

UNITED NATIONS

**ECONOMIC COMMISSION
FOR LATIN AMERICA
AND THE CARIBBEAN - ECLAC**



Distr.
LIMITED

LC/L.1188(MDM.27/4)
31 March 1999

ENGLISH
ORIGINAL: SPANISH

**REPORT OF THE TWENTY-SEVENTH MEETING OF THE PRESIDING OFFICERS
OF THE REGIONAL CONFERENCE ON WOMEN IN
LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN**

San Salvador, 2-4 December 1998

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A. ATTENDANCE AND ORGANIZATION OF WORK

Place and date of the meeting

1. The Presiding Officers of the Regional Conference on Women in Latin America and the Caribbean held their twenty-seventh meeting from 2 to 4 December 1998 in San Salvador.

Attendance¹

2. The meeting was attended by delegates from the following ECLAC member countries and associate members represented by the Presiding Officers: Argentina, Chile, Cuba, El Salvador, Mexico, Netherlands Antilles, Paraguay and Venezuela. The Minister for Women's Affairs of Costa Rica attended as an observer. Representatives from the following programmes and specialized agencies of the United Nations system also attended: United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and International Organization for Migration (IOM). The meeting was also attended by representatives of the following intergovernmental organizations: Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), Inter-American Commission of Women (IACW/OAS) and Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA).

Chairperson and rapporteur

3. The meeting was chaired by the Minister-Director of the National Women's Service of Chile, Josefina Bilbao, Chairperson of the Presiding Officers. The duties of rapporteur were performed by the delegation of Mexico, which was headed by Ambassador Aída González, International Women's Issues Coordinator in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Mexico.

Documentation

4. The representatives had before them the following documents: Provisional agenda (LC/L.1152(MDM.27/1)), Annotated provisional agenda (LC/L.1153(MDM.27/2)) and Activities of the ECLAC secretariat with respect to the integration of women into the economic

¹ See annex.

and social development of Latin America and the Caribbean (LC/L.1151(MDM.27/3)). Participants also had before them the following status reports: “Indicadores de participación y liderazgo de las mujeres en América Latina y el Caribe” published by ECLAC and the Latin American Faculty of Social Sciences (FLACSO); “Mujer, sistema jurídico e igualdad. Guía para el monitoreo” by Hanna Binstock; and “Indicadores de género para el seguimiento y la evaluación del Plan de Acción Regional de las Mujeres de América Latina y el Caribe y la Plataforma de Acción Mundial” by Thelma Gálvez. The following reference documents were also presented: Directory of national organizations dealing with programmes and policies on women in Latin America and the Caribbean (LC/L.1065/Rev.1); National machineries for gender equality. Expert group meeting report (EGM/MN/1998/Rev.1), prepared by the Division for the Advancement of Women and ECLAC; “The Education of women: from marginality to coeducation: proposals for a methodology to achieve educational change”, Mujer y desarrollo series, No. 22 (LC/L.1120), Marina Subirats; “Violence within couples: legal treatment; review of progress and results”, Mujer y desarrollo series, No. 23 (LC/L.1123), Hanna Binstock; “Towards equality for women: progress in legislation since the adoption of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women”, Mujer y desarrollo series, No. 24 (LC/L.1126), Hanna Binstock; “Gender, the environment and the sustainability of development”, Mujer y desarrollo series, No. 25 (LC/L.1144), Nieves Rico; Incorporación de la perspectiva de género en proyectos productivos de la CEPAL (LC/R.1851), Molly Pollack; The institutionality of gender equity in the State: a diagnosis for Latin America and the Caribbean (LC/L.1150), Diane Alméras; Democratic theory and women’s participation in politics: the Chilean case (LC/R.1859), Lois Hecht Oppenheim; Women in water-related processes in Latin America: current situation and research and policy proposals (LC/R.1864), Nieves Rico; “Familias latinoamericanas: convergencias y divergencias de modelos y políticas”, by Irma Arriagada, an offprint of the *CEPAL Review*, No. 65 (LC/G.2033-P); “Perspectiva de género en la reforma de la seguridad social en salud en Colombia”, Financiamiento del desarrollo series, No. 73 (LC/L.1108), Hernández Bello; Recomendaciones desde la perspectiva de género (LC/R.1757), Virginia Guzmán and Rosalba Todaro; “Declaración de Caracas”, issued by the Ibero-American Forum of Ministers and Officials Responsible for Policies on Women: Globalization and International Cooperation (Caracas, September 1998); a joint ministerial statement issued by the APEC Ministerial Meeting on Women (Makati, Philippines, October 1998); and the Plan of Action of the Second Summit of the Americas (Santiago, Chile, April 1998).

