

INTER-AMERICAN PROGRAM ON THE PROMOTION OF WOMEN'S HUMAN RIGHTS AND GENDER EQUITY AND EQUALITY

I. BACKGROUND

The Inter-American Commission of Women (CIM), established in 1928 through a resolution of the Sixth International Conference of American States, was the first intergovernmental agency in the world created specifically to fight for the civil and political rights of women in the Americas. From its inception, one of its basic purposes has been to protect women's rights in the Hemisphere so that women and men may participate in all spheres of society on an equal footing, in order to fully and equitably enjoy the benefits of development.

It is important to emphasize the work done by the CIM to establish systematic standards on behalf of women's rights, such as the Convention on the Nationality of Women (Uruguay, 1933), the Inter-American Convention on Granting of Political Rights to Women (Colombia, 1948), the Inter-American Convention on the Granting of Civil Rights to Women (Colombia, 1948), and the Inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment, and Eradication of Violence against Women, "Convention of Belém do Pará" (Brazil, 1994).

In 1994, the Assembly of Delegates of the CIM adopted its Strategic Plan of Action for 1995-2000, which established strategies for securing and strengthening the role of women through the year 2000. That same year, the First Summit of the Americas was held in Miami. The Plan of Action adopted at the Summit referred explicitly to the need to strengthen policies and programs to improve and expand the participation of women in all spheres of society (Item 18, "Strengthening the Role of Women in Society") and to strengthen the CIM.

Following up on efforts to implement the Plan of Action of the First Summit of the Americas (Miami, 1994), the Second Summit of the Americas (Santiago, 1998) entrusted the Organization of American States (OAS) with specific mandates regarding its lines of action. Pursuant to those initiatives, the OAS General Assembly, at its twenty-eighth regular session, adopted resolution AG/RES. 1592 (XXVIII-O/98), inviting the CIM to conduct various activities, including the preparation of an inter-American program on the promotion of women's rights and gender equity.

In November 1998, the Twenty-ninth Assembly of Delegates of the CIM adopted the Declaration of Santo Domingo [CIM/RES. 195 (XXIX-O/98)], which recognizes the rights of women throughout their entire life cycle as an inalienable, integral, and indivisible part of universal human rights. It also reaffirms the importance of protecting women's human rights and eliminating all forms of discrimination against women, drawing on strategies aimed at strengthening the CIM and its relations with other institutions in the inter-American system.

The Twenty-ninth Assembly of Delegates of the CIM later adopted resolution CIM/RES. 209 (XXIX-O/98), "Strengthening and Modernization of the Inter-American Commission of Women." On the basis of that resolution, the OAS General Assembly, at its twenty-ninth regular session, adopted resolution AG/RES. 1625 (XXIX-O/99), "Status of Women in the Americas and Strengthening and Modernization of the Inter-American Commission of Women," in which it calls a meeting of ministers or of the highest-ranking authorities responsible for the advancement of women in the member states. It further requests that the CIM, acting as coordinator for the aforementioned meeting, prepare a draft agenda that will include, among other topics, the approval of a draft inter-American program on the

promotion of women's rights and gender equity and consideration of the commitments adopted at the Summits of the Americas.

II. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

In the mid-1970s, the gender perspective began to emerge in response to theoretical and methodological issues arising from an awareness of clear gender-based imbalances and inequalities between men and women.

Gender can be defined as a cultural, social, and historical construct which, on the biological basis of sex, determines the values that society attaches to being masculine and feminine as well as the nature of collective subjective identities. Gender also shapes the difference in social value assigned to men and to women and the balance of power between them.

Gender relations also cut across other social relationships: production, ethnicity, nationality, religion, and generational relationships. Gender relations, rather than existing in isolation, are linked to other systems of social relations.

Gender equality means that women and men enjoy the same status and have equal opportunities to realize their full human rights and their potential to contribute to political, economic, social, and cultural development and benefit from the results. Gender equality is therefore the impartial valuing by society of both the similarities and the differences between women and men and the varying roles that they play.

This means that, if gender equality is to be achieved, a series of gender equity measures must be taken to offset the historical and social disadvantages that prevent women's equal enjoyment of the benefits of development and equal participation in public and private decision-making and in power structures. Gender equity is, thus, a path that leads to gender equality. The Inter-American Program on the Promotion of Women's Human Rights and Gender Equity and Equality is intended to further this process.

Incorporation of the gender perspective is “a strategy for making women’s as well as men’s concerns and experiences an integral dimension of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes in all political, economic and societal sphere, so that women and men benefit equally and inequality is not perpetuated.”*

III. OBJECTIVES

The Inter-American Program has the following objectives:

GENERAL

1. To systematically integrate a gender perspective in all organs, organizations, and entities of the inter-American system.
2. To encourage OAS member states to formulate public policies, strategies, and proposals aimed at promoting women's human rights and gender equality in all spheres of public and private life, considering their diversity and their life cycles.

