

UNITED NATIONS
ECONOMIC COMMISSION
FOR LATIN AMERICA
AND THE CARIBBEAN - ECLAC



Distr.
LIMITED
LC/L.521(MDM.9/4)
24 January 1990
ENGLISH
ORIGINAL: SPANISH

REPORT OF THE NINTH 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

(Panajachel, Guatemala, 26 and 27 September 1989)

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A. ATTENDANCE AND ORGANIZATION OF WORK

Place and date

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 on Women to be the link between governments and the Secretariat of ECLAC in the field of women's integration into development.

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 ninth meeting on 26 and 27 September 1989 in Panajachel, Guatemala.

Attendance

3. The meeting was attended by Presiding Officers from the following member countries: Argentina, Cuba, Guatemala and Netherlands Antilles. The meeting was chaired by Raquel Blandón de Cerezo, First Lady of Guatemala. In the absence of Venezuela, Esther Véliz (Cuba) acted as Rapporteur.

Agenda

4. The Presiding Officers adopted the following agenda for their ninth meeting:

1. Adoption of the agenda
2. Report of Secretariat activities
3. Presentation of substantive documents prepared since the Fourth Regional Conference on the Integration of Women into the Economic and Social Development of Latin America and the Caribbean
4. Forthcoming conferences
5. Programme of work of the secretariat
6. Schedule of meetings of the Presiding Officers
7. Other matters

Opening meeting

5. The Secretary of the Commission, Daniel Blanchard, noted that ECLAC had been working for 15 years in the field of women, and considered it a topic of great importance. Following the World Conference of the International Women's Year, held in Mexico City in 1975, the Governments members of ECLAC had decided to establish the Regional Conference on the Integration of Women into the Economic and Social Development of Latin America and the Caribbean

as a standing organ, which would meet every three years. They had also agreed that the Presiding Officers of the Conference would continue in their functions from one conference to another in order to serve as a liaison between the governments and the ECLAC secretariat on the subject, and to provide the relevant guidelines.

6. He offered a brief summary of activities concerning women which had been carried out by the various intergovernmental organs created within the United Nations system at the world and regional levels in recent years, and pointed out the need to strengthen the activities of the ECLAC secretariat in the field of women, especially in view of the adverse effects of the economic crisis on programmes designed for the promotion and advancement of women. He introduced the items of the provisional agenda and the documents prepared by the secretariat, expressing his hope that the countries would give their political support at the Ninth Meeting of the Presiding Officers for the development of new projects and programmes to benefit the countries members of ECLAC. Lastly, he thanked the Chairman of the Presiding Officers and, through her, the Government and people of Guatemala for their hospitality and strong support for the work of ECLAC in the field of women.

7. The Chairman of the Presiding Officers welcomed the delegations in attendance and the ECLAC secretariat, and said that the present meeting demonstrated that there was an interest in highlighting the participation of Latin American and Caribbean women as protagonists in the economic and social development process with the aim of achieving peace and building a more just and humane society.

8. The Ninth Meeting of the Presiding Officers was taking place in the context of other regional and international activities being carried out by the governments and the United Nations to advance the status of women. As an example, the Chairman cited the recent meetings of the first ladies of Central America and the seminar on the implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women being organized in her country by the Division for the Advancement of Women of the Centre for Social Development and Humanitarian Affairs in Vienna, and scheduled for the week of 2 to 6 October 1989.

9. With regard to achievements in Guatemala, a decentralization programme emphasizing new ways of participating in politics was being implemented,, and the allocation of national budgetary resources to grassroots organizations and women's groups that could identify their own needs was being negotiated. In addition, she drew attention to a new draft law designed to eliminate certain forms of gender discrimination that still persisted in her country and that were inconsistent with the provisions of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.

B. SUMMARY OF THE DEBATES

10. The Secretary of ECLAC introduced the document on activities carried out since the Fourth Regional Conference, noting that the most relevant activities had been selected and summarized in order to facilitate discussion. He noted that, despite the multiplicity of mandates and requests, the work of ECLAC could be recapitulated at two levels: actions involving commitment to the sectors of the most vulnerable women, and actions designed to increase the theoretical and quantitative knowledge available on the subject of women.

11. One of the principal achievements of the period, besides the Fourth Regional Conference and the Ninth Meeting of the Presiding Officers, was a proposal for co-operation between the regional commissions and the International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (INSTRAW), which had been considered at the meeting of the executive secretaries of the regional commissions held at ECLAC headquarters in Santiago, Chile, on 27 and 28 April 1989.

12. In view of the need to establish closer ties with the countries, missions to 12 countries of the region would be carried out during the year 1988/1989. Based on the information received thus far, there appeared to be a need to consolidate a technical infrastructure on this topic and, in each country, link together the activities of academic centres, women's organizations and governmental bodies. There was increasing co-ordination and co-operation on this subject within the United Nations, and there was a need to develop long-term guidelines; this required the support and guidance of the countries of the region, and particularly of the Presiding Officers. Lastly, the Secretary noted that the ECLAC secretariat was doing its utmost to incorporate the topic of women throughout the ECLAC system, having made an explicit commitment to do so.

