identified themselves with the rights of women and integrated them, little by little, into their life and work objectives.” And, she says, they were not satisfied with discussing the status of women in abstract terms or in closed circles,” but “they extended their enlightened reflection on these urgent issues to the common space of the media and the public tribune.”¹³

In 1922, the Pan American Association for the Advancement of Women was created with a view to influencing the results of the Fifth International Conference of American States in Santiago de Chile (1923), creating the CIM as a direct consequence¹⁴.

9 Manuel Ramírez Chicharro (2021). *Estudios de Historia Moderna y Contemporánea de México*, n. 62 (July-December 2021), p. 185. Retrieved from <https://www.scielo.org.mx/pdf/ehmcm/n62/0185-2620-ehmcm-62-183.pdf> [Accessed: Sep- tember 27, 2022].

10 *Ibid*, pp. 185-186.

11 *Idem*.

12 *Ibid*, p. 187.

13 Zaida Capote Cruz (n.d.). “Academic activism in Cuba: tradition, practice and testimony”. ICESI University. Retrieved from <https://www.redalyc.org/journal/4763/476362529008/> [Accessed: October 16, 2022].

14 Boletín de la Comisión de Historia, febrero, 2019. Boletín 53. Día de la Mujer de las Américas. Recuperado de <https://comisiones.ipgh.org/HISTORIA/assets/boletin-ipgh-53-esp.pdf> [Consulta: 19 de septiembre, 2022].

The Emergence of an Idea

What is Pan-Americanism?

Pan-Americanism is related, as defined by Ricardo J. Alfaro (president of Panama between January 1931 and June 1932), as a “state of mind, a current of opinion” created by factors such as “geographical continuity, similarity of institutions, economic interests,” faith in democracy and “the community of desires,” translated into “acts tending to strengthen the social, economic and cultural ties of the two Americas.”¹⁵

In 1889, the American States decided to meet periodically and began to forge a common system of rules and institutions. After several attempts, following an invitation from the United States, the First American International Conference was held in Washington, D.C., from October 2, 1889 to April 19, 1890. 18 American States participated in this conference, and it was there that the International Union of American Republics was established. Subsequently, the International Union of American Republics was transformed into the “Pan American Union” and, finally, when its functions were expanded, into the General Secretariat of the Organization of American States. The International American Conferences met at various intervals until, with the entry into force of the Protocol of Amendments to the Charter of the Organization of American States, adopted in Buenos Aires in 1970, they were replaced by the sessions of the OAS General Assembly.¹⁶

In the last decades of the 20th century, the OAS grew with the advent of the independent states of the English-speaking Caribbean to the OAS (Haiti was one of the original 18 OAS members in 1948). Caribbean member states brought a spectrum of differences to the OAS and Pan Americanism, including racial, cultural and linguistic, geopolitical, economic, and legal diversity, to the Organization’s work with their multifocal multilateralism as members of CARICOM, the Commonwealth of Nations, and of the African, Caribbean and Pacific Group of States (ACP), which expanded the geopolitical base of the OAS from 21 member states to 34.¹⁷

15 William Manger (n.d.) “Pan Americanism and Pan American Conferences”. *Congresses and Conference Series*, no. 22, p. 4. Pan American Union, Washington, DC. Retrieved from <https://obtienearchivo.bcn.cl/obtienearchivo?id=documentos/10221.1/67085/1/213007.pdf> [Accessed: September 27, 2022].

16 *Ibid.*

17 CIM (2023, forthcoming) “A Unique Symbiosis: A History of the CARICOM Member States at the Inter-American Commission of Women”, 1967-2023

The Materialization of an Idea: the Inter-American Commission of Women (CIM)

“” We are gathered here on a great and historic occasion. It is the first time in the history of the world that women have appeared before an international group to demand contractual action on their rights. Humanitarily, our thesis today is man and woman, the supreme power in the world...
—Doris Stevens.
Special Plenary Session, Sixth International American Conference.

Pan-Americanism not only united the American countries in a state of mind, an opinion, faith in democracy and a community of Pan-Americanism united the American countries through a state of mind, similar opinions, faith in democracy and a community of desires. It also united the women of the Americas behind those same ideals but with another ideal as well, that had been rumbling through history since the times of ancient Rome: that of equality, which time and again had countless opponents. The closest event to the establishment of the CIM came a few years earlier, when, between December 28, 1915 and January 7, 1916, the Second Pan American Scientific Conference was held in Washington, D.C., at which women's participation had been denied. In reaction, a group of women convened in parallel the Pan American Women's Auxiliary Conference, from which arose the movement promoting the First Pan American Women's Conference (Baltimore, Maryland, April 20-30, 1922), convened by the National League of Women Voters of the United States, with unofficial status. All the American republics were represented (with the exception of El Salvador), and Canada, England, the Philippines and Puerto Rico also sent representatives. At this Conference, the Permanent Pan American Association for the Advancement of Women, later known as the Inter-American Women's Union, which is no longer in operation, was created. There delegates were unofficially present at the Fifth International Conference of the Pan American Union (Santiago de Chile, 1923).¹⁸

This Fifth Conference has a special historical value in that it recommends that the Directing Council of the Pan American Union include in the program of future Conferences “the study of the means of abolishing constitutional and legal disabilities based on sex.” This was done thinking of a future in which women would obtain the same civil and political rights enjoyed by men. Given that, at the time the idea was circulating that women were not prepared for this, the text adds: “by developing the necessary capacities to assume the responsibilities of the case.”¹⁹

18 Verónica Giordano (2004). “Evolution of women's civil rights. Argentina siglo XX”. VI Jornadas de Sociología. Facultad de Ciencias Sociales, Universidad de Buenos Aires, Buenos Aires, 2004, p. 15. Retrieved from <https://cdsa.aacademica.org/000-045/220.pdf> [Accessed: October 8, 2022].

19 Dipublico.or. “Derechos de la mujer (Quinta Conferencia Internacional Americana”, Santiago-1923)”. Retrieved from <https://www.dipublico.org/14192/derechos-de-la-mujer-quinta-conferencia-internacional-americana-santiago-1923/>

Possibly for the same reason; that is, the perceived lack of necessary training for the exercise of rights, “the promotion of the moral, intellectual and physical education of women” is recommended. However, in addition to that, it requests to revise the civil legislation that maintains “an unjustified inequality of rights based on sex,” to adapt it “to the present state of culture of the American woman.” Two important recommendations were also made to the American Republics: to integrate the Delegations with “an element of female personnel,” so that they could participate in the work of future Conferences, and to prepare a Report on the situation of women before the Constitution and the laws, and on the development of women’s education and culture in their respective countries, so that it could be communicated to the Governments and also sent to the Directing Council of the Pan American Union, so that it could serve as a basis for studies.

