

Remarks for the Assistant Secretary General of the OAS, H.E. Nestor Mendez

Policy Roundtable: Gender, Peace and Security

March 17th 2016, 9:30-11:30a.m.

Hall of the Americas, OAS

Her Excellency Dr. Aurelia Frick, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Education and Culture of the Principality of Liechtenstein

Distinguished Excellences and Alternate Representatives

Rear-Admiral Martha Herb, Director of the Inter-American Defense College,

Special invited guests

Good morning,

I first wish to welcome all of you to the Casa de las Américas, and especially Dr. Aurelia Frick, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Education and Culture of the Principality of Liechtenstein. I also wish to thank the Government of Liechtenstein for offering to partner with the OAS to host this Policy Roundtable on Gender, Peace and Security. This is a topic that has been at the forefront of international development in recent years, as policy makers have widely recognized the inextricable link between these themes. From our perspective and that of our member states, it is clear that democratic governance, peace and security cannot be fully achieved **without the full participation of women.**

The United Nations Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security, adopted in 2000, was a landmark resolution that not only recognized the impact of war on women but also the pivotal role that women can and should play in peace processes, conflict resolution, and conflict management. Though the implementation of this resolution has had varied results across regions, it has certainly engendered greater awareness on how gender inequality affects peace and security.

In terms of gender equality, our hemisphere has made much progress particularly for women in Latin America and the Caribbean who have seen greater access to education and the labor market. In fact, according to the World Bank, over 70 million women have joined the workforce in the last 20 years, reducing extreme poverty in the region by 30% in the past decade. However, issues of poverty, social and political exclusion, gender-based violence, and women's reproductive healthcare still need to be addressed at a deeper level.

For that reason and in line with the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the OAS has focused more on promoting women's rights. Just last week, the OAS celebrated International Women's Day by hosting a forum on access to justice for women, which produced a rich discussion on ways to overcome challenges faced by women of marginalized and vulnerable groups. In addition, the Organization also launched its gender policy which seeks to address the gender imbalances and

institutionalize a culture of equal treatment and opportunity. **At the OAS, we firmly believe that women must be provided the opportunity to participate at the highest levels of decision making.**

However, this is not a reality in many of our societies. As UN Resolution 1325 points out, women continue to be excluded from decision-making processes in the areas of peace and security. As a result, the international community has advocated strongly for increased participation and representation of women in peace processes, conflict prevention and post-conflict reconstruction. In our hemisphere, we see a chasm between the progress made by regional organizations in establishing the normative framework on guaranteeing women's rights and the implementation of these policies at the national level.

Furthermore, as many of you know, our region is plagued by high levels of citizen insecurity. We face many of the issues that confront countries in conflict, including weak Rule of Law, security institutions that are sometimes incapable or unwilling to respect human rights, the proliferation of small arms, and high levels of violence against women. This insecurity constitutes one of the principal threats to stability, democratic governance, and sustainable development in the Americas. In Latin America and the

Caribbean, the homicide rate is double the world average. In some areas, the rate is five times higher than the global average.

Unfortunately, women are disproportionately affected by these levels of insecurity. Gender violence is a serious concern in the region considering that worldwide; one in three women will become a victim of violence within her lifetime. In certain parts of Latin America, recent figures released by the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) put this figure closer to one in two.

Against this backdrop, we find ourselves with two objectives in mind: First, to broaden our understanding of the relationship between gender, security and peace; and Second, to learn how we can seek to incorporate greater participation of women in democratic consolidation and our security structures.

Estimados amigos y amigas no se puede hablar de obstáculos para la plena incorporación de las mujeres en el sector de seguridad sin hablar de la interdependencia de los niveles de ciudadanía que las mujeres, estructuralmente, no pueden ejercer en igualdad de condiciones. Las desigualdades que existen a nivel socioeconómico, y que sirven de obstáculo para la plena incorporación de las mujeres en la esfera pública en sus sociedades, se replican en lo político, y las desigualdades de representación a nivel

político se replican también en la distribución de funciones en el aparato del estado, especialmente el acceso de mujeres al sector seguridad. Quisiera compartirles algunos datos que ayudan a ilustrar este fenómeno.

En términos de la desigualdad socioeconómico, aunque la mitad de las mujeres en edad de trabajo en la región se encuentran en la fuerza laboral incrementando de 49.2% al 52% entre el 2000 y el 2010, esto sigue siendo desproporcionado en relación con la participación de los hombres cual figura en el 79.6%. Esto a su vez sugiere que las mujeres son más predispuestas a participar en actividades de baja productividad y de trabajar en el sector informal, con menos movilidad que los hombres al sector formal. Por otra parte, mientras que la brecha salarial ha disminuido, las mujeres siguen ganando menos que los hombres que según la Organización Internacional del Trabajo, en el año 2010 ganaron el 68% del salario de un hombre en el mismo nivel profesional.

También existen diferencias en la representación política de las mujeres. Las mujeres representan en promedio el 50% de la población en los países del hemisferio, pero representan sólo el 19% de la membresía de liderazgo en los partidos políticos.

Sin embargo, hay que destacar el avance que ha logrado el desempeño de mujeres al frente de las carteras de Seguridad y Defensa en algunos de nuestros países. Este es el

caso por ejemplo de la Presidenta Michelle Bachelet en Chile, la hoy Senadora Nilda Garré en Argentina o la Ministra Fernanda Espinosa en Ecuador y por supuesto Aminta Granera, la Directora General de la Policía Nacional en Nicaragua. No obstante, en el mundo hoy tenemos solamente un 17% de mujeres ministras ocupando las carteras de seguridad y defensa; lo que en parte puede explicar, por un lado, la escasez de mujeres dentro de las fuerzas armadas, los servicios policiales y otras instancias de seguridad y, por otro lado que la situación de las mujeres al interior de las estas instancias no haya escalado a un lugar más prominente.

This failure to consider the security needs of women compounded by their absence from decision making processes in security structures constitute a major challenge in our region.

In recognition of this fact, the OAS has prioritized gender mainstreaming in our programs abroad through, for instance, our work in Colombia with the Mission to support the peace process in Colombia also known by its acronym MAPP/OEA. This program was created in 2014 to provide advisory support to Colombia during the process of demobilization and reintegration of illegal armed groups, and to support peace efforts undertaken by Colombian institutions and communities. The Mission has sought to incorporate a gender perspective in its work by creating a gender-sensitive

programming environment to promote awareness of the important link between gender and conflict and encourage equal opportunity for both men and women. It is also worth mentioning that the OAS has sought to achieve gender balance in the composition of the teams that make up its Electoral Observation Missions.

Ladies and Gentlemen, I am delighted that UN Women, the Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces, and the Inter-American Defense College have joined efforts with the OAS and the Government of the Principality of Liechtenstein to organize this Roundtable to address such a critical topic and find ways to guarantee women's participation in democratic consolidation and security in our hemisphere. I hope that your discussions bring greater clarity to these issues and result in greater collaboration to tackle these challenges.

I thank you.