13. The studies carried out during the period were then presented, and some observations were made about activities concerning productive projects for the region.

14. The Argentine delegation noted the strong participation of women in the recent democratic elections held in the Republic of Argentina, and recalled that, although Argentine women had had the right to education since the end of the 19th century, they had been granted the right to vote only in 1951.

15. In the Argentine present Congress, there was presently more participation by women as deputies and senators. There were more female judges not only in the civil courts but also in the criminal courts. Activities had also been developed by the Office of International Human Rights and the Rights of Women to co-ordinate

activities related to the subject of women at the international level, from a multilateral and bilateral perspective.

16. The representative of Cuba thanked the government of Guatemala for its hospitality and congratulated the ECLAC secretariat for its efforts since the Fourth Regional Conference. In her view, the subject of women seemed to have become even more dynamic in ECLAC, and she committed the support of her country to the activities being carried out to enhance the status of women.

17. Commenting on the report on secretariat activities, she pointed out the need to improve efforts to obtain resources in the region, and to establish a link between sources of academic information and levels of political action and decision. She also commented on topics including culture, socialization and the family, pointing out that further study in those areas was needed.

18. The representative of Netherlands Antilles thanked the Government of Guatemala for its hospitality and extended greetings from the Prime Minister of her country.

19. As a member from the Caribbean and Latin American region, she was pleased to be one of the Presiding Officers and to be able to share the same concerns with regard to women and development. She drew attention to the exceptional work of ECLAC, which had been a source of information, inspiration and orientation. As a result of the participation of the Netherlands Antilles in the Fourth Regional Conference, her Government had again established an office of women's affairs at the highest governmental level.

20. The secretariat of ECLAC introduced the document Rural women in Latin America and the Caribbean: results of projects and programmes (LC/L.513), which described the main features of women's position of women in the agrarian structure of the Latin American and Caribbean region in recent years, with special emphasis on the gender-based division of productive rural labour and new forms of work for women in agro-industry.

21. Some experiences arising out of the implementation of programmes and projects for rural women were described, and it was emphasized that there needed to be, on the one hand, political will to carry them out and, on the other, co-ordination between economic and social projects and policies so that these programmes and projects would have an effective impact on improving the living conditions of rural women in the region.

22. The secretary, introducing the document Women and politics in Latin America and the Caribbean, pointed out that this subject was situated in the context of United Nations concern for participation of women in general, particularly in Latin America and the Caribbean, and that such participation had been linked since the 1970s to the concept of integral development. In this sense, the

United Nations had played a fundamental role in the promotion of participation by women. Political participation by women appeared to be based, firstly, on their social class and on their opportunities and capacity for organization. As for political participation through parties, the right of women to vote in the region had been consolidated in 1960s, and some surveys indicated that political participation currently varied between 0% and 13% in congresses or parliaments. Other forms of participation included the Latin American feminist movement and participation by women in social movements.

23. There had been changes in the way in which participation by women was perceived, and new opportunities for participation had opened up, despite the lack of flexibility of the traditional political parties and the greater complexity of societies, all of which made participation more difficult in general.

24. The document Latin America: the challenge of socializing the home environment (LC/L.514) was introduced, which analysed some aspects of the changing situation of women and families in the region as a result of inadequate development and the effects of the crisis, and showed the need to design innovative and effective policies in support of women.

25. The secretariat document drew attention to some aspects of family planning, including especially the declining birth rate and the increase in teen-age pregnancies, two situations that required action in the area of family planning. The document also discussed certain aspects of domestic work done by housewives and domestic servants, which showed that there was a broad opportunity for action in relation to social policies. The last section dealt with child care, which had been insufficiently analysed thus far. This area not only required an expansion of the coverage of services but also a modification of the cultural behaviour which assigns this task exclusively to women.

26. The representative of Argentina thanked the Government of Guatemala for its hospitality, and pointed out some aspects of the new administration of the Argentine Government. A basic criterion had been established for budget administration, namely, optimal use of resources through a decentralization of actions currently centred in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. That would make it possible for resources, information and activities at the international level concerning women to be centralized in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which would then refer the implementation of measures to the national, provincial and municipal ministries through the Office Women's Affairs.

27. Among other aspects of the programmes and budgets of the new administration, she drew attention to retirement plans for housewives a subject on which laws had been passed in six provinces; efforts to obtain resources to fight drug trafficking

as a way of protecting youth; and protective measures for pregnant mothers and follow-up health care for children. Plans concerning women also included developing productive projects to be located primarily at the local community level.