For feminists, especially American feminists, the issue of equality was linked to their own history and of great importance. In 1855 in the United States, the citizenship of the wife and children was tied to that of the white husband or father. After the Expatriation Act of 1907, retroactively, women acquired the nationality of their husbands. This meant that an immigrant woman became a U.S. citizen when she married an American, but an American woman who married a foreigner lost her original citizenship. Women suffrage leaders, aware of the flagrant injustice of this law and galvanized by the recognition of their political rights in the Nineteenth Amendment to the Constitution (passed in 1919 and ratified in 1920), began to press for full citizenship. In most countries on the continent, women found themselves in a similar situation, they did not have the right to their own nationality.²⁰

The agenda of the Fifth International Conference of the Pan American Union, held in Santiago de Chile in 1923, did not include women’s political rights, despite the request of women activists. Therefore, they elaborated a proposal, presented by jurist and writer Máximo Soto Hall, a Guatemalan delegate, to the heads of delegation during a private session. The proposal took the participants by surprise, as described by Hall himself:

*If a bomb had exploded in the meeting room, it would probably have caused less of a sensation than this simple document. A spectacular silence followed its reading. The person chairing the meeting announced, with nervous brevity, that this matter would be dealt with in due course. The session ended and we retired without anyone present saying a word about my proposal.*²¹

He feared the issue would go unaddressed, but the conference took place in a Santiago buzzing with feminist activism. A group of Chilean women began an intense period of

20 Álvaro García Alonso and María Laura Osta Vázquez (2019). “When women raised...*op. cit.*”

21 Ann Towns, (8 February 2011). “The Inter-American Commission of Women and Women’s Suffrage, 1920-1945”. Retrieved from <https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/journal-of-latin-american-studies/article/interamerican-commission-of-women-and-womens-suffrage-19201945/D6536EB4143959408AEEDF48380A29BD>

lobbying individual delegates to secure their support. Soto Hall withholds their names “for fear of making an inadvertent omission” that she might regret. Ann Town believes that “more specific information about the nature and scope of the campaign is hard to find,” but “what is clear is that a combination of state representatives, and subsequent initiative and action by the women’s movement, generated the first PAU resolution on the status of women. Its components were unanimously adopted, including: (1) to study the question of equal civil and political rights between the sexes, and (2) to include women delegates in the next Pan American Conference in Havana.”²²

Despite the expectations created in 1923, not a single woman was included in the national delegations to the Sixth International Conference of the Pan American Union (Cuba, 1928). As a result, women from all over the region mobilized to demand their right to participate. Cuban lawyer Flora Parrado, contacted Alice Paul of the U.S. National Women’s Party (NWP) and requested that a U.S. representative be sent to Havana. The women lobbied Conference members to adopt an Equal Rights Treaty, prepared by Paul²³, who contacted Doris Stevens, chair of the NWP’s International Action Committee.²⁴

Representatives of the 21 member nations of the Pan American Union argued that only they could speak in the room and that there was no room on the agenda to discuss the Equal Rights



Doris Stevens, President of the CIM 1928 - 1938

Treaty. Nevertheless, after a month of protests and active campaigning, the activists succeeded in having their voices officially heard in a public plenary session of a Pan American conference, as “more than a thousand women” filled “the galleries, corridors and staircases of the great conference hall” to hear their speeches.²⁵ Doris Stevens faced the American delegates and stated:

We want no more Laws written for our good and without our consent. We must have the right to rule our own destinies together with you. For you see, no man, no group of men, no Government, no nation, no group of nations, has ever had the right to deprive us of the rights we are demanding today. We are asking for the return of rights that have been usurped from us. They are our human rights.”²⁶

22 *Ibid.*

23 CIM, “Historia en breve de la...”, *op. cit.*

24 Ann, Towns, *op. cit.*

25 CIM, “Historia en breve de la...”, *op. cit.*

26 CIM (1998) *History of the Inter-American Commission of Women 1927-1997*. Washington, D.C, TechniGraphix, 1998, p. 212.

The Equal Rights Treaty was discussed on February 18. According to Peruvian writer Zoila Aurora Cáceres, it was the “first time in the history of nations that, with the general consent of the Plenary Session, a treaty on equal rights between men and women was being negotiated at an international level.”²⁷ Although the Treaty “would have brought the issue of women’s rights throughout the hemisphere to political consideration and debate,”²⁸ it was not accepted. Instead, by means the resolution of February 18, 1928, the decision made to create the Inter-American Commission of Women, CIM²⁹ - the first formal intergovernmental organization in the world expressly concerned with women’s rights, with the mission of “assuming the consideration of the civil and political equality of women in the hemisphere.”³⁰

Referring to this fact, Amalia Castillo Ledón, president of the CIM between 1949 and 1953, wrote:

*... until 1928, when the aforementioned Resolution was passed, none of the aspects of the essential problem affecting women had even been taken into consideration; moreover, the problem itself was denied patent existence [...]. The network of prejudices that imprisoned the capacities and powers of women extended to all the countries of Latin America to such a degree that they were considered non-existent, except in cases of exception and privilege, in which it was not the woman as a social entity that counted, but the person, individually endowed with attributes of position, fortune, culture or beauty.*³¹

Composed of 21 delegates, corresponding to the 21 countries, the CIM would function as the official body in charge of investigating the legal status of women in the continent, and was immediately entrusted with the task of gathering legal and any other information deemed convenient in order to discuss the issue of women’s civil and political equality at the Seventh International Conference of American States (Montevideo, 1933).³²

27 Roida Aguilar, “Collective action for women’s political rights at the Eighth International American Conference, Peru, 1938”. In Rosas Lauro, Claudia (editor) (2019) *Género y mujeres en la historia del Perú: del hogar al espacio público*. Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú, Fondo Editorial. Retrieved from https://books.google.co.cr/books?id=O6HNDwAAQBAJ&pg=PT335&lpg=PT335&dq=propuesta+de+maximo+soto+hall,+guatemala,+mujeres&source=bl&ots=rcY3ghF7N-&sig=ACfU3U3ZYKe9JtUlyptyNEe9du8Mu2vFzQ&hl=en&sa=X&ved=2ahUKewi_nt-KLspT6AhV8TjABHZpmA9AQ6AF6BAgnEAM#v=onepage&q=proposal%20of%20maximum%20high%20high%20hall%2C%20guatemala%2C%20women&f=false

28 CIM, “Historia en breve de la...”, *op. cit.*

29 *Ibid.*

30 Ann, Towns, *op. cit.*

31 Amalia de Castillo Ledón, “Inaugural Session of the Seventh Assembly of the CIM (Santiago de Chile, Chile, 1951)”. In CIM, *History of the Inter-American Commission of Women (CIM) 1928-1977*. *Op. cit.*, p. 242.

32 Ann Towns, *op. cit.*

Its first seven representatives were appointed by a raffle, and Doris Stevens was named as its president, a position she held until 1938. The following meetings of the CIM were to be held at the same time and place as the Pan American Conferences.³³

Minerva Bernardino later referred to the precarious conditions in which the CIM began its work, in a small office “cramped and poorly maintained, sometimes without heat, and located in a small corner of the Pan American Union building,” without “adequate financial support.” Some of its members, like herself, worked only for love of the cause, because they were not paid any salary.³⁴

To ensure a certain continuity and organizational cohesion, the state delegates decided to hold assemblies every two years in addition to the natural points of congregation at the Pan American Conferences.

The First Conference of the Inter-American Commission of Women was held February 17-24, 1930 at the University of Havana, and was far from a success. According to Anna Towns, the delegates did not receive any financial support from the states they represented, so only five members were able to attend, representing the Dominican Republic, the United States, Nicaragua, Panama and Cuba.³⁵ According to another source, Argentina, Brazil, Colombia, Costa Rica, Chile, Haiti, Mexico, Peru and Venezuela were also represented, and El Salvador entrusted its representation to the delegate from Panama.³⁶

At this First Conference, the CIM submitted its report on all nationality laws concerning women in eighty-four countries for discussion. In addition, it agreed that governments should appoint CIM delegates to the Conference for the Codification of International Law to be held in The Hague in March 1930, where the subject would be discussed, and to present there, through its President, Doris Stevens, a draft Convention on equality in nationality.³⁷

33 Ana Lau Jaiven, (2009). “Between the two frontiers: the quest for equal rights for women.” *Politics and Culture*, Spring 2009, No. 31, p. 243. Retrieved from <https://www.scielo.org.mx/pdf/polcul/n31/n31a12.pdf> [Accessed: September 28, 2022].