* United Nations Economic and Social Council, Agreed Conclusions, 1997/2, July 18, 1997.

3. To make international cooperation and horizontal cooperation among the member states one of the instruments for implementing this program.
4. To strengthen relations and foster joint cooperation and coordination activities with other regional and international bodies and civil society organizations active in the Americas, with a view to guaranteeing policy effectiveness and optimal use of resources.
5. To promote the full and equal participation of women in all aspects of economic, social, political, and cultural development.

SPECIFIC

To promote gender equity and equality and women's human rights by strengthening and fostering:

1. Women's real and formal legal equality.
2. Women's full and equal access to the benefits of economic, social, political, and cultural development.
3. Full and equal access for women to employment and productive resources.
4. Women's full and equal participation in political life in their countries and in decision-making at all levels.
5. Women's full and equal access to education at all levels and to the various fields of study.
6. Women's full access to health services during their entire life cycle, which, as required, shall include physical, emotional, and mental health.
7. Women's right to a life free of any form of abuse or violence, in both the public and private spheres.
8. The elimination of cultural patterns or stereotypes that denigrate the image of women, particularly in educational materials and those disseminated in the media.

IV. LINES OF ACTION

Responsibility for implementing this program will fall to the governments of member states and to the OAS. Furthermore, implementation shall be coordinated with national units in charge of women's policies and draw on the contributions of civil society, depending on the different activities to be undertaken. The following lines of action assist in fulfilling those arising from the mandates of the Summits of the Americas, the Strategic Plan of Action of the CIM, the Biennial Work Program of the CIM, the CIM Plan of Action on Women's Participation in Power and Decision-making Structures, the mandates of the OAS General Assembly, the Beijing Platform for Action, and the 1995-2001 Regional Program of Action for the Women of Latin America and the Caribbean, of the United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean.

1. TO RECOMMEND THAT THE GOVERNMENTS OF THE MEMBER STATES TAKE THE FOLLOWING ACTIONS

- 1.1. Formulate public policies and strategies, and take steps to promote women's human rights and gender equality in all spheres of public and private life, bearing in mind their diversity and their life cycles, by incorporating a gender perspective.
- 1.2. Promote the study and, if appropriate, the revision of national laws, to ensure that they meet the obligations set out in the international conventions and treaties on women's human rights adopted and ratified by the member states, together with the adoption of measures to guarantee their effective enforcement.

The goal will be to achieve, through redoubled effort and by all possible means, legal equality between men and women. To that end, efforts will be made to eliminate laws still in force that discriminate against women and to achieve real and effective application of laws already in force that establish equal rights for women. Progress made in this area will be evaluated in 2002.

- 1.3. Promote also the study and, if applicable, the revision of national law in order to encourage full compliance with other international commitments adopted by regional and global conferences in which the member states have participated, or which have been approved by their legislatures, with the objective of ensuring equality and gender equity.
- 1.4. Create or, where appropriate, strengthen national institutions responsible for women's development, provide them with sufficient human, financial, and material resources, and invest them with authority at the highest levels of administration, so as to ensure that a gender perspective and equality of opportunity between men and women are integrated into public policies relating to all spheres of society and government.
- 1.5. Incorporate a gender perspective as an integral part of the programs, actions, instruments, and agendas of national and international events, especially at the ministerial-level meetings.
- 1.6. Step up public awareness campaigns on the human rights of women, including those enshrined in international conventions, so that women will have the awareness they need to demand respect for those rights. The information will be disseminated in appropriate language and formats, also adapted to the needs of women with disabilities and tailored to the situation of women in each country of the region: *inter alia*, women in urban and rural areas, indigenous women, women of different ethnic groups and ages, and migrant women.
- 1.7. Strengthen the Inter-American Commission of Women (CIM) as the principal forum for generating hemispheric policy to advance women's rights and gender equality, and provide it with technical, human, and financial resources, including through voluntary contributions, with which to promote the initiatives required to attain program objectives and follow up on this program.
- 1.8. Implement the Plan of Action of the CIM on Women's Participation in Power and Decision-making Structures.
- 1.9. Encourage the adoption of affirmative action measures of a legislative, administrative, or legal nature, as appropriate, to achieve equal opportunities for women in all structures of society.

