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NATIONAL REPORT: PANAMÁ

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REPUBLIC OF PANAMA  
MINISTRY OF SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT  
National Directorate of Women

PANAMA NATIONAL REPORT  
to the Inter-American Commission of Women (CIM)

JULY 2006

## PANAMA NATIONAL REPORT

### I. GENERAL INFORMATION

According to the National Population and Housing Census of 2000, the Republic of Panama has a total population of 2,839,177, of which 1,406,611 are women.

The majority of the population lives in urban areas, while 43.3% (1,250,880) live in rural areas. The incidence of poverty (whether extreme or not) in Panama is 36.8%.

78.5% of live births in the country occur in urban areas and 21.5% in rural areas. In 2004, there was a total of 62,769 births (30,579 females and 32,190 male).

In 2000, 7.8% of the population illiterate. The level of illiteracy is higher among women (8.2%) than men (7.1%).

Panama is fourth in the Central American region in terms of HIV prevalence (0.9%), according to the 2004 Report on the Global AIDS Epidemic (UNAIDS). The Ministry of Health reports 336 deaths from the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) in 2005, 80 of which were women and 256 men.

### II. LEGAL, POLITICAL AND SOCIOECONOMIC SITUATION

As stated in the Country Report presented at the 32nd Assembly of Delegates of CIM, the Republic of Panama has made efforts to establish in its legislation standards that would guarantee the principle of equality of men and women, notably Law No. 4 of 29 January 1999, “which establishes equality of opportunity for women” and its implementing regulation Executive Decree No. 53 of 25 June 2002. In addition to this legal mandate, there is the Equal Opportunities for Women Plan (PIOM II) for 2001-2006. On the more specific topic of violence against women, there is the National Plan to combat Domestic Violence and promote Civic Coexistence Policies (*Plan Nacional contra la Violencia Doméstica y Políticas de Convivencia Ciudadana*).

We should point out that Panamanian women are mostly to be found in the tertiary sector of the economy. In 2004, 5% of working women were in the primary sector, 11.3% in the secondary sector, and 83.6% were engaged in tertiary sector activities.

The sectors that employ most women are wholesale and retail trade, domestic services, teaching, and hotels and restaurants. According to the data for 2004, nine (9) out of every ten (10) domestic workers are women.

It is harder for women to find employment than men, hence their higher unemployment rate.

According to the 2005 Household Survey, the female economically active population (EAP) 25+ years old represents 47.4% (534,170 women). Similarly, working women aged 15+ total 463,849.

Regarding the participation of women in power structures and decision making, there are currently very few females involved. Panama has three (3) female Ministers of State and four (4) Vice Ministers. In the Legislative Assembly, there are thirteen (13) deputies and thirty-four (34) alternates out of a total of 72 seats.

Although Panama's female parliamentarians have increased between the previous electoral term (1999- 2004) and the current one (2004-2009), the 30% quota established in the electoral law has still not been filled. The same failure to meet quota is observed at the mayoral and township (*corregimiento*) levels. In 1999, there were 82 and 682 female candidates, respectively, whereas in the 2004 elections those numbers had declined to 54 and 456, respectively (MIDES, 2005).

Worthy of note among the mandates and policies established for equal opportunity is the ongoing Regional Project "The Economic Agenda for Women," financed by UNIFEM and UNDP. Its objective is help place the issue of gender equity on the Central American economic agenda so that equal opportunity and equal rights for women and men can indeed be achieved. Great strides in the areas of gender and economics have been made within the framework of that project, such as the Study on Economics and Gender in Panama and the Mapping Existing Institutions in the Areas of Economics and Gender.

A diploma course in Gender and Economics was also given, with a view to starting a process that would enable women to become familiar with the issues of macro-, meso-, and micro-economics, which directly or indirectly affect their lives. Six studies were also carried out with the aim of contributing, through research and capacity building, to the analysis of gender and economics, so that an agenda for influencing public policy can be drawn up.

In commemoration of International Women's Day in March 2006, this theme was stressed with the slogan: "Women move the economy too." Training seminars and workshops were held, as well as a National Forum on Economics and Gender.

In order to fuel institutional processes and actions in 2005-2006 that would set in motion the priority activities described in the III Women and Development Pact, a proposal is being drafted in a high-level committee to study and identify a better structure for the national women's system (DINAMU).