34 Minerva Bernardino. “Mi gestión como la última Vicepresidenta y Presidenta de la Comisión Interamericana de Mujeres elegida por el Consejo Directivo de la Unión Panamericana para los períodos: 1939-1944 y 1944-1949” (My tenure as the last Vice President and President of the Inter-American Commission of Women elected by the Directing Council of the Pan American Union for the periods: 1939-1944 and 1944-1949). In *Historia de la Comisión Interamericana de Mujeres 1927-1997*, p. 224 *op. cit.* p. 225.

35 Ann Towns, *op. cit.*

36 Dipublico (January 26, 2014) First Conference of the Inter-American Commission of Women. Havana, February 17-24, 1930. Retrieved from <https://www.dipublico.org/101319/primer-conferencia-de-la-comision-interamericana-de-mujeres-la-habana-17-24-de-febrero-1930/> [Accessed: October 8, 2022].

37 *Ibid.*

According to the “Reseña histórica” published by Elena Mederos de González in the *Boletín de Información*, no. 6 (Dec. 1942), a group of psychiatrists had requested to be present at the assembly, to study this alleged ‘rare species of abnormal women’³⁸ :

*His presence made us too uneasy. We lost all our spontaneity and rarely dared to say what was on our minds. As a result, we were not satisfied with the results of the meeting. We left without having expressed our ideas frankly*³⁹ .

38 Ann Towns, *op. cit.*

39 *Ibid.*

The CIM, the Nationality of Women and other rights

“” When history evaluates the work of the Seventh Pan American Conference, it will choose our two Treaties extending greater equality to women, not only as its most immortal act, but marking an important stage in the long, painful and lamentable struggle for equality of opportunity and rights with men.
- Doris Stevens, 1934.

Stripped of Nationality



Women participating in the Hague Conference, Holland, 1930.

In 1930, at the time of the Hague Conference on Nationality, Territorial Waters and State Responsibility, “the nationality laws in all but five countries of the world made distinctions based on sex.”⁴⁰ Doris Stevens and her companions appeared at the conference in an attempt to have the Equal Rights Treaty included, which had been previously denied. She was allowed to attend the first plenary session as a mere observer, and received, along with a few other feminists, an invitation to participate in an open hearing before the

40 Brennan, Deirdre, *op.cit.*

delegates. It was the first opportunity she saw for women to defend their interests in the plenary session of a diplomatic conference.⁴¹

Finally, the Hague Conference concluded without women obtaining any guarantee of enjoying the same nationality rights enjoyed by their male counterparts.⁴² That is how things remained until 1933, when the Seventh International American Conference was held in Montevideo, Uruguay and the issue of women's civil rights was on the agenda.

Trying to Open Doors

As mentioned earlier, the Fifth International Conference of the Pan American Union (Santiago de Chile, 1923), had recommended including women in the delegations to future Conferences, as well as studying "the means of abolishing constitutional and legal disabilities based on sex."⁴³ At the Seventh International Conference of American States (Montevideo, Uruguay, in 1933), these two recommendations were fulfilled: women delegates were present for the first time, and the CIM had prepared a comparative report, the first study of its kind in the world, on the legal statutes of the American countries. Said report discussed the civil and political rights of women and the status of nationality, in the official language of each country. The report was a compendium of legislation on women, prepared exclusively by women, and consisted of 21 monographs which showed the limited civil and political rights they enjoyed in each of the American republics. It also recommended the adoption of preliminary treaties on equal rights and nationality as regards women.⁴⁴ The CIM sought acceptance of its Equal Rights Treaty, whose article of promulgation had only two lines: "The contracting states agree that, as of the ratification of this treaty, men and women shall have equal rights throughout the territory subject to their respective jurisdictions."⁴⁵

Held in a context of intense mobilization and campaigning for women's suffrage throughout the continent, the Seventh Conference is recognized as having the historical value of introducing the issue of equal rights for women to the countries of the Americas. Although it did not go beyond this recommendation, it is considered the starting point for a discussion that led the countries of the Americas to rethink the civil equality of women.⁴⁶

41 Bredbenner, Candice Lewis. *A Nationality of Her Own. Women, Marriage, and the Law of Citizenship*. University of California Press, University of California Press. Retrieved from <https://publishing.cdlib.org/ucpressebooks/view?docId=ft-0g500376&brand=ucpress> [Accessed September 5, 2022].

42 *Ibid.*, p. 212.

43 Dipublico.or. "Derechos de la mujer (Quinta Conferencia Internacional Americana", Santiago-1923)". Retrieved from <https://www.dipublico.org/14192/derechos-de-la-mujer-quinta-conferencia-internacional-americana-santiago-1923/> Accessed: December 15, 2022].

44 *Ibid.*

45 Ann Towns, *op. cit.* p. 2011.

46 Álvaro García Alonso and Ma. Laura Osta, "Cuando las mujeres plantearon..." *op. cit.* p. 7.

In the III Commission, which responsible for studying feminist proposals, representatives from all the countries were heard, however, the most outstanding speakers were Bertha Lutz, delegate for Brazil, and Sofía Álvarez Vignoli, delegate for Uruguay. Both presented projects at the Seventh Conference, and the speeches with which they defended themselves are considered brilliant.



Bertha Lutz, Delegate for Brazil.

Alvarez Vignoli declared, on December 17, 1934, “we are in an historic session [...] we are going to pass judgement on the future of thousands of women who [...] await [...] a new day of justice”. Later she added:

*[Feminism] is one of those many forces that tend to conquer the level to which [women] are rightfully entitled. It is not the whimsical and capricious creation of visionary souls, but is rooted in the painful and obscure reality of life itself.*⁴⁷

She then refers to the “prohibitive norms” that, in the American Codes, “circumscribe and narrow the sphere of action in which women move,”⁴⁸ to which, according to her count, 17 countries deny them the right to hold public office and 13 prohibit them from exercising professions under the same conditions as men. “In a word,” says Vignoli, “the doors of honorable and dignified work are closed to them, preventing the normal development of their noble activities.”⁴⁹

Finally, she criticizes the arguments used to maintain this inequality:

*The anti-feminists justify this procedure of exclusion by saying that it defends the femininity of women by preventing them from being deformed in the hard struggle of life. Without resistance, I would accept this gentle concern of men, if those same countries did not show us with surprising statistics, the thousands of working women who leave their lungs in the factories, in the workshops and in the laundry rooms.*⁵⁰

The project discussed proposed laws ranging from labor protection, to those that protected mothers with dependent children, fair remuneration, the right of marital property and the possibility of administering their property in the same way as their husband. Sofía

47 Cited by García Alonso, Álvaro and Osta Vázquez, *Ibid*, p. 10.

48 *Idem*.

49 *Idem*.

50 *Ibid*, p. 16.