- 1.10. Develop mechanisms to give women ready and timely access to justice, in particular women with little or no income, by adopting measures to render judicial proceedings more transparent, efficient, and effective.
- 1.11. Systematize and support the exchange of information on issues relating to women's human rights and gender equality and facilitate the direct exchange of experience among countries, institutions, and organizations working in these areas.
- 1.12. Launch awareness campaigns and implement programs to promote gender equality and equal opportunities at all levels in national education systems, both formal and nonformal.
- 1.13. Support the provision of continuing gender education and training for judiciary and legislative staff and for law enforcement officers of both sexes, within the objectives of this program.
- 1.14. Develop strategic linkages with civil society organizations for the exchange of information and sharing of best practices related to gender mainstreaming.
- 1.15. Include, where necessary, the objectives and lines of action of this inter-American program in the national programs or plans of the member states on women.
- 1.16. Ensure women's equal access to employment and productive resources, such as credit and land.
- 1.17. Promote policies designed to ensure equal pay for equal work by women and men, as well as equal pay for work of equal value.
- 1.18. Encourage recognition of the economic value of unremunerated labor, including work done in the home by women.
- 1.19. Promote a cultural change whereby all sectors of society will become involved in the empowerment of women and in the pursuit of gender equality, in particular, by engaging men as an active and integral part of this change.

2. INTER-AMERICAN ORGANIZATIONS

2.1 ACTIONS TO BE TAKEN BY THE OAS GENERAL SECRETARIAT

- 2.1.1. Disseminate this program among the member states so as to contribute to the fulfillment of the mandates issued in resolution AG/RES. 1625 (XXIX-O/99), "Status of Women in the Americas and Strengthening and Modernization of the Inter-American Commission of Women," adopted by the General Assembly at its twenty-ninth regular session.
- 2.1.2. Ensure that a gender perspective is consistently mainstreamed into the preparation and application of international instruments, mechanisms, and procedures within the framework of the OAS, and particularly on the agendas of ministerial-level meetings.
- 2.1.3. Adopt, in coordination with the CIM, the measures needed to integrate the gender perspective into the execution of programs and activities by all organs, agencies, and

entities of the OAS, and promote the incorporation of this perspective into the work of the agencies of the inter-American system.

- 2.1.4. Provide all organs, agencies, and entities of the OAS system with the necessary training to incorporate the gender perspective into their work and to prepare suitable tools for attaining this program's main objectives, tapping, where applicable, the experience of other international organizations, cooperation agencies, and member states.
- 2.1.5. Strengthen the Executive Secretariat of the CIM by providing it with adequate human and financial resources and supporting it in its efforts to raise funds from private sources.
- 2.1.6. Implement measures to ensure full and equal access by men and women to all categories of posts in the OAS system, particularly in decision-making positions [AG/RES. 1627 (XXIX/O-99)].
- 2.1.7. Support the integration of the gender perspective into the overall programs of the Organization and the inter-American system, including their budget allocations.

2.2 ACTIONS TO BE TAKEN BY THE INTER-AMERICAN COMMISSION OF WOMEN

- 2.2.1. Play a pivotal role, as the principal forum for generating hemispheric policy to advance women's human rights and gender equality in carrying out the Inter-American Program, and to forge closer ties with other international forums and civil society.
- 2.2.2. Report to the OAS General Assembly and the CIM Assembly of Delegates on progress made in executing the Inter-American Program.
- 2.2.3. Invite all organs, agencies, and entities of the inter-American system that have not yet done so to share with the CIM information on the progress made by each of them in activities designed to incorporate a gender perspective, implement this program, and promote gender equality.
- 2.2.4. Invite all international bodies, organizations, and institutions to share information, including lessons learned and best practices on promotion and protection of women's human rights and the incorporation of the gender perspective to achieve gender equality.
- 2.2.5. Undertake actions with civil society organizations to:
 - a. Promote joint efforts with government agencies and civil society organizations to establish effective means of implementing, monitoring, and evaluating policies, programs, and projects designed to promote women's human rights and gender equality.
 - b. Study and analyze the status of observance of women's human rights in the various countries.

V. HUMAN AND FINANCIAL RESOURCES

Request the General Secretariat of the OAS to:

- a. Take short-term measures to comply with item 2.1.5 of this program.
- b. Encourage its specialized organizations to examine their budgets to determine if any existing allocations could be channeled toward the implementation of this inter-American program.

VI. PROGRAM MONITORING ACTIVITIES

It will be incumbent upon the CIM to monitor this inter-American program and to coordinate and evaluate, in coordination with governmental mechanisms pertaining to women, the actions taken to implement it, including support for the formulation of policies to promote women's human rights and gender equality.

The Secretary General of the OAS shall report annually to the General Assembly of the OAS on implementation of this program by the organs and agencies of the inter-American system.