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REPORT OF THE THIRTEENTH MEETING OF THE PRESIDING OFFICERS
OF THE REGIONAL CONFERENCE ON THE INTEGRATION OF WOMEN
INTO THE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT
OF LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN

(Curaçao, Netherlands Antilles, 14 September 1991)

CONTENTS

	<u>Paragraph</u>	<u>Page</u>
A. ATTENDANCE AND ORGANIZATION OF WORK	1-5	1
Mandate	1	1
Place and date	2	1
Attendance	3-4	1
Agenda	5	2
B. SUMMARY OF DEBATES	6-26	2
Report on activities from 1 May to 31 July 1991	9-24	3
a) Report of the Chairman of the Presiding Officers	9-13	3
b) Report on secretariat activities	14-15	4
c) Report of the Presiding Officers	16-24	4
Fifth Regional Conference on the Integration of Women into the Economic and Social Development of Latin America and the Caribbean	25-26	7
Annex: LIST OF PARTICIPANTS	-	9

A. ATTENDANCE AND ORGANIZATION OF WORK

Mandate

1. In accordance with paragraph 88 (2) of the Regional Plan of Action for the Integration of Women into Latin American Economic and Social Development, adopted at the eleventh special meeting of the Committee of the Whole of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), it is incumbent upon the Presiding Officers of the Regional Conference to be the link between the Governments and the secretariat of ECLAC in the field of women's integration into development.

Place and date

2. In compliance with this mandate, the Presiding Officers elected at the Fourth Regional Conference on the Integration of Women into the Economic and Social Development of Latin America and the Caribbean held their thirteenth meeting on 14 September 1991 in Curaçao, Netherlands Antilles.

Attendance

3. The meeting was attended by participants from the following countries represented by Presiding Officers: Argentina, Guatemala, Netherlands Antilles and Venezuela. The meeting was chaired by Ms. Aura Azucena Bolaños de Aguilera, Deputy Minister of Labour and Social Welfare of Guatemala. The delegation of Venezuela, headed by Ms. Evangelina García Prince, Minister for the Advancement of Women, served as Rapporteur. The meeting was also attended by observers from the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) and the Inter-American Commission of Women of the Organization of American States (IACW/OAS).

4. The Prime Minister of the Netherlands Antilles, Ms. María Liberia Peters, honoured the opening of the meeting with her presence.

Agenda

5. The Presiding Officers adopted the following agenda for their thirteenth meeting:

1. Adoption of the agenda
2. Report on activities from 1 May to 31 July 1991
 - Report of the Chairman of the Presiding Officers
 - Report of the Presiding Officers
 - Report on secretariat activities
3. Fifth Regional Conference on the Integration of Women into the Economic and Social Development of Latin America and the Caribbean, Curaçao, Netherlands Antilles, 16-19 September 1991:
 - Review of documentation for the Conference
 - Review of the note by the secretariat
4. Other matters.

B. SUMMARY OF DEBATES

6. Following the opening of the meeting, the floor was taken by Ms. María Liberia Peters, Prime Minister of the host Government. She thanked the delegations, saying that she was proud that her country had been offered the opportunity to organize the present meeting, and that the geographical position of the Netherlands Antilles, united with the Caribbean and near Latin America, made its efforts at cooperation to achieve greater integration particularly relevant. Despite being constitutionally tied to the Netherlands, her country had the same problems and aspirations, culturally speaking, as the Latin American countries.

7. She also drew attention to her Government's commitment to the work of ECLAC, and expressed the hope that the work of the present meeting would achieve the major objective of improving the lives of human beings, in both the region and the world.

8. The Chairman of the Presiding Officers, Ms. Aura Azucena Bolaños de Aguilera, Deputy Minister of Labour and Social Welfare of Guatemala, thanked the host country for the magnificent preparations it had made for the meeting, welcomed the participants and thanked the ECLAC secretariat for its work in providing the documents.

Report on activities from 1 May to 31 July 1991 (agenda item 2)

a) Report of the Chairman of the Presiding Officers

9. The Chairman began by referring to the activities carried out in the Central American subregion for the purpose of promoting attendance at the Fifth Regional Conference. She noted that those activities had been conducted at the level of the corresponding ministries of labour, which had been joined in their meetings by Panama, as an observer, and by Belize following its recognition by Guatemala as an independent country. A setting for joint efforts had thus been created, and within that framework the ministers of labour, during a meeting held in July in Managua, had approved a resolution on women and development containing an important annex on women and employment. Policies on social compensation and on support for women in production had also been dealt with, and both of these issues were of great importance as regards the linkage of women, changing production patterns and social equity. A call had been made for the coordination of the agencies working on social issues in each of the countries so that what was referred to as "the human side" of the adjustment might be addressed on a joint basis. In addition, those meetings had served to further disseminate ECLAC's proposal for changing production patterns with social equity, which had been widely discussed and had aroused a great deal of interest that would be reflected in the composition of the delegations attending the Fifth Regional Conference.

