

Speech

Organization of American States



**LUIGI R. EINAUDI, ASSISTANT SECRETARY GENERAL OF
THE ORGANIZATION OF AMERICAN STATES
AT THE MEETING "FOLLOW-UP TO THE INTER-AMERICAN
PROGRAM ON THE PROMOTION OF WOMEN'S HUMAN
RIGHTS AND GENDER EQUITY AND EQUALITY" - SEPIA
III, GENDER AND EDUCATION
December 9, 2003 - Washington, DC**

[Print this page](#)
 [Email this page](#)

REFERENCE

[Press Releases](#)
[Latest News](#)
[Speeches](#)
[OAS's website](#)

Doctor Nora Nivar, Under-Secretary of State for Women's Affairs of Dominican Republic

Leonor de Garcia, Inter-American Commission on Education and Director of International Affairs, US Department of Education

Ambassador Salvador Rodezno Fuentes, Chair of the Permanent Council and Permanent Representative of Honduras to the OAS

Distinguished Ambassadors, Permanent Representatives to the OAS
Permanent Observers to the OAS

Delegates to the CIM

Representatives of the Ministries of Education

Representatives of Inter-American and International Organizations

Carmen Lomellin, Executive Secretary of the Inter-American Commission of Women

Representatives of Non-Governmental Organizations,
Ladies and Gentlemen:

I am very pleased to welcome to you to this third meeting of experts convened by the CIM as part of its strategy to promote the formulation of gender-based policies throughout the Hemisphere.

The SEPIA (Seguimiento del Programa Interamericano) process has been particularly interesting for two reasons. The first is the holistic approach of the initiative, which seeks to link gender mainstreaming policies in areas central to the regional agenda, such as labor, justice and education in ways that will enable them to mutually reinforce each other in a systemic manner. The second is the consensual nature of the recommendations and lines of action that have thus far resulted from SEPIA, and which reflect the points of view of its many stakeholders: governments, international organizations, and civil society.

We have great expectations for this meeting. Education is an acknowledged and fundamental human right. But it is perhaps also the most important single mechanism for social mobility, integration, overcoming poverty, and promoting cultural change. All this makes it a very important tool for strengthening democracy. Without education, women and men remain invisible and are powerless to influence their societies. This is why the systematic oppression of women by repressive regimes, such as the Taliban in Afghanistan, very specifically limited the access of women targeted their access to schooling and employment.

Educating women has a powerful multiplier effect on societies and a very high rate of return. The bad habits of men have traditionally forced women to be the transmitters of culture to their children. Educated mothers encourage their children to attend and stay in school, provide better health conditions for their families, have the tools to fight against poverty and tend to participate more actively in their communities.

More and better education for women also helps improve other aspects of social development, such as maternal and infant mortality, health, nutrition and education of new generations, population control and environmental protection, social integration, and the development of citizenship.

In Africa, in Asia, in many countries with significant gender gaps in literacy and school enrollment rates, governments are committing to the United Nations' Millennium Goals, which emphasize literacy, education, equity and empowerment of women. This has been accompanied by a growing awareness of the importance of women's participation in economic and political spheres. This moving forward together towards common goals is a form of "globalization of values," shared beliefs in certain ethical principles based on human rights and equity, which are intrinsic to democratic development.

In this Hemisphere, as schooling has increased for the entire population, girls and women have massively entered the school systems and the illiteracy gap has practically disappeared, except among rural and indigenous women. In fact, in some countries, women have attained higher educational levels than men. Even so, such quantitative achievements do not necessarily mean that women have equal access and opportunities in our societies. Historic, gender-based inequities help perpetuate the different social values assigned to men and to women and the balance of power between them. It is clear, then, that education alone cannot change some of the more pervasive discriminatory paradigms. This is why economic disparities and other structural inequities must be addressed in a systemic or holistic manner.

By presenting a holistic approach and providing the Member States with the tools to translate commitments on gender equity and equality into domestic public policy, the SEPIA process can help significantly to advance these goals. I congratulate the CIM for this Third SEPIA meeting, which continues to unite national mechanisms, Ministries, regional and international agencies and non-governmental organizations.

In closing, two additional notes. First, I would like to commend the work that the CIM has begun with the Council of Women World Leaders, to strengthen strategic and cooperative alliances and the exchange of information and best practices among Gender Units of Intergovernmental Organizations. These units are playing a fundamental role in promoting the values of respect and equal opportunity that will enable both women and men to reach their full potential. As a result, a network is being established to facilitate communication among Ministries of Women's Affairs and between the Ministries and the gender units, to address common concerns and continue the discussion initiated at the world-wide Ministerial Meeting for Women's Affairs that took place in October in Georgetown University.

Second, I would like to stress an aspect of education not directly related to gender: its contribution to competitiveness in an age of globalization. Students of Latin American affairs have long been concerned of an education deficit, one of whose most socially costly forms is a sharp drop in school attendance in secondary school that essentially converts universities into elite institutions while the popular majorities are left behind. A recognition of the seriousness of this crisis was a major factor behind the creation of the Inter-American Commission on Education last August by the very successful Summit-related meeting of Ministers of Education. (I note my pleasure that it was the Director of International Affairs of the US Department of Education that presented to us the report on the new Commission's activities, a fact that underscores a practical US commitment to inter-American cooperation.)

Here is my point. Globalization is remorseless to the uneducated. Without improvements in the quality of education, parts of our competitive edge will disappear. I was present recently at a discussion among businessmen who import lines of apparel for department stores here in the United States. They are currently using Central American suppliers, and they commented that the top executives in those countries are world class, but the second line managers and shop stewards are less capable of rapid changes in production lines. The businessmen expressed the fear that they might have to transfer their sourcing to China, which - despite its distance -- apparently has the faster response times that marketing requires. The costs of the education deficit could not be more graphically illustrated!

Jacques Delors, former president of the European Commission, has said that education is founded on four pillars: learning to know, learning to do, learning to be, and learning to live together. Let us make these four pillars the bedrock on

which to build a better future for the Americas. I wish you much success and look forward to the results of your important meeting. Thank you.

© Copyright 2005. Organization of American States. All Rights Reserved.
Headquarters: 17th Street & Constitution Ave., N.W., Washington, D.C. 20006, USA
Tel. (202)458-3000 / Email: multimedia@oas.org

Designed by the Office of Public Information - Multimedia Unit.