28. Lastly, she offered Argentina as a host for any activities which the Presiding Officers might consider useful.

29. With regard to agenda item 4, the Presiding Officers agreed that the Fifth Regional Conference on the Integration of Women into the Economic and Social Development of Latin America and the Caribbean would be held in September or October 1991, with the Netherlands Antilles tentatively offering to host it, or, alternatively, Argentina.

30. It was also agreed to hold a meeting in 1994 to co-ordinate the Fifth Regional Conference with the preparatory conference for the world conference to be held in 1995; Argentina or Guatemala offered to host that meeting.

31. With regard to agenda item 6, on the scheduling of meetings of the Presiding Officers, it was agreed to hold the next meeting at ECLAC headquarters in Santiago, Chile, in approximately April 1990, with Chile being invited as an observer. The next meeting was set for October or November of the same year in Cuba. In general terms, it was agreed that the forthcoming meetings of the Presiding Officers would be held at least once a year, although it would be desirable to meet more often.

32. The ECLAC secretariat reported on administrative and financial requirements for holding regional conferences.

33. In discussing the possible functions of the Presiding Officers, Cuba suggested that the committee could promote the advancement of women in those countries where not enough importance was yet given to it, and where an appropriate infrastructure was lacking. Cuba also offered to introduce this topic at the next ministerial meeting of non-aligned countries, to be held in January 1990 in Havana, Cuba, during which the role of women in development would be discussed.

34. Cuba proposed, lastly, that the report of the Fourth Regional Conference should be submitted to the next meeting of the Commission on the Status of Women, as a reference and input document from the region.

35. The Chairman of the Presiding Officers offered to bring up the topic during the seminar on the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, to be held in Guatemala City from 2 to 6 October 1989, and to present the results of this meeting at the next meeting of the Presiding Officers.

36. The Secretary of the Commission suggested, as one concrete way in which the Presiding Officers could promote the status of women in the region, that when the Presiding Officers carried out missions in their own subregions, financed with their own resources, for the purpose of detecting needs and suggesting solutions, they should take advantage of the opportunity to make additional consultations on the relevant matters.

37. In relation to agenda item 5, the Secretary set out some guidelines for the future, including further co-ordination with the countries, the need to develop joint regional projects especially oriented towards strengthening the technical capacity of national offices, helping in the training of young women, updating the legislation of the countries and supporting training in the region. The need was also expressed of continuing to conduct baseline studies and further studies on theoretical topics.

38. The representative of Argentina stressed the need to train women to formulate and implement country projects, pointed out the diversity of existing situations in the various countries.

39. The representative of Cuba agreed with the priorities expressed by the Secretariat, and said that it would be useful to hold seminars on projects with the donor organizations of both the United Nations system and the developed countries. She noted that the work in the subregions must be further strengthened, and drew attention to the effectiveness of brief, succinct working meetings on specific topics. She also noted the importance of comparative studies on the situation of women in the subregions, such as an analysis of the need to combine non-remunerated domestic work with remunerated work and social activities.

40. The representative of Curaçao pointed out the importance of dealing with the problem of young women, especially those with children who needed to work. There was also a need for combined training for this group. She noted that the language problems in the Caribbean were added to the problems of extreme poverty and migration of women to work as prostitutes.

41. The Chairman of the Presiding Officers noted that it was important to continue to indicate what the possible contributions of the Presiding Officers might be, and what the secretariat could offer in terms of joint activities. She suggested that care should be taken to select experts for the training courses who were already familiar with the topic and working on it in the various countries.

42. It was of primary importance to strengthen national machinery by establishing information and documentation centres and data bases (or by providing assistance where structures already existed), and that they should be provided with sufficient support

equipment to allow for communication between the countries and the secretariat and with the principal data networks on women.

43. It was agreed to request the ECLAC Division of Operations to provide technical guidelines and concrete project proposals at the next meeting of the Presiding Officers.

44. In discussing agenda item 7, it was suggested that there was a need to have advisory assistance in creating and monitoring documentation centres in the countries. A model programme on this topic and suggestions for obtaining basic equipment were requested.

45. At the closing meeting, the Secretary of the Commission, Daniel Blanchard, expressed his satisfaction at the work accomplished by the Presiding Officers, who he felt had achieved their objectives and had contributed substantive and essential ideas for future activities.

46. He expressed his personal thanks and those of the secretariat team to the host country, and especially the Chairman of the Presiding Officers, Raquel Blandón de Cerezo, for their generous and warm welcome and outstanding hospitality.

47. The representative of Argentina expressed thanks for the welcome that had been given to her at her first meeting of the Presiding Officers. She noted that the Presiding Officers had carried out their work efficiently, and that the climate of the meeting had been one of great cordiality.

48. The Chairman of the Presiding Officers thanked the participants for their presence, congratulated the secretariat on its efforts and wished everyone good luck, especially the representatives of the Netherlands Antilles, who were initiating a new stage in their work on the subject of women in development.