B. AGENDA

5. The Presiding Officers adopted the following agenda for their twenty-seventh meeting:
 1. Adoption of the agenda.
 2. Review of the activities of the Presiding Officers and of the ECLAC secretariat since the twenty-sixth meeting of the Presiding Officers.

3. Follow-up to United Nations world conferences and international summits, activities of other intergovernmental organizations, their conclusions concerning gender mainstreaming and the agreements adopted concerning the advancement of women.
4. Report on the activities of specialized agencies and other bodies of the United Nations system and other intergovernmental organizations.
5. Review of follow-up to the Regional Programme of Action for the Women of Latin America and the Caribbean, 1995-2001, in strategic areas not considered at the seventh session of the Regional Conference.
6. Planned activities of the Presiding Officers and of the ECLAC secretariat.
7. Other matters.

C. SUMMARY OF PROCEEDINGS

6. The Executive Director of the Salvadoran Institute for the Advancement of Women (ISDEMU) opened the meeting with the observation that history had been written by men from a male perspective and as if they had been the only actors, which was clearly not the case. A forum such as that of the Presiding Officers of the Regional Conference was important because it provided an opportunity for a dialogue among Governments concerning the status of women and their valuable contributions to national development.

7. The Government of El Salvador welcomed the opportunity to host the meeting and to contribute in that way to building a future marked by social equity and justice, two prerequisites for the success of a world strategy for a balanced form of development. The ultimate objective was a world that was not only for men but for all human beings, both men and women, as it should always have been.

8. The Minister-Director of the National Women's Service of Chile expressed appreciation for the hospitality extended by the Government of El Salvador, which was all the more significant given the tragic losses caused by Hurricane Mitch, and pledged her support for and solidarity with the countries of Central America.

9. After recalling the most important meetings held in the region since the middle of 1997, she said that since the Fourth World Conference on Women, almost all the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean had created offices devoted to women's issues, a major milestone for the region. That was not only cause for great satisfaction but also an important step forward in view of the need to structure public policies that would serve as an incentive for change. The next step should be to design mechanisms for mutual support among countries in order to permit the replication of successful experiences and avoid the repetition of mistakes.

10. On behalf of ECLAC, the Secretary of the Commission expressed his condolences to the countries of Central America, which had been stunned by the catastrophic effects of Hurricane Mitch, and reported that ECLAC, in keeping with its mandate as a member of the United Nations system, was assisting in the evaluation of the structural economic damage sustained by those countries.

11. Ever since the first session of the Regional Conference held in 1977, ECLAC had been focusing specifically on the integration of women within a framework of social justice and democracy, and studies on gender equity formed an integral part of its work. The existence of various forums on women's issues would not necessarily lead to a dispersion or duplication of work but could instead contribute to a pooling of efforts which ECLAC was prepared to coordinate.

12. The First Lady of El Salvador and Chairperson of ISDEMU, speaking on behalf of the Government and people of El Salvador, welcomed the participants and expressed her appreciation of the Presiding Officers' decision to meet in El Salvador despite the disastrous consequences of Hurricane Mitch; that decision was proof of their confidence that the meeting would be successful.

