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

**ADDRESS BY MR. GERT ROSENTHAL, EXECUTIVE SECRETARY OF ECLAC,  
TO THE SEVENTH SESSION OF THE REGIONAL CONFERENCE  
ON THE INTEGRATION OF WOMEN INTO THE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL  
DEVELOPMENT OF LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN**

(Santiago, Chile, 19 November 1997)

**ECLAC**



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Mr. President,  
distinguished delegates,  
colleagues and friends:

Although it is a little out of the ordinary, as well as a departure from my usual practice, I would like to begin this brief address on a personal note. As most of you know, at the end of this year I will be stepping down from my post as Executive Secretary of ECLAC, after ten highly productive and stimulating years at the helm of this organization. This will therefore be the last intergovernmental conference I will attend in that capacity, and it would thus be an unforgivable omission on my part if I were not to take this opportunity to acknowledge the invaluable and unwavering support which President Eduardo Frei and his entire Government have always provided to ECLAC.

Indeed, one of the most important assets which the secretariat has at its disposal is the support of its member Governments, and this includes most especially the support that has been forthcoming for nearly 50 years now from our host country. Surely this merits our sincere thanks, and I would like to express my affection, admiration and respect for President Eduardo Frei and, if you will permit, his predecessor as well, Patricio Aylwin Azócar.

It may be just one of those coincidences of life, but I recall that one of the first intergovernmental conferences I ever attended as Executive Secretary was the fourth session of the Regional Conference, held in 1988 in, what is more, my own country, Guatemala. Whether, in looking back over my time at ECLAC I reflect upon the nine years that have passed between the fourth and seventh sessions of the Regional Conference ("from Guatemala to Santiago") or simply the ten years that I have served as Executive Secretary, I see a certain parallelism between how our thinking at ECLAC regarding gender issues and how our thinking about the overall development process have evolved. Over the past decade, the issue of women's integration into the economic and social development process has become a microcosm, if you will, of broad-ranging trends and features, both in the realm of ideas and in the operational style of the United Nations in general and of ECLAC in particular.

This has not always been the case. With regard to women's integration into development, I believe that a great deal more progress has been made in both conceptual and practical terms during the past 10 years than in the 15 years that went before, starting with the United Nations General Assembly's 1972 resolution proclaiming 1975 as International Women's Year. I would like to mention six areas in which I find this parallelism.

**First**, there can be no doubt as to the fact that gender issues have come into the mainstream and have ceased to be regarded as an isolated, peripheral aspect of development that is of interest only to a small circle of advocates. There is a certain parallelism here with our thinking regarding approaches to development. Our proposal for changing production patterns with social equity is a systemic approach; its starting point is the idea that we need to move forward on numerous fronts simultaneously in order to meet the demands of international competitiveness. These demands have to do with aspects of macroeconomic policy, institution-building, the regulatory mechanisms that foster democratic governance, and the way in which civil society and the State interact. In much the same vein, today the question of gender equality is focused on the need to undertake systemic, integrated action within a global policy framework in order to improve disadvantaged women's living conditions and enable them to surmount the obstacles that block their access to the same opportunities as those enjoyed by men.

**Second**, although equality of opportunity is still not a reality for many women, and there are various factors inherent in women's position in society that heighten this inequality, today we are placing priority on more comprehensive measures aimed at achieving growth coupled with greater social equity, so that all strata of the population will benefit. This is why ECLAC has been advocating an integrated approach that brings out the symbiotic relationship between growth and social equity. We have also stressed the feasibility of this proposition, which emphasizes the complementarity of policies designed to promote efficiency and growth, on the one hand, and policies intended to achieve a better distribution of the benefits of that growth, on the other. We also need to cast aside the idea that the only possible objective of economic policy is satisfactory growth and that it is the job of social policy to deal with matters of distribution. Neither type of policy is distributionally neutral, and both influence growth and distributive capacities.

