



## ORGANIZATION OF AMERICAN STATES

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### INTER-AMERICAN COMMISSION OF WOMEN

FOLLOW-UP MECHANISM TO  
THE CONVENTION OF BELÉM DO PARÁ (MESECVI)  
COMMITTEE OF EXPERTS ON VIOLENCE (CEVI)  
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MEETING OF EXPERTS ON THE FOLLOW-UP MECHANISM TO  
THE INTER-AMERICAN CONVENTION ON THE PREVENTION, PUNISHMENT  
AND ERADICATION OF VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN  
*CONVENCIÓN OF BELÉM DO PARÁ*

#### FINAL MINUTES

The opening session took place on Monday, July 24, at 9:30 a.m. The Executive Secretary of CIM, Carmen Lomellin, welcomed the participants and thanked the CIM staff for preparing the meeting. Immediately thereafter, the following took the floor: the Chair of the Permanent Council, Ambassador Henry Lothar Illes, Permanent Representative of Suriname to OAS; the Executive Secretary of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR), Santiago Cantón; the Vice-President of CIM, María José Argaña Matheu; and the Coordinator of the Committee of Experts of the Follow-up Mechanism to the Implementation of the Inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment and Eradication of Violence against Women, Convention of Belém do Pará (CEVI), Leila Linhares Barsted. Their remarks have been published in the documents MESECVI/CEVI/INF. 1/06, MESECVI/CEVI/INF. 2/06, and MESECVI/CEVI/INF. 3/06, respectively.

After a brief break, the first plenary session began. Ms. Moira Méndez, Permanent Representative of Venezuela to OAS, took the floor to report that her country's expert, Dr. Asia Villegas, was unable to attend the event because she was not granted a visa on time. She indicated that it would be advisable to have alternate experts in the Mechanism to prevent this situation from occurring again and to examine the possibility of holding the meetings outside of OAS headquarters. She also pointed out that her country's expert had done the work that had been assigned to her, that she had sent the preliminary report on the country she had been asked to evaluate, and that her absence would affect the performance of both the Committee and the Mechanism.

The participants expressed their concern about this situation. In addition to addressing a note to the Secretary General of the OAS to report this matter and to request his support in order to prevent its repetition, the experts unanimously agreed upon holding the next Committee meeting in another member state of the OAS. To this end, the expert from Argentina stated that the Permanent Mission of her country had briefed her about their interest to host the next meeting of experts. The Secretariat shall send a list of the needs to be met to the Argentine government in order to host the next meeting of the CEVI, in line with the consensus of the Committee. The experts of Peru and Mexico also expressed the same interest as Argentina to host future meetings.

In accordance with the meeting's agenda, the Coordinator of CEVI presented the report of CEVI activities since the last meeting, highlighting the importance of articulating them with other OAS bodies and coordinating activities with the region's women. She pointed out the need to examine the working methodology to ensure that the reports of the experts would become more standardized, thus facilitating the drafting of the hemispheric report. She then went to explain the dynamics of the meeting, the work that would be carried out in the plenary sessions, the establishment of the working subgroups, the distribution of responsibilities among each one of them, and the coordination of tasks to be carried out in them.

In the afternoon of the meeting's first day, the experts met in three previous agreed upon working groups to examine the preliminary reports made by the experts and to issue their recommendations.

When beginning the second plenary session, the coordinator read a note received from Uruguay's expert, Lilian Curbelo, who was unable to attend because her government did not have financial resources to fund her attendance, as well as a note from the Panamanian Government, indicating that, because of a force majeure situation, the alternate expert, Rosina Perez, would be unable to attend the meeting.

The Alternate Representative of the United States to the OAS, Stacy Williams, requested the floor to clarify the visa situation of the expert from Venezuela, Dr. Asia Villegas. She stated that Dr. Villegas had not fulfilled the requirements either in 2005 or in 2006 and had disregarded due procedures. She clarified that the U.S. Embassy requires three working days to issue a visa. In this case, it was unable to process the visa because the supporting documents were not received on time and Monday was a holiday in Venezuela. She pointed out that, in 2005, the U.S. Embassy granted 327 diplomatic visas and 162 visas to international organizations. She underscored that the United States is committed to granting visas and that it is willing to work together with others to avoid this type of situation.

The Coordinator read the draft left to be sent to the Secretary General of the OAS regarding the matter and it was ratified by the participants.

Immediately thereafter, the rapporteurs of each one of the three working subgroups submitted a report on the results obtained at the session held in the afternoon of the first days of the meeting, specifying how the activities were conducted and the conclusions that were reached. They are published as documents ESECVI/CEVI/doc.63/06, MESECVI/CEVI/doc.64/06, and MESECVI/CEVI/doc.65/06, respectively.