13. While ISDEMU was a relatively new institution, created only two years earlier, one could not fail to recognize the important advances achieved for the benefit of all women since the inception of the Regional Conference. In that respect, the first ladies of the region were carrying out an important task in sensitizing civil society and government authorities to women's issues as a means of helping to ensure that those issues were given due consideration in the public agenda.

Review of the activities of the Presiding Officers and of the ECLAC secretariat since the twenty-sixth meeting of the Presiding Officers (agenda item 2)

14. Some of the representatives of member countries serving as Presiding Officers agreed that the period of time that had elapsed since the preceding meeting had been too short for any meaningful report on changes and new activities and that it would be appropriate to reconsider the frequency of their meetings. Moreover, it was regrettable that some countries which were members of the Presiding Officers had not sent representatives to the meeting.

15. The representatives did, however, report on the work carried out in the last few months in their respective countries, with emphasis on the progress achieved in implementing and disseminating the agreements reached at the Fourth World Conference on Women and the seventh session of the Regional Conference on Women. Intense efforts were also being made at the country level to organize meetings and workshops on the problem of domestic violence. The growing institutionalization of the bodies and groups dealing with women's affairs within the short time that had elapsed was indicative of the increasing importance attached to such agencies in the government structure.

16. The Officer-in-Charge of the Women and Development Unit of ECLAC presented a summary of the work being carried out to fulfil the mandates received. Efforts were being made along three broad lines of action: the follow-up to the Regional Programme of Action for the Women of Latin America and the Caribbean, the Platform for Action adopted at the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing and the Santiago Consensus. Milestones during that period included various seminars, for which ECLAC continued to act as the focal point of the United Nations system for Latin America and the Caribbean, and participation in inter-agency meetings which made it possible to coordinate and progressively strengthen the attendance of specialized agencies and other organizations at meetings of the Presiding Officers. During the period under review, the Division for the Advancement of Women of the United Nations had held the Expert Group Meeting on National Mechanisms for Gender Equity and the Advancement of Women in Santiago (from 31 August to 4 September). At that meeting, national and regional case studies were presented and discussions were held on the organizational and political standing of national entities dealing with the status of women. Consideration was also given to the links between national mechanisms and civil society and possible strategies for demanding government accountability for measures taken with respect to gender mainstreaming.

17. The Social Affairs Officer of ECLAC presented a document prepared as a special contribution to the meeting of experts entitled, *The institutionality of gender equity in the State: a diagnosis for Latin America and the Caribbean*, which examined the degree of institutionalization of national mechanisms for the advancement of women in terms of their empowerment and access to State instruments and resources, including the legitimacy of their legal mandate, the human and financial resources at their disposal and the range of State functions that they could carry out. The classification used in the document for grouping institutions in various categories reflected a situation in constant flux and, for that reason, countries were urged to send comments and up-to-date information to the secretariat. Some delegations gave additional information to supplement the data provided in the report.

18. Delegations then requested that future reports on the development of indicators should contain more detailed explanations concerning the differences between countries and special situations.

19. In the period that had intervened since the previous meeting of the Presiding Officers, the Women and Development Unit had also updated the Directory of national organizations dealing with programmes and policies on women in Latin America and the Caribbean (LC/L.1065/Rev.1). Thanks to the positive response from the countries, the second version of the directory was more comprehensive and the information more methodically arranged, which reflected the positive developments in terms of gender mainstreaming in State institutions. Moreover, the directory was being submitted in the hope that it would be a useful working instrument for assessing the status of organizations in the official State apparatus and determining whether that translated into any real power.

20. The Officer-in-Charge of the Women and Development Unit referred to another important aspect of their recent work, which focused on deepening the gender mainstreaming process in ECLAC; in that connection it was clear that there already existed a general political will to incorporate the gender perspective into all plans and spheres of activity. Indeed, that perspective was being applied in an increasing number of divisions and projects, and efforts were being made to produce statistics disaggregated by sex and to include them in important periodical publications such as the *Social Panorama* and the *Statistical Yearbook*. A great effort was being made to improve the methodology for gender mainstreaming in all project phases, including those of production projects.