Álvarez presented a ten-article project entitled “to unify the legislations of the American Republics regarding the civil rights of women.”⁵¹ Bertha Lutz made two proposals to the VII Conference. One, for the next meeting to have women delegates in all the countries, considering, she affirmed, that “women have their own problems, their special vocations and a genuine aspiration to collaborate in social and American issues.” The other, which consisted of six articles and a justification, referred to the civil and political status of women. Its text, recorded in the Proceedings, read:

*Marriage is a contract that regulates the common life of a man and a woman, legally sanctioning their union. It should not imply diminished capacity or subordination of one spouse to the other [...] The restriction of the civil capacity of married women [...] is illogical and infringes on their dignity.*⁵²

Another article of her project referred to the fact that “equality of salary is based on justice, because the salary represents the payment of a service and to reduce it for the fact of belonging [...] to the sex precisely considered weaker is an illicit exploitation of the effort of others.”⁵³

With respect to nationality, the bill established that it is “a fact determined by birth” and “preexisting marriage,” which should not affect either of the spouses. It also stipulated that before establishing laws and provisions affecting women, feminist organizations should be consulted, because it was incomprehensible that this should be done “without the necessary collaboration of those on whom the governmental measures would directly affect.”⁵⁴ It was also proposed that unions should have at least one woman member on their boards of directors.⁵⁵

A path of light: Civil Equality

Finally, the Seventh International Conference of American States approved the recommendation that, in the following conference, women representatives should be appointed in all delegations.⁵⁶ This meant that “now women could have an active participation and take their demands and proposals to the Conferences as official spokespersons,”⁵⁷ while it also pointed out the lack of women in previous conferences. As for the CIM, it was decided that its Presidency should be held within the period between Conferences and by representatives of the different countries that conform the organization. They also

51 García Alonso, Álvaro and Osta Vázquez, *op.cit.*, p. 16.

52 Cited by García Alonso, Álvaro and Osta Vázquez, *op. cit.*

53 *Idem.*

54 *Ibid.*, p. 16.

55 *Idem.*

56 *Ibid.*, p. 12.

57 *Idem.*

approved and supported its studies on the situation of women in the continent, favoring future studies and reports that would continue to support the work of the CIM.⁵⁸ But the most important achievement for women and for the CIM was the approval of the Convention on the Nationality of Women, which in its Article 1 states: “No distinction based on sex shall be made in nationality, either in law or in practice.”⁵⁹

And shadows: The Equal Rights Treaty

It seems that access to equal rights, as desired by the CIM, was an excessive concession for the time, given that the project had very little support among the main state delegates. As Peruvian suffragist Zoila Aurora Cáceres commented, “upon entering the debate, after the initial flash of admiration provoked by the efficiency of the women, a general coldness spread through the assembly. Only four delegates sat through the entire presentation.”⁶⁰ Those from the major states made virtually no effort to find solutions that might have satisfied the CIM, at least partially.

The approval of equal civil and political rights was postponed based on the following three reasons: a) these could only be acquired after a long and meditated study; b) there were substantial differences from country to country; and c) the obligatory nature of the Conference would infringe on the sovereign rights of the different States.

58 *Idem.*

59 Convention on the Nationality of Women. Retrieved from <http://www.oas.org/es/cim/docs/CNW%5BSP%5D.pdf> [Accessed:October 17, 2022].

60 *Ibid.*

CIM and Women's Civil and Political Rights: Dripping water hollows out stone

Since its inception, the CIM had been campaigning for women's suffrage on the assumption that it would help women change sexually discriminatory laws.⁶¹

During the 1930s and 1940s, it collected data on inequalities regarding the status of women in the Americas and systematically published these studies in an effort to disseminate them as widely as possible. Over time, the CIM increased the number of its members and became the representative symbol of several feminist organizations in the Americas, which it supported by providing a forum through which they could communicate with each other in their struggle to achieve legal equality.⁶² However, the CIM's struggle "was countered by groups opposed to the recognition of equal rights," and "throughout the length and breadth" of the Eighth Conference.

Finally, the CIM achieved the issuance of the Declaration of Lima in Favor of the Rights of Women, approved on December 22, 1938, in which it was agreed: 1) that "women have the right to "equal political treatment with men", to "enjoy equality in the civil order", to "the broadest opportunities and protection in the workplace", and "the broadest protection as mothers", and 2) "to urge the Governments of the American Republics, which have not yet done so, to adopt, as urgently as possible, the consequent legislation for the integral realization of the principles contained in the present declaration" to be called: The Lima Declaration in Favor of Women's Rights.⁶³ This demonstrated that the drop of water of feminism can hollow the stone of patriarchy.

The CIM was so convinced of the value of its struggles that between 1941 and 1945, during the Second World War "when travel to Washington meant a perilous voyage by ship through submarine-infested seas [...] it continued to meet to promote the ideal of women's equality and the validity of inter-American action to assert women's rights."⁶⁴

61 *Idem.*

62 *Idem.*

63 Declaration of Lima in favor of women's rights (Eighth International Conference of American States, Lima - 1938). Retrieved from <https://www.dipublico.org/15179/declaracion-de-lima-a-favor-de-los-derechos-de-la-mujer-octava-conferencia-internacional-americana-lima-1938/> [Consultation: November 24, 2023].

64 CIM, "Historia en breve de la...", *op. cit.*



Assembly of Delegates of the CIM, 1944, Washington D.C.

Between March 30 and May 2, 1948, the Ninth Pan American Conference was held in Bogotá, Colombia. In a speech recorded by the United Nations and transmitted directly from the National Capitol, Alberto Lleras Camargo, former President of Colombia and Secretary General of the Pan American Union, declared, in allusion to the then almost recently passed World War II:

The contrast between the deliberations of the Ninth Conference and the general situation of the world is striking but encouraging. Everywhere at this time, there is alarm, violent clashes of opinions and forces, intransigence, distrust and danger. At the Assembly of the Americas, on the other hand, serene voices discuss the highest principles of contemporary juridical civilization.⁶⁵

As President of the CIM and Plenipotentiary Delegate of her country, Minerva Bernardino was among those serene voices alluded to in Mr. Lleras Camargo's speech, as she presented and achieved the adoption of the CIM Organic Statutes.⁶⁶

⁶⁵ Felipe Arias Escobar (April 30, 2022). United Nations Radio Service), The IX Pan American Conference of 1948, according to Alberto Lleras Camargo. Retrieved from <https://www.senalmemoria.co/piezas/conferencia-panamericana-1948> [Accessed September 5, 2022].

⁶⁶ Minerva Bernardino, "Mi gestión como...", *op. cit.*, p. 227.

As we have seen above, at the Seventh International Conference of American States, held in Montevideo in 1933, the draft Treaty on Equal Rights was rejected. Subsequently, the CIM took a draft Convention on Civil and Political Rights to the Ninth International Conference of American States in Bogotá, Colombia. As Bernardino recounts, at the Ninth Conference “it was necessary to divide the Convention into two parts” to give the States the opportunity to sign them.⁶⁷ Both Conventions were defended “insistently and responsibly” by her, which resulted in their adoption by the American States.

The Inter-American Convention on the Granting of Political Rights to Women was established as a binding international agreement to equalize the status between the sexes, in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. On May 2, 1948, the Inter-American Convention on the Granting of Civil Rights to Women was approved, in which it was determined to grant women “the same civil rights enjoyed by men” (Article 1).

Overcoming the Culture of Exclusion in all Spheres of Life



Shortly before midnight on December 10, 1948, after almost three years of gestation, long days of negotiation and deliberation, the General Assembly of the then recently constituted United Nations Organization, meeting in Paris, approved and proclaimed the Universal Declaration by 48 votes in favor, none against and with only eight abstentions. At that moment, a new chapter in the history of humanity began, a new horizon was opened on which hope, darkened years before by the gloom of the second world conflagration and its insane excesses, shone once again.

–Mauricio Iván del Toro Huerta.

Only Two Women, or Two Unique Women

Between February 21 and March 8, 1945, the Inter-American Conference on War and Peace Problems met in Chapultepec, Mexico. It was, in fact, a special meeting convened by that country with the purpose of having the governments of the American Republics jointly consider “how to intensify their collaboration, as well as the participation of America in the future world organization and the impulse that should be given both to the inter-American system and to the economic solidarity of the continent.”⁶⁸

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 228.