10. The discussion of the subject of changing production patterns with social equity had been enriched by the inclusion of two basic elements. The first was the quest for stability, which was associated with the process of carrying forward negotiations among workers, employers and the State and with efforts to arrive at a social pact that would permit the countries to surmount internal conflicts. In this connection the Chairman took note of the progress being made in her own country and in Costa Rica. The second fundamental element was peace, which was of particular importance in Central America as a necessary condition for changing production patterns with social equity.

11. The Chairman then drew attention to the increased involvement of private organizations in activities relating to women and the organization of indigenous women. In the latter connection she underscored the importance of reaching those particularly vulnerable groups and mentioned the convention (No. 169) on indigenous and tribal peoples, which had been ratified by Mexico, Bolivia and Norway and concerning which national consultations were being held in Central America.

12. With regard to activities at the Latin American level, she noted that during the meeting of presidents held in Mexico, the representative of Argentina had drawn attention to the need to

integrate women's issues into the consideration of development issues and characterized the recognition of that fact as a great stride forward. Another important advance had been made as a consequence of the meeting which had been held by first ladies of Latin American countries; during that meeting a request had been made for technical and work-related guidance, and, in view of the fact that all the first ladies were working on social programmes in their own countries, the possibility of establishing a social exchange council had been discussed.

13. The Chairman concluded her report by noting that the consolidation of working relationships among the Presiding Officers also constituted an achievement within the framework of the joint efforts of the Governments and the secretariat of ECLAC.

b) Report on secretariat activities

14. The Chief of the ECLAC Women and Development Unit reported to the meeting on the activities carried out by the secretariat since the Twelfth Meeting of the Presiding Officers. In that connection she mentioned the preparation of the position paper, the report on activities conducted since 1988 and the contacts established with the relevant focal points in the countries. With respect to regular activities, she made special mention of the study on adolescent mothers and teenage pregnancy, which had led to a meeting that had marked the culmination of that stage of the work on the subject. She also referred to the start-up of a project designed to lead to legal and institutional improvements in the situation of women in some countries of the region; the project had already held its first national-level meeting, in Paraguay.

15. After reporting to the participants on the work carried out on the subject of violence and the law in the subregion and other topics, the Social Affairs Officer of the ECLAC Subregional Headquarters for the Caribbean made special reference to the discussion of ECLAC's proposal for changing production patterns with social equity within the framework of the preparations for the Fifth Regional Conference. That discussion had demonstrated that the subregion was facing a twofold challenge. On the one hand it would have to raise its productivity within a highly competitive international economic environment, while on the other hand it would need to re-examine traditional policies and practices with a view to incorporating production by women into production at the national and subregional levels.

c) Report of the Presiding Officers

16. The representative of the Netherlands Antilles warmly welcomed the participating delegations and, referring to her Government's efforts to ensure the success of the Fifth Regional Conference,

said that good results had been achieved as far as the participation of Caribbean countries was concerned. She thanked the ECLAC Subregional Headquarters for its assistance in that regard.

17. The representative of Argentina thanked the host country and said that her country had prepared a report for submission to the Fifth Regional Conference and that she would highlight some of its points at the current meeting. She particularly stressed the fact that changes in international economic relations had forced her country to respond to new conditions on the international labour market. In that respect, stability not only made economic growth possible but also strengthened democracy, and that was why a framework of proposals was required to end confrontation and set the economy on a growth path. Under that framework it was very important to place a value on the work of women in the informal sector so that it could be incorporated into the formal sector and recorded as an element of a country's gross domestic product, although the recent population census conducted in Argentina had failed to fulfil that objective.

18. Achievements of the past few months included collaboration with the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) in helping women having insufficient financial resources to set up micro-enterprises; the signing of agreements with organizations for the advancement of women; inclusion of the women's dimension in the framework of the Southern Cone Common Market (MERCOSUR); the signing of an agreement with the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries, in collaboration with the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO); and training and self-management seminars.

19. In connection with the foregoing topics, she said that a Coordinating Council on Public Policies Concerning Women had been established under the Office of the President of the Republic. Within that framework, agreements had been signed on the changing of stereotypes in education and a Standing Committee on Women and AIDS had been set up.

20. She stressed that integration was not limited to the economic sphere but involved political and cultural factors as well. The topic of women was particularly important with respect to MERCOSUR, where a project had been drawn up on migrant women, and consideration was being given to juridical, legislative, environmental, labour relations and other aspects relating to women.