21. The Social Affairs Officer then referred to a project initiated in response to an express request by the countries: the development, in conjunction with the Latin American Faculty of Social Sciences (FLACSO), of indicators on participation and leadership; the first phase of the project had already been reported on at the previous meeting. The results of the second round of data collection were presented in a new progress report, which included tables with quite comprehensive coverage. Unfortunately, there was no information on the countries of the Caribbean, and Presiding Officers were urged to distribute the questionnaires in which gaps in the information would be indicated.

22. The Officer-in-Charge of the Women and Development Unit advised that, once again in response to a query from the Presiding Officers, an important review of legal systems in force in the region had been conducted. In addition to making it easier to gauge the degree of compliance with established commitments, the review had also revealed that eliminating provisions that were explicitly discriminatory against women was not enough, since, in practice, the policy framework and the legal structure both reflected strong gender biases in terms of customs and practices.

23. The representative of the ECLAC subregional headquarters in Mexico drew attention to the progress made within the subregion with respect to legal reform and the approval and application by various countries of equal opportunity programmes; moreover, in various cases, the rank of the office responsible for women's affairs had been raised. Central American Governments were showing greater interest in the issue, as was evident in the agreements and plans adopted at presidential meetings held within the framework of the Central American integration process.

24. The ECLAC subregional headquarters in Mexico had also taken major steps to promote gender mainstreaming; those efforts would be reflected not only in the studies conducted in various areas covered by its mandate but also in technical cooperation provided to countries of the subregion. Projects were also being designed and executed to promote the harmonization of subregional policies and cross-country coordination.

25. The representative of the ECLAC subregional headquarters for the Caribbean reported on the increase in women's participation in decision-making bodies, an issue that had been the subject of specific meetings. With respect to domestic violence, joint activities had been carried out with UNIFEM and non-governmental organizations in the subregion.

26. A few Caribbean countries were processing the information to be included in the assessments being prepared for the World Conference scheduled for the year 2000, which had been circulated by the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, and, at the same time, had initiated talks with the other countries in the subregion to convince them of the importance of submitting the relevant reports. In a subsequent phase, a detailed analysis of statistical indicators would be undertaken as part of the population census round for the year 2000 in order to determine more precisely the present status of women in the subregion.

Follow-up to United Nations world conferences and international summits, activities of other intergovernmental organizations, their conclusions concerning gender mainstreaming and the agreements adopted concerning the advancement of women (agenda item 3)

27. On that item, reference was made to the following meetings:

(a) Fourth Ibero-American Meeting of Ministers and Officials Responsible for Policies relating to Women (Caracas, 17 and 18 September 1998): the Venezuelan representative reported on the above-mentioned meeting, which was held in preparation for the seventh Ibero-American Summit of Heads of State and Government (Oporto, Portugal, October 1998). One of the issues considered on that occasion was the employment situation of women and the effects of globalization. The proposals formulated at the meeting, which were set forth in the Caracas Declaration, were communicated to the Ibero-American Summit. Since that Summit was concerned essentially with general topics, no detailed discussion of women's issues was reflected in the final act.

(b) Meeting of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) Council to consider women's issues (Makiti, Philippines, 15 and 16 October 1998): the representative of Chile reported that the meeting had focused on women's participation in economic development and international cooperation in Asia and the Pacific; within that context the participants had examined the status of women and small and medium-sized enterprises, women and science and industrial technology, and women and human resource development. The joint declaration signed by all the representatives of APEC member countries contained seven general recommendations for government authorities; two of those recommendations were that gender should be recognized as a cross-disciplinary issue and that a high priority should be given to the collection of data disaggregated by sex and to the development of studies on the impact of the financial and economic crisis on women.