**Third**, the conferences that have dealt with the subject of the integration of women at the world and regional levels have played an important role in enlightening people and raising their awareness, in promoting the adoption of policy and action guidelines, and in fostering international cooperation. This is one of the many areas in which the United Nations is making a valuable contribution, as we have seen in such diverse fields as the environment and development, population and development, human settlements, the rights of the child, the improvement of the status of women and, of course, the issues addressed at the World Summit for Social Development. In the effort to promote the advancement of women, in particular, Latin America and the Caribbean have been in the vanguard: the region's contributions to the Fourth World Conference on Women, held in Beijing, are reflected at the global level in the Platform for Action, and we also have the Regional Programme of Action for the Women of Latin America and the Caribbean, 1995-2001, which was approved at the sixth session of the Regional

Conference. In an effort to incorporate the issue into their overall national policies, the countries of the region have also begun to adopt equal opportunity plans (eight have already done so) —in conjunction, in a number of cases, with allocations of human and financial resources— which provide for the kinds of changes needed in order to achieve equity.

Fourth, we have devised a very useful method of organizing the work to be done at the Regional Conference which might also be applied to other intergovernmental forums having decision-making responsibilities. I am referring to the highly productive activities carried out by the Presiding Officers between sessions of the Conference. The Presiding Officers meet on a regular basis, twice each year, to serve as a liaison between the countries of the region and the secretariat. Responsibilities and tasks are assigned at these meetings, and each Presiding Officer reports to, visits and assists the countries in his or her area.

Fifth, as in the case of other forums, we have made a deliberate effort to include non-governmental organizations in our activities. Non-governmental women's organizations have strengthened their regional, subregional and national linkages, and some of them have been invited to take part in meetings of experts during this period; the most recent formal gathering of this sort was held only yesterday at ECLAC headquarters. The meeting was organized by the Initiative Group of Chile and dealt with the same issues as appear on the agenda for this session of the Regional Conference, in addition to a discussion on the subject of human rights. It is to be hoped that the conclusions reached at that meeting will also serve as inputs for the deliberations of the session we are inaugurating today.

Sixth, in addition to its provision of support to the countries through the Presiding Officers, the preparation of studies and reports, and the maintenance of a dialogue with organizations throughout society as well as with our colleagues within the United Nations, the secretariat has also embarked upon an internal analysis of how the gender perspective has been institutionalized within ECLAC. The German Agency for Technical Cooperation, or GTZ, has been working with us in this area. The objective is to improve the technical assistance services we provide, increase the accuracy of our analyses and fine-tune the recommendations we make so that, ultimately, we can achieve a greater degree of equity—including gender equity—in our region.

In short, the purpose of this session of the Conference, as determined by the member countries, is to speed up the pace of change so that we may surmount the obstacles which prevent women from exercising their rights and duties as citizens on an equal and equitable basis. This reflects the more general objective of all our conferences: to contribute to the development of the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean within a democratic framework. I would like to underscore the fact that this seventh session of the Regional Conference has been organized, down to the tiniest detail, in collaboration with the countries. The items on the agenda were chosen jointly, and the subject outlines were drawn up during a very fruitful discussion which was enriched by inputs from other organizations of the United Nations system, intergovernmental bodies and academic institutions that have been invited to attend the meetings of the Presiding Officers. The format for this session is also an innovative

one; based on discussions held at meetings of the Presiding Officers, guidelines were sent out to the countries to help them prepare their presentations for two working groups which are to function concurrently: one on poverty and gender, and the other on access to power and decision-making.

I would not like to conclude these remarks without first making very special mention of the unfailing support we have received in the organization of this session of the Conference both from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Chile and from the National Women's Service of Chile (SERNAM) and its Director, Josefina Bilbao. We are very grateful for all their help.

I earnestly hope that what we accomplish here will constitute a new milestone along our path as we move forward towards the full incorporation of gender equality into the mainstream development agenda of Latin America and the Caribbean and the consolidation of ECLAC as a valuable meeting place for the countries of the region.

Thank you.



