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Seventh 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

Mexico City, 30 October 1987

**NOTE BY THE SECRETARIAT OF ECLAC ON THE FOURTH REGIONAL
CONFERENCE ON THE INTEGRATION OF WOMEN INTO THE
ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT OF
LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN**

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I. INTRODUCTION

1. This note by the Secretariat seeks to provide information which may be of use to the participants in the Seventh 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.

2. Although the United Nations Decade for Women: Equality, Development and Peace, came to an end in 1985, the General Assembly in subsequent resolutions reaffirmed the need to implement specific measures during the period between 1986 and the year 2000 aimed at overcoming the obstacles to the achievement of the goals and objectives of the Decade as regards the advancement of women. This is stated with particular clarity in resolution 40/108, dated 12 December 1985, in which the General Assembly endorsed the "Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women" (known as "the Strategies"), and in resolution 41/111, dated 4 December 1986, in which it reaffirmed the need for these Strategies to be translated into concrete action by Governments, as determined by their overall national priorities, as well as by the organizations of the United Nations system.

3. We are thus embarking on a significant new phase in the realization of far-reaching social, economic, cultural, legal, political, and institutional changes intended to redress existing imbalances between men and women, to optimize the potential for development and to contribute to a more peaceful and just world.

4. Reaffirming its desire to continue the process aimed at improving the situation of women, the Economic and Social Council, in its recent resolution 1987/20, of May 1987, recommended that two other world conferences on women be held, one in the 1990s and the other in the year 2000. These conferences will appraise, at the global level, the activities undertaken in the implementation of "the Strategies". The dates of the conferences are to be determined by the General Assembly not later than 1990.

5. Within this framework, ECLAC, as the principal regional body of the United Nations for development, is particularly concerned with the subject of women. In this regard, the Regional Conference on Women shall continue to be relevant and important for countries and for the Secretariat, having regard to the objectives which it fulfills and which are set forth below.

II. THE REGIONAL CONFERENCE ON THE INTEGRATION OF WOMEN
INTO THE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT OF
LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN

Background

6. ECLAC's involvement in the subject of women began at its fifteenth session, which was held in Quito, Ecuador, in 1973. On that occasion, the Commission adopted resolution 321(XV) in which it recommended that the Secretariat should prepare a study on the participation of women in the development of the region and on the measures to be taken to eliminate discrimination and the lack of educational, employment and economic opportunities for women.

7. In the years following the Quito meeting, ECLAC has undertaken studies and has collaborated in the organization of important regional meetings on the subject of women. These included the "United Nations Regional Seminar on the Participation of Women in Economic, Social and Political Development: Obstacles that Hinder their Integration" (Buenos Aires, 22-30 March 1976), which recommended, inter alia, that a working group should be convened comprising experts appointed by Governments in accordance with the principle of equitable geographic distribution for the purpose of preparing a draft regional plan of action under the auspices of the United Nations and within the framework of the activities of ECLAC.

8. While the group of experts was preparing the draft regional plan, the seventeenth session of ECLAC was being held in Guatemala in 1977.^{1/} At that session the Commission decided to convene at the earliest possible date a regional conference on the integration of women.^{2/} The Conference was held from 13 to 17 June 1977 in Havana, Cuba, and it adopted the Regional Plan of Action for the Integration of Women into Latin American Economic and Social Development (hereinafter referred to as RPA).^{3/} The Committee of the Whole of ECLAC approved the RPA at its eleventh extraordinary session, on 21 November 1977, and in that same year, the Economic and Social Council welcomed, by consensus, the decision of the Committee of the Whole. In this way, the Regional Conference became a Standing Conference within the ECLAC system.

9. The legislative basis of the Regional Conference is set forth in paragraph 88.1) of the RPA, which contains the decision:

To convene within the framework of CEPAL, on a permanent and regular basis and at intervals of no more than three years, a United Nations Standing Regional Conference on the Integration of Women in the Development of Latin America."