(c) Follow-up to the Summit of the Americas: the Officer-in-Charge of the Women and Development Unit stated that ECLAC was fulfilling the mandate it had received in that connection by providing substantive support for the study of the legal system, specifically with respect to provisions on equality of opportunity, and by proceeding with the development of indicators. Another important aspect of their work concerned the way government reports on

issues examined at intergovernmental meetings were tied in with women's issues, which was not limited merely to specific areas but also applied to general issues.

28. The representative of the Inter-American Commission of Women of the Organization of American States (IACW/OAS) reported that at the last meeting of the Assembly of Delegates held in Washington, D.C., in November 1998, new mandates had been approved to enable that body to pursue its work in follow-up to the Summit of the Americas.

Report on the activities of specialized agencies and other bodies of the United Nations system and other intergovernmental organizations (agenda item 4)

29. As agreed at the sixth meeting, held in July 1998 in Santiago, Chile, of specialized agencies and other bodies of the United Nations system on future activities for promoting the integration of women into the development of Latin America and the Caribbean, an agenda item has been introduced to cover activities carried out in the months preceding the meeting. The Presiding Officers thus had the opportunity to hear detailed reports on the work conducted in the region on a wide range of topics in response to the specific mandates of each organization. In some cases, it was anticipated that the implementation of programmes under way in Central America would suffer a severe setback following the serious damage to infrastructure caused by Hurricane Mitch, which, at the same time, had created new kinds of needs in the hardest hit areas.

Review of follow-up to the Regional Programme of Action for the Women of Latin America and the Caribbean, 1995-2001, in strategic areas not considered at the seventh session of the Regional Conference (agenda item 5)

30. During the exchange of views on the issues addressed by the Regional Programme of Action which should be examined at the eighth session of the Regional Conference, scheduled for the year 2000, the participants agreed that since those issues were all closely linked, in some cases a separate study of individual issues would be difficult or unnecessary.

31. The Secretary of the Commission referred to human rights and to economic, social and cultural rights in the region. Those issues had been and continued to be the focus of in-depth studies in ECLAC and had supplanted economic efficiency as the overarching consideration to be addressed. At the regional level, the hallmark of the 1990s was the vigorous effort being made by the countries of the region to establish a position for themselves in today's highly complex global economy. In that respect, the question of social equity —of which one of the most important dimensions was gender equity— remained unresolved and spilled over beyond the social sphere to affect the economic situation as well.

Planned activities of the Presiding Officers and of the ECLAC secretariat (agenda item 6)

32. It was decided that the main theme of the eighth session of the Regional Conference on Women in Latin America and the Caribbean would be "Gender equity: the foundation for a just and equitable society" (see section D, "Agreements reached").

Other matters (agenda item 7)

33. The representative of Mexico circulated copies to the participants of the questionnaire sent by the Division for the Advancement of Women of the United Nations, which was designed to serve as a basis for their country reports. As indicated, it contained points in common with the Regional Programme of Action and the Platform for Action adopted in Beijing. The Division was also requesting that Governments should collaborate with non-governmental organizations on the preparation of their country reports.

34. At the closing session, the Minister-Director of the National Women's Service of Chile expressed satisfaction at the important agreements reached during the meeting. She pointed out that the decision to work on social equity was all the more appropriate since the issue was universal and had numerous ramifications and, moreover, was inextricably linked to the advancement of true democracy.

35. In her closing remarks, the Executive Director of ISDEMU referred to the play *Ladies in Parliament* by Aristophanes, which she viewed as a clear example that, as far back as the fourth century AD, women had been considered competent to deal with civic and domestic matters on an equal footing, in addition to being regarded as capable, multifaceted and conciliatory administrators, all of which were democratic qualities. On the strength of that recognition dating back to antiquity, one could confidently press on with the work at hand.