⁶⁸ Dipublico.org. INTER-AMERICAN CONFERENCE ON THE PROBLEMS OF WAR AND PEACE - Mexico City, February 21 to March 8, 1945. Retrieved from <https://www.dipublico.org/conferencias-diplomaticas-naciones-unidas/conferencias-inter-americanas/conf-inter-amer-1945-1954/conferencia-interamericana-sobre-problemas-de-la-guerra-y-de-la-paz-ciudad-de-mexico-21-de-febrero-al-8-de-marzo-de-1945/> [Accessed: December 22, 2022].

Although this Conference was attended by more than one hundred participants, there were only two women present: Minerva Bernardino, President of the CIM and member of the Dominican Republic delegation; and Amalia de Castillo Ledón, who at that time was an advisor to the Mexican delegation and later became President of the CIM between 1949 and 1953. “Their concerted action,” says Gabriela Cano, “succeeded in getting the Conference to pronounce itself against discrimination based on sex, which was a precursor to the Declaration of Human Rights.”

As Amalia later explained, although none of the items on the Agenda of this Chapultepec Conference included topics related to the specific purposes of the CIM, “the CIM, however, indirectly carried and introduced,” through two delegates, “two very important resolutions that were approved. One, on Women’s Rights, and the other, recommending the attendance of women in their government’s delegations to international meetings.”⁶⁹ In this regard, “distinguished women from the Americas and other continents”, previously excluded “from participation in diplomatic events, were included in the official delegations attending the San Francisco Conference.”⁷⁰

The Moment of Equality... or at Least of its Foreshadowing

The United Nations Conference on International Organization, or San Francisco Conference, was held in San Francisco, California, between April 25 and June 26, 1945. The United Nations Charter on International Organization was signed at the conference. García Maldonado highlights the active participation of 18 female diplomats, representatives of 11 of the 50 Member States of the United Nations. That is, 3% of the 160 participants, representing the 30 countries where women’s suffrage existed at that time.⁷¹ They were the delegates from Uruguay, Mexico, the Dominican Republic, Venezuela and Australia, among others, led by the Brazilian scientist and politician Bertha Lutz, who insisted that the principle of equal rights between men and women be recognized and included in both the Preamble and the articles of the San Francisco Charter, and that an intergovernmental body for the promotion of gender equality be created.

Some diplomats considered feminist speeches at the Conference unnecessary, as women were already “well established” and had equal opportunities with men in the United States. Lutz responded during the debates that “nowhere in the world was there comple-

69 Amalia de Castillo Ledón. Inaugural Session of the Seventh Assembly of the CIM (Santiago de Chile, Chile, 1951). In CIM, *History of the Inter-American Commission of Women (CIM) 1928-1997*, p. 243.

70 Ana Lucina García Maldonado, “The Universal Declaration of Human Rights: The recognition and incorporation of women’s rights”. Retrieved from <https://feminismoinc.org/2020/12/la-declaracion-universal-de-los-derechos-humanos-el-reconocimiento-e-incorporacion-de-los-derechos-de-la-mujer.html> [Accessed: December 11, 2022].

71 *Ibid.*

te equality of rights with men,” and that she had been commissioned by the then government of President Getúlio Vargas to defend just that point in the UN Charter.”⁷²

Minerva Bernardino attended the Conference in the dual role of Plenipotentiary Delegate of the Dominican Republic and President of the CIM. According to García Maldonado, the prominence of Latin American women diplomats in San Francisco was due to their experience and seniority in the defense of women’s rights at the international level. “Since 1928, they had been acting repeatedly in the Inter-American Commission of Women, within the Pan American Union in a continent at peace,” affected by the war “in a collateral way.”⁷³ Lutz and other Latin American feminists argued that the term “men” to refer to both sexes “always resulted in the fact that women were prevented from participating in public affairs.”⁷⁴

The document was signed by only four women as Plenipotentiary Delegates: Minerva Bernardino for the Dominican Republic, Bertha Lutz for Brazil, Virginia Gilders-Leeve for the United States of America and Wo Yi Fang for China; but of these, only Lutz and Bernardino defended women’s rights.



Minerva Bernardino, Presidenta de la CIM 1944 - 1949

Del Toro Huerta highlights the role played by women in the process of drafting and adopting this document, whose contributions were “in no way minor” despite the fact that their participation was proportionally smaller than that of men.”⁷⁵ Initially, Article 1 read: All men are born free and equal in dignity and rights and, endowed as they are with reason and conscience, should behave fraternally towards one another. Indian politician and feminist activist Hansa Mehta is credited with changing “all men” to “all human beings” in that sentence.

By General Assembly Resolution 217 A (iii) of December 10, 1948, the United Nations General Assembly adopted and proclaimed the Universal Declaration of Human Rights “as a common standard of achievement for all peoples and all nations.”⁷⁶

72 *Ibid.*

73 *Ibid.*

74 *Ibid.*

75 Del Toro Huerta, *op. cit.*, pp. 123-124.

76 United Nations General Assembly, “Universal Declaration of Human Rights (10 December 1948)”. Recuperado de <http://www.pgrweb.go.cr/DOCS/NORMAS/1/VIGENTE/I/1940-1949/1945-1949/1948/BF77/5513E.HTML#:~:text=Declaraci%C3%B3n%20Universal%20de%20los%20Derechos%20humanos&text=El%2010%20de%20diciembre%20de,figura%20en%20las%20p%C3%A1ginas%20siguientes> [Consulta: 20 de enero, 2023].

Equal Pay for Equal Work



Newspaper article headline.

In the 1950s, with the battle for women's suffrage almost won with the approval of the Convention on Political Rights and the Convention on Civil Rights, the CIM's priorities shifted to social and economic rights⁷⁷ and raising awareness of the difficult reality faced by many women in Latin America and the Caribbean.⁷⁸ In 1951, the CIM promoted the First Regional Seminar on the Civil, Political, Economic, Social and Cultural Rights of Women, which had always been part of its agenda.

Later on, in the 1960s and 1970s, the CIM began to promote technical cooperation projects through programs that offered organizational and cooperative training courses to women workers, and supported projects that not only allowed them to generate income, but also offered them, both in urban and rural areas, the necessary means and training to change their situation. Emphasis was placed on equal pay for equal work.⁷⁹

In this context, the debates in the OAS on the topic of regional integration also intensified. At the XIV Assembly of Delegates of the CIM (Montevideo, November 1967), days after the first Caribbean States – Barbados and Trinidad and Tobago – deposited their instruments of ratification of the OAS Charter – one of the highlighted topics was Women and Latin American Integration; and an Assembly document specifically noted the situation in the Caribbean with respect to integration efforts. It was this framework of deepening Caribbean integration, together with the entry of the first two Anglophone Caribbean states to the OAS, that fueled the movement for greater Latin American integration. From the perspective of the CIM, the role of women in this process was relevant, since they are an integral part of development; and a resolution presented to this XIV Assembly of the CIM by Argentina would strengthen that position.⁸⁰

It was from 1974 that the first wave of Member States from the English-speaking Caribbean joined the CIM, in the midst of preparations for the historic United Nations First

77 CIM, *Ibid.*

78 CIM, "Brief History of the ..."

79 *Ibid.*

80 CIM (2023, forthcoming) "A Unique Symbiosis: A History of the CARICOM Member States at the Inter-American Commission of Women", 1967-2023

World Conference on Women (Mexico City, 1975), as the culmination of the International Year of Women in 1975. After the World Conference, within the framework of the Decade for Women (1976-1985), the CIM began to focus on granting donations as part of technical cooperation for the execution of a program of national activities in the Member States, a program from which Caribbean countries benefited.⁸¹

The Road to Beijing 1995

“” *The Beijing Conference opened up many avenues, as well as many challenges. [...] We have understood that gender relations permeate every corner of public and private life, not only for women, but for all people. We have recognized that equal opportunity mechanisms encouraged by the State are instruments for changing gender relations, but that they also require strategies for their implementation throughout society. We have found that poverty has a particularly different weight for women.*

–Cristina Muñoz.
President of the CIM 1997-1998.

