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INTER-AMERICAN PROGRAM ON THE PROMOTION OF WOMEN'S HUMAN RIGHTS AND GENDER EQUITY AND EQUALITY

Background

The adoption of the IAP constituted the achievement of political consensus by the OAS member states around the issue of discrimination against women; its acceptance led to acknowledgement of situations of inequality, discrimination, and violence to which women were subjected, as well as acknowledgement of the need to promote measures to advance women's rights and to combat all forms of discrimination and promote equity and equality between women and men from a gender perspective.

In ten years, the IAP has placed the "issue" of women on the working agendas of various OAS organs and agencies and member states. It became the "cornerstone" of the process to generate awareness of the meaning of the concept of gender and its implications for the formulation and implementation of programs and projects. This opened up an avenue for the gender issue and, with it, the acceptance of women as equally important as men in every sphere of public and private life, and thus all forms of gender-based discrimination and violence should be eliminated.

1. General conclusions

Based on a review of documents and interviews, the following points are being raised as they could help improve future initiatives to promote women's human rights and gender equity and equality.

a. The existence of programs or strategies for action, with an institutional mandate. These would also seek to contribute to the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women and to advance women's rights and equality and are politically very important in managing the Organization's various areas of work.

b. In formulating and implementing action programs and projects, there should be a concrete, explicit statement of what specific issues are to be addressed; objectives to be achieved; action plans to be pursued; goals or outcomes expected; the time frame for achieving concrete outcomes that are measurable with quantitative and qualitative indicators; monitoring and tracking processes; periodic evaluations of execution; impact and challenges; and periodic delivery of results, etc. For this to be properly presented, the specific agencies or persons responsible for implementing those actions have to be identified, as their participation is crucial to the periodic evaluations.

c. Programs being proposed should be "future-oriented," that is, as a process to be undertaken, with clearly-stated short-, medium-, and long-term measures and outcome. It would not be useful to propose programs of indefinite, loose, or lengthy time-frame.

d. Learning and managing the concept of gender and gender perspective must be an ongoing process for which a process of ongoing training must be proposed, given the complexities associated with using it as a tool to be incorporated into any analysis or action plan, and because staff of institutions are constantly changing, particularly in the work areas most involved in women's rights. Training mechanisms should therefore be diversified: ranging from workshops, courses, or manuals, to online refresher programs.

e. Applying the gender perspective concept in implementing programs and projects of the CIM and of the OAS' various secretariats requires political will at the highest level for it to be permanently and properly incorporated into every operation they undertake. This also requires support or specialized technical assistance.

f. The participation of international donor agencies in the gender mainstreaming process and the objective of helping to bring about equality for women has been a crucial factor. The cases of Finland and Canada are specific examples of how the provision of technical and financial resources goes hand in hand with political will in the thrust for equality. It would therefore be useful to continue strengthening the conditions set by the agencies for applying a gender perspective to whether or not to approve funding.

2. Scenarios to consider

Over its nearly ten years of operation, the IAP has been in a symbiosis of sorts with the plans and programs of the CIM. It is perhaps now time for this symbiotic process to be taken to its logical conclusion. In other words, the situation should be taken for what it is, with the benefits and disadvantages in terms of performing the tasks assigned to the CIM, to move to decision-making about its immediate future and that of IAP.

Against this backdrop, three possible scenarios arise, then, for the General Secretariat and the CIM to consider, with respect to IAP:

- *Firstly*, for the IAP to continue being viewed, as usual, as the basic frame of reference for OAS measures to eliminate discrimination and to achieve equality for women, with the necessary adjustments made for regular publicity and internal coordination so that the different units of the OAS can be strengthened for their operations to incorporate the issue of gender and promotion of women's human rights.

- *Secondly*, rethinking the IAP by defining the main areas of work, with specific achievable objectives, operational strategies for action, with targets and indicators to measure its development; clearly-defined implementation deadlines and monitoring and evaluation processes. In addition, the different agencies and entities of the OAS should strengthen their commitment to eliminating all forms of discrimination against women and to focusing their activities towards human rights development and achieving equality, within the framework of the IAP.

- *Thirdly*, to assume that the IAP played an important role in promoting women's rights and that, because of institutional dynamics and the hemispheric reality, its effective period of operation can be considered officially ended. This means strengthening the CIM for it to carry on the tasks outlined in the IAP, but with operational strategies on matters that are urgently needed by and of interest to the countries, which strategies can be monitored and evaluated regularly and corrective measures put in place when necessary. The overall objectives outlined in the IAP could remain a frame of reference for the OAS and the CIM, given its role in transforming the patriarchal system, but the specific goals should be operationalized in specific short- to medium-term proposals or action plans. The CIM Assembly, Committee of Delegates, and Executive Secretariat should also review their role in achieving this goal and should enhance the Commission's management capacity and impact in terms of the central effort to achieve equality for women.

Under any of these three scenarios the CIM, being composed of various bodies, should continue pressing firmly ahead in this process to support women's rights and equality; and the various organs, agencies, departments, and offices of the OAS should play a vital role. In this respect it would be useful to identify what OAS work units or areas are most strategic and urgent and could make a significant contribution to the advancement of women's rights, in order to establish an effective coordination mechanism to plan and execute joint activities.