36. The Secretary of the Commission thanked the Government of El Salvador for its hospitality. Its insistence that the meeting should be held there and assurances that it could be conducted without mishap despite the difficult situation caused by Hurricane Mitch had proved to be well-founded. The meetings of the Presiding Officers were an important part of the secretariat's activities and had played an innovative role as an example of joint work with the Governments. In conclusion, the Secretary of the Commission expressed confidence that the theme chosen for the forthcoming session of the Regional Conference would tie in well with the concerns of the countries of the region as they looked towards the twenty-first century.

D. AGREEMENTS REACHED

37. The representatives participating in the twenty-seventh meeting of the Presiding Officers arrived at the following agreements:

1. To recommend that member countries of the Presiding Officers of the Regional Conference make every effort to fulfil their commitments as Presiding Officers, particularly in terms of attendance;
2. To ask the ECLAC secretariat to develop a standard format for the presentation of country reports to the Presiding Officers, which would be useful for purposes of comparison;
3. To make the oral reports presented to the Presiding Officers on events occurring since the preceding meeting as succinct as possible, to limit them to the main lines of action and to supplement them with detailed country reports for distribution to other countries, in order to leave enough time for comments and the exchange of ideas, with a view to considering possible options for cooperation;
4. To avoid, as far as possible, scheduling meetings of the Presiding Officers for the same dates as other regional or subregional meetings on gender issues in order to ensure that representatives of member countries are free to attend the meetings of the Presiding Officers;
5. To keep the ECLAC secretariat informed about meetings addressing women's issue that are attended by representatives of member countries that serve as Presiding Officers;
6. To propose that the eighth session of the Regional Conference be devoted to an analysis of the issue "Gender equity: the foundation for a just and equitable society", to include an analysis of gender equity, human rights, and peace and violence;
7. To hold consultations with those Presiding Officers that were absent from the current meeting and with representatives of the other countries of the region in order to define more precisely the issues to be considered at the eighth session of the Regional Conference and to determine how they tie in with the strategic areas of the Regional Programme of Action not previously addressed;
8. To forward the conclusions of those consultations to the ECLAC secretariat by the end of January 1999 to enable the Commission to establish guidelines for the analysis of the selected issues;
9. To work out a definitive methodology for organizing the work of the eighth session of the Regional Conference at a subsequent meeting of the Presiding Officers on the

basis of the issues selected and to assign responsibilities relating to the analysis of those issues;

10. To seek to coordinate the activities in follow-up to the Platform of Action of the Fourth World Conference on Women and the Regional Programme for Action and the commitments made in other forums;
 11. To schedule the biannual meetings of the Presiding Officers appropriately at six month intervals, with one being in the first half of the year and the other in the second half;
 12. To ensure that the heterogeneity of the female population and, where relevant, differences in age, habitat (urban or rural), ethnic group and other characteristics are reflected in documents and presentations;
 13. To include a cross-disciplinary analysis of sectoral matters as part of the consideration of core issues where necessary and to show how they are interrelated;
 14. To recommend that consideration be given to the possibility of setting up a system of horizontal cooperation whereby staff members of either sex employed in national women's offices could undertake internships in similar institutions in other countries;
 15. To hold the second meeting of the Presiding Officers for 1999 in Santiago, Chile, in the second half of the year. The representative of the Netherlands Antilles offered to contact the Government of Barbados in order to determine which Caribbean country could be the venue for the first meeting of the year;
 16. To thank the host country for the warm welcome extended to all participants in the twenty-seventh meeting of the Presiding Officers.
38. The participants also made the following commitments:
1. To pursue their efforts to maintain contact with the other countries of the region, as previously decided when assigning responsibilities;
 2. To provide relevant information on indicators of women's empowerment and leadership which has not yet been transmitted to the secretariat;
 3. To inform the secretariat about their own systems of indicators in order to permit an analysis of their relevance and compatibility with the evaluation activities scheduled for the year 2000;
 4. Cuba and Mexico undertake to make a presentation on an issue selected for consideration at the eighth session of the Regional Conference, and Chile undertakes,

during its regular contacts with Bolivia and Brazil, to keep those countries abreast of the work of the Presiding Officers to supplement the information sent to them directly by the secretariat.