Functions of the Conference

10. The RPA identifies five functions of the Conference:^{4/}

- "a) To determine regional and subregional needs for technical assistance and give support to all the United Nations bodies operating in the region in order that they can meet such needs;
- b) To put forward recommendations to Governments and to ECLAC itself based on studies carried out by the Secretariat on the most feasible way of implementing the agreements adopted by the United Nations regional conferences;^{5/}
- c) To review and appraise periodically the activities of ECLAC and other United Nations agencies in compliance with the Programme for the Decade of Women, and in particular to draw up recommendations for the regional conferences on women to be held before the World Conference scheduled for 1980;^{6/}
- d) To periodically evaluate the accomplishment of the Regional Plan of Action; and
- e) To provide a forum for the exchange of information which will facilitate the mutual co-ordination and support of the programmes for the integration of women into economic and social development at various levels and permit the countries in the region to share the corresponding experience."

Functions of the ECLAC Secretariat

11. The RPA states that the Secretariat of ECLAC will serve as the permanent secretariat of this Regional Conference, in regular consultation with the Presiding Officers.^{7/} For this purpose, it shall have a specialized unit attached to the Social Development Division at its headquarters in Santiago, Chile; a social affairs officer based in Port of Spain, Trinidad and Tobago, who shall be co-ordinator of the programme on women for the subregion of the Caribbean; and an official in charge of the programme on women, who shall be based in the regional office for Mexico and Central America.

12. ECLAC shall work in close co-operation with the focal point of the United Nations system for the co-ordination of women-related issues,^{8/} the Subdivision for the Promotion of Women of the United Nations Centre for Social Development and Humanitarian Affairs (CSDHA); with the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM); with the International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (INSTRAW); with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP); and with the specialized agencies of the system such as FAO, ILO, UNICEF, and others.

Presiding Officers of the Conference

13. Each Regional Conference shall elect its Presiding Officers, who will continue their functions until new ones are appointed and will be the link between Governments and the Secretariat of ECLAC in the field of women's integration in development.^{9/}

14. The Presiding Officers elected during the First Regional Conference were:

Chairman: Cuba

Vice Chairmen: Jamaica
Mexico

Rapporteur: Venezuela 10/

15. The Second Regional Conference, held in Macuto, Venezuela, from 12 to 16 November 1979 elected the following Presiding Officers:

Chairman: Venezuela

Vice Chairmen: Brazil
Colombia
Cuba
Jamaica
Mexico
Uruguay

Rapporteur: Costa Rica 11/

16. The Conference agreed to follow the procedure established in paragraph 88.2) of the RPA, and for the purpose of discharging the functions established therein, it decided that the quorum of Presiding Officers shall be four countries, and that the venue for their meetings shall rotate among the countries comprising the bureau.^{12/}

17. The Fifth Meeting of Presiding Officers, held in Mexico City, on 5 August 1983, adopted the following recommendations: to put into practice the principle of rotation of offices on the bureau among the member countries of ECLAC; with a view to facilitating and improving the effectiveness of its operation, to reduce the number of members of the bureau to the holders of the offices of chairman, three vice chairmen and rapporteur; and finally to seek adequate geographical distribution, by including on the bureau representatives of Central America, the Caribbean, the Andean Group and the Southern Cone countries.^{13/}

18. The Third Regional Conference, which was held in Mexico City, from 8 to 10 August 1983 elected the following Presiding Officers, who shall function until the new Bureau is elected at the Fourth Regional Conference:

Chairman: Mexico

Vice Chairmen: Ecuador
Guyana
Panama

Rapporteur Argentina 14/

Meetings of the Presiding Officers

19. In fulfilment of its role as the link between the Governments of member States and the Secretariat of ECLAC in the field of the integration of women in development, the Presiding Officers, in consultation with the Executive Secretary of ECLAC, have held six meetings: three of them in the interval between the First and Second Conferences, two between the Second and Third, and one during the Regional Meeting for Latin America and the Caribbean in preparation for the World Conference to Review and Appraise the Achievements of the United Nations Decade for Women: Equality, Development and Peace. The Presiding Officers also held informal meetings during the World Conferences that took place at Copenhagen (1980) and at Nairobi (1985).

