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February 18th Day of Women of the Americas



Inter-American Commission of Women



Belém do
Pará +20
Convention

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Message from the President of the Inter-American Commission of Women, María Isabel Chamorro, on the Day of Women of the Americas, February 18th, 2014

This year, we celebrate 20 years since the adoption of the Inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment and Eradication of Violence against Women (Belém do Pará Convention) by the members of the Organization of American States (OAS).

At the time, the Convention solidified the political will of the governments of the region to combat violence against women in all its forms. It provided a strong legal and action framework for confronting physical, psychological and sexual violence in the public and private spheres, including the violence that is perpetrated or tolerated by the State. Over the last two decades, the Convention has provided the basis for a new generation of integrated laws and the establishment of legal standards at the national and international levels, the formulation of public policies and national plans, the organization of information and awareness-raising campaigns, the development of specialized care, support and accompaniment services, as well as countless other initiatives and activities.

In all the countries of the region, examples of these advances exist, and one of the priorities of the Inter-American Commission of Women (CIM) over the next year will be to identify and publicize these good practices from the State and civil society in order to guide future work and promote the full implementation of the Convention, as well as the strengthening of its Follow-up Mechanism, the MESECVI.

To the significant extent, however, the Belém do Pará remains a promise to be fulfilled, because violence is still a daily reality for too many women in our region. We all have the right to live a life free of violence, yet not all of us have the capacity to exercise that right.

Violence against women and girls reflects the persistence of asymmetrical situations of power and structural inequalities based on sex, gender, and the many factors that expose women and girls to additional forms of discrimination – ethnicity, poverty, and age, among others.

The protection of women’s human Rights goes beyond individual or collective guarantees of specific rights: the defence of the right to a life free of violence is closely related to strengthened democratic governance, inclusion, security, social justice, human development the Rule of Law, and justice.

The State that aims to fully implement the Convention must identify the asymmetrical power relations and structural discrimination that underlie violence against women, in order to design an integral response to the problem and various manifestations. In accordance with the Belém do Pará Convention, a State that seeks to guarantee women’s human rights must be able to effectively and sustainably implement at least the following 10 measures to combat violence against women and girls:

1. Organize the State apparatus to decisively combat the general pattern of State tolerance to violence against women and girls and to guarantee the protection of women.
2. Organize its justice system to combat impunity and judicial ineffectiveness in cases of violence against women, young women and girls.
3. Organize its education system to guarantee women’s right to be valued and educated free from stereotyped patterns of behaviour and social and cultural practices that are based on notions of subordination and inferiority.
4. Organize its legislative system, at both the federal and provincial levels, to:
 - closely analyze the laws, regulations, practices and public policies that establish differences in treatment based on sex; and
 - immediately strike down any national or State regulation that is discriminatory against women and girls or that may deepen discrimination that is based on discriminatory social patterns.
5. Organize all of the structures through which public power is exercised so that they are able to legally ensure the free and full exercise of women’s human rights and the possibility of denouncing any incidence of violence in either the public or private spheres.
6. Implement all the actions that are within reach of the State in order to eradicate discrimination against women and stereotyped patterns of behaviour that promote the inferior treatment of women in communications media.
7. Incorporate a gender perspective in public and human security policies that identifies the specific needs of women and girls with respect to violence and that guarantees temporary and permanent measures of protection and prevention.
8. Guarantee the economic resources necessary to execute national policies and plans and guarantee the active participation of women in their implementation, evaluation and follow-up.

9. Organize its judicial and administrative systems in order to guarantee that, in the face of violations of women's human rights, the victims and their families have access to effective tools to ensure not only access to justice, but also integral reparation of the harm caused.

10. Direct, adapt and produce the disaggregated statistical tools needed for the effective implementation of these measures, for the collection of the differentiated data needed to understand the complexity of lived discrimination, as experienced by the victims, and for the periodic evaluation of the measures implemented to progressively eradicate the underlying causes of violence against women.

The implementation of these 10 Key Steps is only an approximation of the long list of duties that remain in order to ensure the full implementation of the Belém do Pará Convention. The Committee of Experts of the MESECVI has issued a series of concrete and practical recommendations in the areas of legislation, national plans, access to justice, specialized services, budgets, and information and statistics that seeks to support the States Party in this work.

For all of these reasons and more, on this Day of Women of the Americas and in commemoration of the twentieth anniversary of the Belém do Pará Convention, I call for an intensification of efforts to advance towards our set goals and to consolidate what we have already achieved, to identify and replicate good practices, to strengthen collaboration between governments, civil society, and regional and international organizations, to follow-up and evaluate the effectiveness of laws and national plans, to develop capacity in the administration of justice, to ensure the commitment of communications media, and to allocate the resources necessary to make a reality of our commitment to women's rights and fulfill the promise to eradicate violence.