All the subgroups were concerned about the diversity of the structure of the preliminary reports that were drafted by the experts. Some of them were overly short, whereas in others data were missing; some experts pointed out that further information would have needed, especially in terms of the omissions by national authorities in some cases, to draw up a more complete report. It was considered that all of this would undermine the Mechanism's reliability, and therefore it would be impossible to send the reports as they were to the governments.

Various experts indicated that they would need further information to draft the preliminary report more accurately and also expressed their doubts about whether it was proper or not to consult other sources of information to draft the report. It was widely felt that it was proper and that, in addition, it would be necessary to disseminate the Mechanism more broadly so that it could widely known, credible and reputable.

In this regard, after exchanging ideas, a consensus was reached that the reports should contain an executive summary or abstract at the beginning, followed by four chapters pertaining to the questionnaire, highlighting the Mechanism's progress, obstacles and setbacks. It would conclude with general recommendations based on the Convention's provisions and specific recommendations bearing in mind the information presented by the country. When making recommendations, the experts shall consider the feasibility of the Convention's enforcement by governments and the respective follow-up.

As it involves the first round in which the multilateral evaluation process is being conducted, it was deemed necessary to take an additional step, where the experts must reorganize their reports to standardize them and, if necessary, send questions or requests for further information to governments, solely to fill in the information gaps.

To this end, the Coordinator requested the participants to set new deadlines for rewriting the preliminary reports by the experts and the time-limits they should set for governments to reply to the explanatory questions. It was agreed that the steps to be taken would be as follows: 1) The experts would send the Secretariat the questions or requests for further information they deemed adequate by August at the latest; 2) The Secretariat would in turn send them to the Competent National Authorities (Autoridad Nacional Competente—ANC), requesting them to send the answers within a pre-established deadline, which would be the end of October; 3) The Secretariat would send the information that was received to the experts, who would draft a new preliminary report and would send it to the Secretariat by December 15; 4) The Secretariat would send the preliminary reports to the ANCs so that they could submit the comments or explanations they consider relevant by the end of February 2007. The Secretariat was requested to change the CEVI's working timetable on the basis of the above.

Emphasis was laid on collective responsibility and the Committee's credibility, which depends on all of its members; therefore a report that does not have quality content, sufficient length, etc., should not be allowed to be distributed. Because of this, it was decided to revise the reports at the next meeting of CEVI.

The Coordinator, to avoid any uncertainty, requested the inclusion of the following consensus in the minutes: Bearing in mind that the States Parties ceased or failed to provide enough information to answer the questions made in the questionnaire sent by the CEVI, the Committee cannot ensure complete follow-up on Articles 21 and 23 of the Rules and, to make up for the shortage of information, adopted the decision to reiterate their requests to the States Parties to provide missing information, calling for concrete and more objective answers, so that it could complete its evaluation report.

Continuing with the topics on the agenda, the criteria for civil society participation in the CEVI was discussed. The Coordinator reported that some organizations such as the Latin American and Caribbean Committee for the Defense of Women's Rights (Comité de América Latina y el Caribe para la Defensa de los Derechos de la Mujer—CLADEM), the Center for Justice and International Law (Centro por la Justicia y el Derecho Internacional—CEJIL), Amnesty International, and the Central American Network on Violence Against Women requested the right to participate in the meeting, and they were told that it was not possible, because as yet no rules had been established to enable them to attend and that this matter would be discussed at the present meeting.

It was recalled that there was a proposal that had been circulated previously, requesting that the experts select nongovernmental organizations from their countries, but this approach was turned down because it was not considered to be fair, and that is why it was decided that the matter had to be discussed at the present session. There was an extensive exchange of viewpoints regarding whether the participation had to be onsite, in writing or via alternative reports and, in the latter case, about the length of the reports.

The approach that was adopted was that civil society participation would not be restricted and that alternative reports based on the questionnaire sent to governments, which is a public questionnaire that can be found on the CIM's website, could be received. To this end, the experts from each country would extend an invitation to civil society organizations to send their contributions to the Secretariat, which in turn would transmit them to the expert who was evaluating the country. It was felt that the approach to selecting the organizations should be based on their experience and achievements in dealing with violence against women, even though they might not necessarily be women's organizations, and their capacity to provide supporting documents, data, statistics, and case studies that are important, among others. The importance of civil society participation in the evaluation process was emphasized to highlight the process, ensure its transparency and disseminate how it works.