Participation in the Conference

20. Participants in the Fourth Regional Conference shall be:

- a) The member States and associate member States of the Commission, which are required to designate representatives at the ministerial level as far as possible.
- b) The bodies, offices, departments, etc., of the United Nations Secretariat with mandates or programmes on the integration of women, as well as specialized agencies (FAO, ILO, UNESCO, etc.).
- c) Non-governmental organizations to which consultative status has been granted by the Economic and Social Council.
- d) Governments of member States of the United Nations, which are not members of ECLAC, together with Switzerland and the Holy See, may participate as observers.

Organization of the Conference

21. Before the Conference is held the Presiding Officers shall meet to consider the proposals for documentation and organization submitted by the Secretariat. In the event that the Presiding Officers do not meet, before the

Conference begins an informal meeting of heads of delegations will be held to consider the Secretariat's proposal for the organization of work, including the establishment of working groups,^{15/} the election of the new Bureau, and the adoption of the provisional Agenda.

Documentation

22. The documentation of the Conference may be divided into three categories:

- a) Working documents: documents prepared by the Secretariat of ECLAC (or by consultants contracted by them), the provisional Agenda and the report of activities. In view of the budgetary crisis of the United Nations, every effort will be made to maintain the volume of working documents within the established limits;
- b) Reference and consultation documents: include documents of historical or legislative value, such as the RPA, "the Strategies", reports of previous conferences, both regional and global, reports of meetings held by the Secretariat on the subject of women; and
- c) Country reports: this category covers documents prepared by specialized bodies operating in the region and documents by other bodies of the United Nations system, monographs or national evaluation studies of the situation of women. The Presiding Officers shall decide if the latter will be requested for the Fourth Regional Conference.

Pre-Conference procedures

23. The Conference shall be officially convened by the Executive Secretary of ECLAC in consultation with the Presiding Officers (resolution of the First Regional Conference, ratified by the eleventh meeting of the Committee of the Whole) 60 days before its scheduled commencement date. The convening shall be done in two stages: in the first stage (45 days before the Conference is scheduled to begin), through cables which the Executive Secretary shall send to the Ministers of Foreign Affairs copied to the Resident Representatives of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in each country. These cables shall contain a summarized version of the provisional Agenda of the Conference. In the second stage, the convening shall be ratified through letters, and the working documents shall be sent to each country.

Objective of the Conference

24. The principal aim of the meeting is to promote substantive debate on the situation of women in the region, taking into account new concepts, statistics and informational material, contained in the documentation prepared by the Secretariat. In addition, the Conference shall serve to strengthen the will of Governments to pursue their actions aimed at the full integration of women in the development of Latin America and the Caribbean, and shall enable ECLAC to co-operate with Governments in improving these actions. Finally, the

Conference shall enable ECLAC help Governments establish regional co-operation mechanisms for the integration of women.

Notes

1/ The group comprised experts from the following countries: Argentina, Brazil, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, Dominican Republic, Jamaica, Mexico, Panama and Venezuela.

2/ See Part IV of the Annual Report of ECLAC, E/CEPAL/G.1030/Rev.1, p. 248.

3/ The complete text is contained in document E/CEPAL/G.1042/Rev.1.

4/ See paragraphs 88.1), i) to v).

5/ In this regard, "the Strategies" constitute the most up-to-date instrument of the United Nations system for the integration of women.

6/ The RPA refers to the World Conference of the United Nations Decade for Women: Equality, Development and Peace, held in Copenhagen from 14 to 30 July 1980. See: A/CONF.94/35.

7/ See paragraph 88.3).

8/ "Focal point" means any organizational unit whose function is to be a point of contact, for both internal and external communications. The "focal point" may be a person, office, or department. It serves mainly to channel initiatives aimed at promoting and defending the cause of women.

9/ RPA, paragraph 88.2).

10/ See E/CEPAL/G.1042/Rev.1.

11/ See E/CEPAL/G.1113, 26 February 1980.

12/ See paragraph 8 of E/CEPAL/G.1113.

13/ See E/CEPAL/CRM.3/L.2.

14/ See E/CEPAL/G.1265.

15/ In view of the limited simultaneous interpretation services available, it is very unlikely that the suggestion will be made to establish one or more working groups in addition to the plenary, unless one or the other of them does not require interpretation.