In 1946, the United Nations Economic and Social Council, concerned about the situation of women, established its Commission on the Status of Women (CSW). It was, as Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka notes, “the world’s foremost policy-making body on matters relating to gender equality and the advancement of women.”⁸² At its first session, “fifteen government representatives, all of them women” met in February 1947 in Lake Success, New York.⁸³ The CSW had two main tasks for the Council: one, to prepare recommendations and reports on the promotion of women’s rights; the other, to make recommendations on urgent problems.⁸⁴ In 1947, thanks to the “insistent management” of Minerva Bernardino, according to her own account, the Economic and Social Council “invited the CIM to be represented at the Sessions of the CSW in an advisory and informative capacity, with a view to avoiding duplication of work and effort by both organizations. This representation proved to be so efficient that the “newly created Commission on the Status of Women” “had no alternative” but to use the CIM Reports to the American International Conferences as a guide for its future work, the reports of the CIM to the International American Conferences⁸⁵.

81 *Ibid.*

82 Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka (September 17, 2015) “The 70th anniversary of the united nations and the continuing quest for gender equality”. Retrieved from <https://www.un.org/es/chronicle/article/el-70o-aniversario-de-las-naciones-unidas-y-la-busqueda-constante-de-la-igualdad-de-genero> [Accessed: 21 December, 2022].

83 *Ibid.*

84 United Nations (2014). “Women’s rights are human rights.” Retrieved from https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/Publications/HR-PUB-14-2_SP.pdf [Accessed: October 30, 2022].

85 Minerva Bernardino. My tenure as the last Vice-President and President of the Inter-American Commission of Women elected by the Directing Council of the Pan American Union for the periods: 1939-1944 and 1944-1949. In *Historia de la Comisión Interamericana de Mujeres 1927-1997, op.cit.*, p. 228.

The CIM Planning for Equality

The CIM (according to Julieta Jardi de Morales Macedo, its President from 1980 to 1983), drew up a “Plan of Action for the Decade of Women in the Americas” to which all its activities from then on were directed.⁸⁶ In 1979, it held an “Inter-American Seminar on Evaluation and Planning” and noted that, despite its efforts, progress had been rather slow, so in the 1980-82 biennium it sought to increase its efforts.⁸⁷ To this end, it implemented an extensive technical cooperation program in 30 OAS member states, where it carried out more than 200 projects on a wide variety of topics, such as training, legal advice, agricultural technologies, and the organization of cooperatives.⁸⁸

Disappointing, but not Surprising, the Decade Evaluation

As Doris Stevens had said years ago, it was a matter of “starting over...again and again and



Princess Lawes,
Primera Presidenta Caribeña de la CIM 1984-1986

again and again”. The CIM had experience in this. At its Twenty-third Assembly of Delegates, held in Washington, D.C., October 6-10, 1985, a new Plan of Action was approved under the theme “Full and Equal Participation for the Year 2000. This plan was drawn up on the basis of the reports of Inter-American meetings held in the hemisphere, national and regional evaluations of the review and appraisal of the Decade for Women, and the forward-looking strategies for the advancement of women adopted by the World Conference to Review and Appraise the Achievements of the United Nations Decade for Women: Equality, Development and Peace. Princess Lawes, then President of the CIM, wrote in this regard:

It is disappointing, but not surprising, that the Decade of Women has concluded with many unfulfilled goals and therefore, the promotion of

86 Julieta Jardi de Morales Macedo. “Regional Plan for the Decade of Women in the Americas.” In *Historia de la Comisión Interamericana de Mujeres 1927-1997*. Op.cit., p. 438.

87 *Ibid.*, p. 439.

88 CIM, “Historia en breve de la...”, *op. cit.*

*women's effective participation at all levels of development must continue. Our nations cannot neglect the development and full utilization of fifty percent of their most productive resources, especially in these times when our region bears the brunt of a global recession and its attendant economic needs; we must order our priorities so that we can better survive.*⁸⁹

In 1994, in preparation for the Fourth World Conference on Women to be held in Beijing the following year, and after analyzing the progress made since 1995, the CIM approved a Strategic Plan of Action, “taking as a reference the progress and difficulties identified during the last decade, the results and recommendations of the national reports of the member states, and the conclusions and resolutions of the Inter-American Meeting for the Evaluation of the CIM Plan of Action, approved in 1986.”⁹⁰ The CIM was clear that sustainable development with gender equity could not be achieved until “relations between the sexes and the system of socio-cultural patterns that place women in a subordinate role that excludes them and is incompatible with their ability to participate, under equal conditions, in a modern society” were changed.

Paths and Challenges in the topic of violence against women



Dilma Quezada, President of the CIM from 1994 to 1996, at the Fourth World Conference on Women, Beijing, 1995.

The Fourth World Conference on Women, held in Beijing from September 4-15, 1995, was attended by the President of the CIM, Ambassador Dilma Quezada de Martinez, and Executive Secretary Linda J. Poole. Dilma’s speech was distributed during the plenary.⁹¹ The CIM Plan of Action was to be made available to national or international forums convened “to address issues related to the promotion of the advancement of women.”⁹² At the Conference, the CIM distributed, in addition to the Plan, other CIM

89 Princess Lawes. “Women’s Day of the Americas February 18, 1986.” In CIM. *History of the Inter-American Commission of Women 1928-1997*, op. cit. p.495.

90 CIM, “Strategic Plan of Action of the Inter-American Commission of Women”. Retrieved from <http://www.summit-americas.org/Strategic%20Plan%20of%20Action%20CIM-Spanish.htm> [Consultation: November 23, 2022.

91 CIM. *History of the Inter-American Commission of Women (CIM) 1928-1997* op. cit., p. 170.

92 CIM, “Plan Estratégico de Acción de la ...”, op. cit.

publications such as its text of the International Convention on the Prevention, Punishment and Eradication of Violence against Women or “Convention of Belém do Pará,” “A Century of Struggle for Women’s Rights in the Americas. The CIM Keeps its Promise,” and the document “Purposes, Activities, and Achievements of the CIM,” which was translated into Chinese.⁹³

As acknowledged by Cristina Muñoz, President of the CIM between 1997 and 1998, the Beijing Conference opened up new paths and challenges. The conference made it clear that gender relations color the entire social network, that the opportunities provided require strategies to implement them in order to become instruments of change, and that a poor woman has a more difficult time than a poor man.⁹⁴ In short, things that we already knew, but were not said so clearly.

When Women Speak Up...



When women speak up, the law changes.
—Linda Jeanne Poole.

This undoubtedly led to the Second World Conference on Women (Copenhagen, 1980), where the problem of gender-based violence was expressly raised for the first time. It recognized the serious consequences of abuse within the family and the virtual judicial impunity of abusers, and acknowledged that signs of inequality were beginning to emerge between guaranteed rights and the difficulty women had in exercising them.⁹⁵

As Linda J. Poole points out:

*In the 1980s, women throughout the Inter-American region began to raise their voices to denounce the millennial and systemic violence to which they were subjected. This union of voices in search of long overdue justice was the trigger that brought the issue to public debate at the national and regional levels.*⁹⁶

93 CIM, *History of the Inter-American Commission of Women*, op. cit.

94 Cristina Muñoz. “Seventy Years of the CIM. A Long History in a Short Time. In *Historia de la Comisión Interamericana de Mujeres 1927-1997*, op. cit. p.595.