Afterwards, the approach to adopt in terms of when and how civil society organizations can participate in the committee was discussed. It was suggested that the model of other organizations be used, such as that of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR), which has thematic hearings with organizations once or twice a year, using a predetermined framework and which provides time for drafting the report. Another proposal was aimed at conducting hearings by country, taking into consideration special situations that might arise, or else some of the formats for specialized agencies of the United Nations.

The approach that was finally adopted not only enabled civil society organizations to participate by providing inputs, reports, and answers to the questionnaires but also provided them with a half-day forum before the Committee's session to discuss specific topics.

The importance of onsite visits was highlighted, although it was recognized that, at present, there are no financial resources available for this activity. The need to resolve the problem of funding experts was also mentioned, because some of them could not attend for lack of funding. CIM's Executive Secretary was asked if it would be possible to secure funding for this purpose, and she explained that resources allocated from the regular fund for the topic of violence for next year would be for the Mechanism's meetings and that, at the end of the meeting, a budget of expenses would be drawn up for the donor countries. Without detriment to the latter, attempts would be made to raise funds from external sources. She urged the experts to encourage their respective governments to support the Mechanism, as Mexico has already done, assigning public officials to work on it.

As the Alternate Coordinator, Margarita Puerto, the expert from Honduras, had resigned from her position, the election of a new alternate was held. The expert from Mexico presented the candidacy of the expert from Argentina, Susana Chiarotti, who in turn, to ensure a regional balance among the officers, requested the recently appointed expert from Honduras to take up the position. As the latter did not accept the candidacy, the expert from Argentina was designated by acclamation to be the Alternate Coordinator.

There were various motions requested the submittal of recommendations to governments regarding priority topics for the area of gender-based violence. After an exchange of various viewpoints, it was agreed that only one recommendation would be made, to the Brazilian Government, urging it to fully ratify the first law on violence against women. The letter, to be signed by the Alternate Coordinator, was read and adopted.

In short, in keeping with the recommendations made by the working groups and the meeting's agenda, the following decisions were reached by consensus:

- 1. Structure of preliminary reports.** They should adopt the following structure:
  - 1.1. Executive summary or abstract.
  - 1.2. Four chapters corresponding to the questionnaire, indicating progress, obstacles, and setbacks in the respective chapters.
  - 1.3. General recommendations based on the Convention's provisions and specific recommendations bearing in mind the information presented by the country. When making their recommendations, the experts shall consider the feasibility of their implementation by governments and their respective monitoring.
  
- 2. Procedures and a new timetable to follow:**
  - 2.1. By the end of August, at the latest, the experts shall send the Secretariat the questions or requests for expanding the information they deem adequate to complete their preliminary evaluation reports.
  - 2.2. The Secretariat shall send them to the ANCs, requesting them to submit their responses within the time-limits that were established, that is, at the end of October.
  - 2.3. The Secretariat shall send the information that is received to the experts, who shall draft new preliminary reports and shall send them to the Secretariat by December 15.
  - 2.4. The Secretariat shall send the preliminary reports to the ANC so that they can submit the comments or explanations they consider relevant by the end of February 2007.

- 2.5. The Secretariat shall send the comments received from ANC to the experts.
- 2.6. The reports shall be adopted at the next meeting of the CEVI.

### **3. Inputs for preliminary reports**

The experts must consult other sources they consider relevant to complete their evaluation of the country assigned to them, as well as the inputs they receive from civil society organizations.

### **4. Criteria for civil society participation in CEVI**

- 4.1. The experts of each country shall invite organizations to submit their contributions to the Secretariat, which in turn shall transmit them to the corresponding expert.
- 4.2. At the CEVI meetings, a half-day will be given prior to the Committee's sessions to discuss specific topics.

### **5. Communications:**

- 5.1. A note shall be addressed to the Secretary General to inform him and request his cooperation to ensure that, at the next meetings of CEVI, experts shall receive their visa to travel.
- 5.2. Recommendation to His Excellency the President of Brazil to request the enactment of the Law on Violence against Women.
- 5.3. The Secretariat shall send a list of requirements that must be met by the Argentinean Government to host the next meeting of CEVI, in line with the consensus of the Committee.

On behalf of the President of CIM, Nilcéa Freire, the Vice-President of CIM closed the meeting and thanked the participants for their work. She stated that, for the CIM, it is essential to strengthen and promote the Mechanism and to ensure its sustainability. She highlighted the importance of having all States participating in it. She informed that, at the Assembly of CIM Delegates that shall be taking place in El Salvador, it would be important for the Coordinator to report on the progress made by the Mechanism as well as its difficulties. She also invited them to attend the MERCOSUR meeting on violence against women to be held in September in Argentina to conduct a regional analysis. She concluded by congratulating the participants for their work and once again pledged the support of the CIM's Executive Committee.