Annex

LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

States members and associate members of the Commission

ARGENTINA

Claudio Gell, Secretario de la Embajada de Argentina en El Salvador

CHILE

Josefina Bilbao, Ministra Directora, Servicio Nacional de la Mujer (SERNAM)
Teresa Rodríguez, Jefa, Departamento de Relaciones Internacionales y Cooperación,
Servicio Nacional de la Mujer (SERNAM)

CUBA

Magalys Arocha Domínguez, Secretaria de Relaciones Exteriores, Federación de Mujeres
Cubanas
Yanira Kuper Herrera, Federación de Mujeres Cubanas

EL SALVADOR

Ana María de Gamero, Viceministra de Salud Pública
José Vicente Machado Salgado, Viceministro de Justicia
José Armando Zepeda Valle, Viceministro de Trabajo y Previsión Social
Darlyn Xiomara Meza, Viceministra de Educación
Vilma Hernández de Calderón, Viceministra de Agricultura y Ganadería
Blanca Himelda Jaco de Magaña, Viceministra de Economía
Milena Calderón de Escalón
Sonia Hasbún, Secretaría Nacional de la Familia
Enrique Valdés, Jefe, División de Atención a la Violencia, Instituto Salvadoreño para el
Desarrollo de la Mujer (ISDEMU)
Ada Evelyn Méndez, Jefa, División de Género, Instituto Salvadoreño para el Desarrollo
de la Mujer (ISDEMU)
Rosalfá Jovel, Jefa, Unidad Planificación, Instituto Salvadoreño para el Desarrollo de la
Mujer (ISDEMU)
Virginia de Rivas, Sectorialista, Áreas Familia y Participación Ciudadana

Patricia Alfaro, Sectorialista, Áreas Salud, Agricultura, Ganadería y Pesca
Himelda García, Sectorialista, Áreas Educación y Medios de Comunicación
Ana María de Melara, Sectorialista, Área Medio Ambiente

MEXICO

Aída González Martínez, Directora General de Asuntos Internacionales de la Mujer

NETHERLANDS ANTILLES

Vivienne Daflaar de Leander, Ministry of Welfare, Family and Humanitarian Affairs

PARAGUAY

Emilio Balbuena, Encargado de Negocios, Embajada de Paraguay en El Salvador

VENEZUELA

Carmen Teresa Martínez, Directora, Relaciones Internacionales, Consejo Nacional de la Mujer
Miriam Romero, Consejo Nacional de la Mujer

Observers

COSTA RICA

Yolanda Ingianna, Minister for Women's Affairs

Programmes and specialized agencies of the United Nations

United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)

Ximena de la Barra, Representative for El Salvador
Marina Morales Carbonell, Consultant, Gender Issues

Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO)

Ton Oomen, Representative for El Salvador and Guatemala

United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)

Antonio Pallarés, Director

International Organization for Migration (IOM)

Luz María Zuleta, Coordinator on women issues

Intergovernmental bodies

Inter-American Development Bank (IDB)

Luis Vergara, Representative

Inter-American Commission of Women of the Organization of American States (IACW/OAS)

Mercedes Kremenetzky, Senior Specialist

Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA)

Magali Quintana Saravia, Regional Coordinator of the Proyecto Unidas

ECLAC secretariat

Ernesto Ottone
Secretary of the Commission

Nieves Rico, Officer-in-charge
Women and Development Unit

Diane Alméras
Social Affairs Officer
Women and Development Unit

Evangelina Mijares
Coordinator for Mexico and Central America
Women and Development Unit
ECLAC subregional headquarters in Mexico

Asha Kambon
ECLAC subregional headquarters for the Caribbean