95 United Nations. 2^a. World Conference on Women, Copenhagen 1980 Source: United Nations RESOLUTION 35/136. Retrieved from http://www.coordinadoradelamujer.org.bo/observatorio/archivos/marco/5copen80_562.pdf [Accessed: December 2, 2022].

96 Linda J. Poole (October 28, 2013). “Educating and promoting ...”, op. cit.



Inter-American Consultation on Women and Violence, Washington DC, 1990.

The CIM designed a multidimensional and multifocal strategy that defined the steps required to identify it, analyze it, and try to put an end to it. It was decided,” says Poole, “that it would be a transparent and open process, not a private one, and without restricted documents.”⁹⁷ The strategy envisaged having the “participation and support of civil society at the national level and to obtain the accompaniment of the OAS decision makers.”⁹⁸

In July 1990, the CIM opened an Inter-American Consultation on Women and Violence (Washington D.C.), as a result of the expressions made at different Assemblies of Delegates, on the need to pay urgent attention to the problem.⁹⁹ The idea was to gather data and information that would support its incidence on women in order to recommend measures to put an end to it.¹⁰⁰ As Milagro Azcunaga, then President of the CIM, saw it, this type of violence has been validated “by the very structures of our society: the patterns of behavior, molded by inherited historical traditions and the legislation that protects our human coexistence.”¹⁰¹ She therefore considered it a priority to “consider the existence of a prototype legislation” on the basis of which “future legislation that truly provides women with the necessary protection” would be approved.¹⁰² Azcunaga pointed out the importance of analyzing “the possibility of an Inter-American convention on violence against women.”¹⁰³

97 Linda J. Poole (October 28, 2013). “Educating and promoting ...”, *op.cit.*

98 *Ibid.*

99 Milagro Azcunaga de Meléndez. “Inaugural Session of the Inter-American Consultation on Women and Violence” (Washington, D.C., USA, 1990). In *History of the Inter-American Commission of Women 1927-1997. Op. cit.*, p. 547.

100 Linda J. Poole (October 28, 2013). “Educating and promoting ...”, *op. cit.*

101 Milagro Azcunaga de Meléndez. “Sesión Inaugural ...”, *op.cit.*, p. 548.

102 *Idem.*

103 *Ibid.*, p. 548.



Inter-American Meeting of Jurists, Caracas, Venezuela, 1991.

In June 1991, the OAS General Assembly reaffirmed the recommendations of the Inter-American Consultation on Women and Violence, through resolution AG/RES. 1128 (XXI-0/91), “Protection of Women against Violence”, and resolved to support the CIM initiative, says Linda J. Poole, “in its efforts to elaborate a preliminary draft Inter-American convention for the eradication of violence against women.”¹⁰⁴

At subsequent meetings, the opinions of all the States were incorporated into the draft, and in August 1991, with the support of the governments of Canada and Venezuela, the CIM convened a Meeting of Jurists at which ten women participants were elected, who agreed on the elements to be included in the Convention and gave it the structure it has.¹⁰⁵ In Poole’s opinion, “the coherence and internal logic of what was proposed from the outset contributed throughout the subsequent consultation and adoption process.”¹⁰⁶

In October 1991, the CIM sent the text to the governments “for their consideration and observation.”¹⁰⁷ After a period of consultations, meetings and petitions for signatures, it was submitted to the OAS General Assembly and approved as the Inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment and Eradication of Violence against Women or “Convention of Belém do Pará” (Brazil, June 9, 1994), which recognized that “violence against women transcends all sectors of society regardless of class, race or ethnic group, income level, culture, educational level, age or religion and negatively affects their very foundations. Article 1 defined this type of violence as “any act or conduct, based on gender, which

104 Linda J. Poole (October 28, 2013). “Educating and promoting ...”, *op. cit.*

105 Linda J. Poole (October 28, 2013). Educating and promoting ...”, *op.cit.*

106 *Ibid.*

107 *Ibid.*

causes death or physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, whether in the public or the private sphere.”¹⁰⁸

All this is the result of the persistent work of the CIM, which did not cease for years in its quest for a society free of gender-based violence. The Convention of Belém do Pará has proven to be an effective instrument in terms of national normative changes, both substantive and procedural, with respect to women’s right to a life free of violence, as well as cultural transformation. It has also contributed to women’s access to national and international justice.



Ana Lucina García Maldonado, signing the Belém do Pará Convention, at the Twenty-fourth Regular Session of the OAS General Assembly. Belém do Pará, Brazil, 1994.

108 Inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment and Eradication of Violence against Women or “Convention of Belem do Para”-1994. Retrieved from <https://www.oas.org/juridico/spanish/tratados/a-61.html> [Accessed: November 2, 2022].

CIM at Present and in the Future: A Tireless Effort

“” All human rights are universal, indivisible, interdependent and interrelated. The international community must treat human rights globally and in a fair and equal manner on the same footing and with the same weight.
–*Vienna Declaration and Program of Action*. Paragraph 1, Paragraph 5

In order to contextualize the actions and interventions of the CIM in the Americas, it is important to briefly review the main and most recent Declarations of the Assemblies of Delegates of the CIM. The Assembly is made up of the governmental authorities responsible for women's issues in each of the OAS member states, and discusses issues of regional relevance on the situation of women in order to propose policy and programmatic actions in accordance with the progress of women's human rights and the challenges for their realization in different contexts and historical moments.

A total of forty seven Assemblies of Delegates (regular and special) have been held, the last one being the 39th Assembly of Delegates held in Panama in May 2022. The antecedent of these Assemblies is the First Conference of the Inter-American Commission of Women, held from February 17 to 24, 1930, in Havana, Cuba. At that Conference, the Commission's report on nationality laws concerning women was presented and the importance of continuing to work on the issue of women's nationality in the hemisphere was recognized. Urgent actions were also recommended to strengthen the work of the Commission, and resolutions were adopted regarding the request for financial assistance and the appointment of a CIM Executive Committee.

Although the Declarations of each Assembly have dealt with different topics, of particular concern at the time or requiring a deepening of efforts to continue advancing, some topics constitute “common threads” among all the declarations, beginning with and above all the political rights of women to highlight the importance of their equal and substantive participation in all spaces of representation and decision-making. Over time, the declarations have also included economic rights, gender mainstreaming and the strengthening of the National Women's Machineries at the national level, and of course the strengthening of the CIM at the regional level.

At each of these moments, the participation of the CARICOM Member States has made specific contributions that have left an indelible and distinctive mark in these instances

and therefore in the work of the Commission. Among the priority issues they have contributed are political leadership in areas such as agribusiness and rural women; gender-based violence against women and girls; situation of female-headed households, adolescent pregnancy, the incorporation of the gender perspective in work, justice, education and science, natural disasters, and the intersection of violence against women and HIV/AIDS, among other both cross-cutting and specific topics.¹⁰⁹

At the XXXIV Assembly of Delegates, held in Santiago, Chile, in 2008, the Santiago Declaration on “Strengthening National Women’s Machineries for Mainstreaming the Gender Perspective in Public Policies” was approved. This Declaration of the Delegates is important in that it seeks to strengthen the institutional framework for women and urges the States to “Promote the adoption of measures to ensure that the existing National Women’s Machineries have the budgets and institutional autonomy to carry out their work, granting them the authority to guide, follow up and evaluate public gender policies and, in accordance with the domestic legislation of each country, to monitor budgets from a gender equity perspective, as well as to participate in technical and political cooperation agreements, both at the national and international levels. From this moment on, all the declarations of the CIM Assemblies have referred to the strengthening of the National Mechanisms.