21. The representative of Venezuela thanked the host Government and ECLAC and then discussed the coordination of the work being done on behalf of women in her country. Within the framework of the Legislative Branch, a special commission made up of senators and deputies dealt with legislation relating to women. Within the Executive Branch, the Advisory Commission on Women for the Office

of the President (COFEAPRE) had been created, as had the Ministry for the Advancement of Women. Furthermore, a bill was currently before Congress which, if approved, would create a national women's council that would take the place of COFEAPRE as a permanent, autonomous body attached to the Office of the President that would be responsible for formulating, implementing and evaluating policies concerning women.

22. She then referred to her country's most recent achievements relating to women. Firstly, she mentioned the mitigation of the impacts of adjustment by means of social policies which transferred resources to groups living in extreme poverty, children under five years of age, pregnant women and nursing mothers through PAMI and other programmes in such areas as food subsidies, direct transfers of foodstuffs, primary health care, cervical and breast cancer detection, and family planning services. In addition to discussing welfare policies, which were primarily the responsibility of the Ministry of Family Affairs, the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare, she underscored the importance of policies aimed at fostering a capability for self-management. Such policies chiefly relied on the provision of support rather than direct aid. Some were already being implemented by the Ministry of Family Affairs and others would be the responsibility of the Ministry for the Advancement of Women. In that connection reference was made to loans for microenterprises and the special fund which existed within the Ministry for Family Affairs for that purpose.

23. With respect to advances at the regional level, the representative of Venezuela noted that her country had hosted the meeting held by IACW/OAS concerning the inter-American convention on the subject of violence. She also referred to the meeting held by United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) in Quito, which had been attended by representatives of governmental offices responsible for women's affairs from throughout the entire region, and recalled that Venezuela had been given the responsibility of serving as its secretariat for the South American subregion. She further noted that Venezuela's proposal to incorporate a special chapter on women into the Andrés Bello Convention and to make women's issues an integral part of the concerns of the Latin American Economic System (SELA) and the Rio Group had met with a positive response. She drew special attention to the meeting held by first ladies of Latin American countries, which had decided to establish a network for exchanges in connection with social programmes.

24. Among the other advances made in her country which would be discussed in greater detail during the plenary meeting of the Fifth Regional Conference, the representative of Venezuela mentioned the progress made within the framework of projects dealing with teenage pregnancy, the creation of centres to provide comprehensive care for women, the strengthening of women's civic role in society, and the prevention of violence against women. Other sectoral programmes

also existed which the representative would discuss at a later time.

Fifth Regional Conference on the Integration of Women into the Economic and Social Development of Latin America and the Caribbean (agenda item 3)

25. A representative of the secretariat presented the documents for the Conference and said that the position paper was a consolidation of the preliminary text which had been presented to the Presiding Officers at their twelfth meeting. The representative then proposed an operational mechanism for the Conference whereby a plenary meeting at which the countries could discuss the progress they had made would be held concurrently with meetings of a drafting committee formed for the purpose of drawing up the conclusions of the Conference. Some of the Presiding Officers proposed different procedures because they felt that, in view of the scant number of opportunities for exchanges among the countries and current conditions in the region, it was important for all presentations and proposals to be heard and that, in any event, in accordance with the Regional Plan of Action for the Integration of Women into Latin American and Caribbean Economic and Social Development, as well as the secretariat document entitled "Women in Latin America and the Caribbean: The challenge of changing production patterns with social equity" (LC/L.627(CRM.5/4)), the Fifth Regional Conference would need to make an evaluation before beginning to draw up its conclusions and recommendations. Some of the Presiding Officers also recommended that, for future conferences, provision might be made in advance for the possibility of working in committees and for circulating the schedule of events.

26. The secretariat representative recalled that in accordance with item 1 of the recommendations made at the Twelfth Meeting of the Presiding Officers of the Regional Conference on the Integration of Women into the Economic and Social Development of Latin America and the Caribbean (LC/L.620(MDM.12/4)), in addition to the evaluation which was to be made, the Fifth Regional Conference should "initiate the work needed to prepare a new regional plan of action within the framework of the new scenario in the region and in accordance with the proposal relating to changing production patterns with social equity". The Chairman of the Presiding Officers said that a document had been received from the secretariat which could serve as an input for that work. The document was then provided to the Presiding Officers, who decided to meet informally to consider the possibility of drawing up a proposal for a method of organizing the work of the Conference which would permit the participants to learn more about achievements in the region, to evaluate them, to discuss the document mentioned in the preceding paragraph and to draw up an outline for a regional plan of action.

Annex

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