In 2010, the XXXV Assembly of Delegates of the CIM was held in Mexico City, which is relevant because it approved the Declaration of the Inter-American Year of Women “Women and Power: For a World with Equality,” in which the Delegates commit to “develop and promote, as appropriate, reforms to electoral legislation and affirmative action measures necessary to promote equal treatment between women and men in positions of political representation.” If suffragism constituted the starting point for the CIM, then parity is the goal for transforming society and democracy strengthening.

In 2012, the XXVI Assembly of Delegates of the CIM was held in San José, Costa Rica, approving the Declaration of San José on the economic and political empowerment of women. In this Declaration, the Delegates commit to carry out specific actions in the area of violence and citizen security, in the area of political participation and in the area of care infrastructure and economic autonomy of women, while requesting the Executive Secretariat of the CIM to strengthen its “relationship with civil society organizations that develop actions in favor of women’s human rights and gender equality.”

At the XXXVII Assembly of Delegates held in Lima, Peru, in 2016, the Declaration of Lima on Equality and Autonomy in the Exercise of Women’s Economic Rights was approved,

109 CIM (2023, forthcoming) “A Unique Symbiosis: A History of the CARICOM Member States at the Inter-American Commission of Women”, 1967-2023

which recognizes that “Autonomy, equality and non-discrimination in the enjoyment and full exercise of economic rights by women, in all their diversity, and their participation in planning, resource allocation and policy formulation in the economic sphere are elements that contribute to sustainable development and that consolidate and strengthen the democracies of the Hemisphere.” This Declaration also begins to lay out the road map for strengthening the normative framework for women’s economic rights as a necessary precondition for their full participation in other spheres of life.

At the XXXVIII Assembly of Delegates, held in Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic, in 2019, the Declaration of Santo Domingo on Equality and Autonomy in the Exercise of Women’s Political Rights for the Strengthening of Democracy was adopted, which declares the commitment of the States and the Commission in their efforts to “achieve equality and autonomy in the exercise of women’s political rights and access to leadership and decision-making positions in all areas of public and political life under conditions of equality and free from violence.” In this Declaration, the centrality of women’s leadership in maintaining and accelerating progress in terms of achieving equality is positioned for the first time.

In the last Declaration of the Assembly of Delegates: “Building bridges for a new social and economic pact led by women” approved in Panama in May 2022, the idea of positioning the CIM as a space to generate alliances that involve many feminist actors, NGOs, the private sector, academia and the State, a human rights-based and “feminist” State (understood as a “State that defends the rights of all women and is committed to gender equality”) was proposed as an essential complement to women’s participation and leadership.

Recognizing that it is as discriminatory to treat equally what is different, as it is to treat differently what is equal, the Declaration of Panama emphasizes the need to incorporate the intersectionality approach into institutional work, in order to achieve a comprehensive understanding of the diverse situations of women, and also emphasizes the gender impacts caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. The Declaration recognizes that the “struggle for equality requires solidarity among women in leadership positions, understanding this as sororal leadership, which implies: i) a political arrangement among all women, around common goals and concrete agendas for gender equality, to enhance their empowerment and impact on the world, and ii) an ethical responsibility of women in leadership positions”.

The Declaration recognizes that “achieving the economic autonomy of women in the region requires the configuration of a system of co-responsibility between the State, the private sector and households as a whole, thus translating into national care systems, accompanied by regulatory frameworks that advocate equal working conditions, and access to quality health systems that prioritize women’s mental health,” hence the importance of the Inter-American Model Law on Care, developed by the CIM.

On the way to a gradual change for reinvolvement in the CIM in the Caribbean subregion, the Declaration of Panama, the 39th Assembly of Delegates and the Executive Committee expressed their commitment and adopted a specific chapter for the Caribbean within the framework of the Strategic Plan 2022 -2026.

Caring and Being Cared for: New Ethics

One of the events that highlighted the precariousness of women's rights was the crisis provoked by COVID-19. Immediately, the headlines announced how the gender gap and inequalities between the sexes were worsening. The measures adopted by the countries shed light on the effects of the burden of caregiving on women. In April 2021, the CIM opened multiple spaces for intersectoral dialogue in which it noted that the emergency resulting from COVID-19 had not only deepened existing gender inequalities, but even implied "unacceptable setbacks in terms of the rights achieved." From there the CIM focused its efforts on generating public policy recommendations to the States to support them in facing the challenge posed by the pandemic.

The confinement measures caused "the spheres of work (teleworking) and education (virtual) to be added to the long list of pre-existing care activities," and had an impact on the old bases of gender inequality in the family, labor and social-political spheres.¹¹⁰ Taking these facts into account, and aware that, as the current Executive Secretary of the CIM, Costa Rican jurist and researcher Alejandra Mora Mora, points out, caregiving tasks are fundamental "for the survival of people, societies and economies, the CIM considered it necessary to "propose a new ethic and a new social pact with care at the center." This understanding formed the basis for the construction and publication of the Inter-American Model Law on Care and its Implementation Guide, which today are references for States in the area of care legislation.

110 OAS/CIM, "Covid-19 in women's lives: global care emergency". Retrieved from <http://www.oas.org/es/cim/docs/CuidadosCOVID19-ES.pdf> [Accessed: November 23, 2022].

New Theoretical Tools against Old Forms of Power



Despite our diversities, we the women of the Americas have been able to work effectively together for the advancement of women because we have refused to allow social, cultural, ideological or racial differences to divide us; instead we have concentrated on those things that we have in common and in doing so we have achieved a great measure of success.

–*Princess Lawes*,

CIM President (1984-1986) and Principal Delegate of Jamaica (1982-1987) ¹¹¹

As we have seen, the history of the CIM is part of a long collective and millennial struggle of women for their human rights, which for centuries has been diminished and often denied. Tireless as the voices that have sought to silence them, its women leaders have had to fight not only against the institutionalization of inequality, but also against the stereotypes and fallacies that have served to institutionalize it. We seek to follow their example of optimistic fortitude and uphold the ideals for which they fought. To this end, today we have new theoretical tools, forged by the CIM, with which to understand and dismantle the socio-cultural mechanisms that have allowed the emergence and permanence of different forms of sexual discrimination.

We are aware that language plays a key role in this whole struggle. We have seen how the invention of the word feminism in 1880, with the meaning we give it today, was a formidable tool for extending the women's emancipation movement far beyond a few limited rights. Today, concepts such as gender, gender equality, gender approach, empowerment, mainstreaming, parity, intersectionality, and active inclusion, are fundamental tools to face new forms of struggle as well as the insistent prevalence of the old patterns. In the words of Line Bareiro, these concepts help "to defend the good we have built."¹¹² New words and names arise from the need to change social realities, or to change the way of facing them.

Thus, following the mandate for which it was created on February 18, 1928, the CIM, cele-

¹¹¹ Princess Lawes was the first woman from the English-speaking Caribbean to preside over the CIM. CIM (2023, forthcoming) "A Unique Symbiosis: A History of the CARICOM Member States at the Inter-American Commission of Women", 1967-2023

¹¹² UN Women (September 24, 2021). "Line Barreiro: 'It's time to make positive changes'". Retrieved from <https://lac.unwomen.org/es/noticias-y-eventos/articulos/2021/09/line-bareiro-es-el-momento-de-hacer-cambios-positivos> [Accessed January 23, 2023].

brating its 95th anniversary, crowns a long and memorable life in the service of equality, the cornerstone of respect for human rights and the preservation of democracy. While planning for the present and dreaming of the future, we must look back to recognize, as landmarks of the ground won against oppression, the names of those who, in their firmness and tenacity, did not allow themselves to take a step back even in the most difficult and bitter moments. The CIM's commitment to women is also a way of honoring our ancestors, to keep building equality together with new generations of women...we will continue forging paths...building equality.

95
YEARS



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