### **III. FOLLOW-UP OF IMPLEMENTATION OF THE CIM STRATEGIC PLAN OF ACTION**

With respect to the implementation of CIM's Strategic Plan of Action, we can say the following about the priorities that should receive special attention:

The national government launched the Opportunities Network Program in the first half of 2006. It basically targets the population living in extreme poverty by giving contributions (*bonos*) to extremely poor families, headed by women, with the commitment to share the responsibility for the family's health care and education.

On the topic of access to land, the Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock Development (MIDA) has been promoting titling through the Agrarian Reform Program and the National Land Administration Project (PRONAT). Between 1999 and 2006, titling efforts have led to the issue

of a total of 28,001 titles, 20,199 of which belong to men and 7,802 to women nationwide.

The participation of women in nontraditional activities has increased in recent years in areas such as: beekeeping, poultry farming, growing rice, watermelons, vegetables, agroindustrial exports and cottage industry exports, rearing animals, etc. According to the data of the last agricultural census, by 2001 there was a total of 68,152 farmers, of which only 29.31% were women.

On the issue of violence against women, in January 2006, the national government launched the Media Campaign on Sexual Abuse of Young Children and Adolescents, Mistreatment of Adults and Seniors, and Domestic Violence. The aim of this campaign is to use advertising spots, press releases, billboards, digital bulletin boards, posters, etc. to guide the public and make them take responsibility for the prevention, care, reporting and punishment of crimes of sexual abuse of children and adolescents, ill treatment of adults and seniors, and domestic violence.

At the same time, the National Plan to combat Domestic Violence and promote Civic Coexistence Policies for 2004-2014 is being operationalized and implemented. The various sectors involved are taking an active part in its execution, namely: Health, Education, Judicial Police, other governmental organizations, NGOs, and civil society.

During this period, the implementation of the Local Domestic Violence Prevention and Care Plan in the Soná district of Veraguas Province is being followed up and monitored. Specific action is also being taken under the Local domestic Violence Prevention and Care Plan for the San Miguelito district of Panamá Province. The plans are coordinated by the Soná and San Miguelito Local Domestic Violence Prevention and Care Networks, respectively. Furthermore, initial steps are being taken to create and strengthen the local networks against domestic violence in the districts of David, Juan Díaz and Colón. These projects are being executed by the Ministry of Social Development with technical support and financing from such agencies as the Inter-American Development Bank, the Spanish International Cooperation Agency, and the United Nations Population Fund, among others.

The Saná community has a **Domestic Violence Integrated Care Center**, which offers guidance, counseling, and legal services, under the title *“Centre for Support and Promotion of Civic Coexistence in a Culture of Peace.”* The operating costs of this center are defrayed by the UN Population Fund and an annual subsidy from the government through the Ministry of Social Development.

At the state level, there has been progress in domestic violence prevention and care through the creation of the National Police Office of Services against Family Violence.

The Ministry of Social Development has the New Life Halfway House, which provides temporary accommodation for women who are victims of domestic violence and their children. To take care of the victims, the halfway house is staffed with personnel specializing in different areas such as psychology, social work, and legal aid, and there is a help hotline.

At the University of Panama two classes (2005 and 2006) graduated with a Masters in prevention and care of violence in the family with a focus on gender.

Panama does not have a single system for recording information on cases of domestic violence, but it does have data sources or centers that collect data from different entities, such as the Judicial Technical Police, the judiciary, public prosecutors, local government administrators, the Ministry of Health, Ministry of Social Development (MIDES), etc.

On the educational front, the Office of Women's Affairs of the Ministry of Education has been taking steps to promote programs and/or actions including:

1. Program for Teenaged Mothers, by forming cooperatives that provide opportunities for the mothers to earn income to meet their socioeconomic needs.
2. Communications program for disseminating the rights of women on issues such as non-sexist language, nontraditional occupations, etc.
3. Training teachers nationally to use gender-oriented didactic tools.
4. Establishment of the Gender Supervision Commission for school texts and teaching materials, under Law 6 on the use of nonsexist language.
5. Mothers and fathers in the School for Fathers Program have been trained in Law 29, which guarantees the health and education of pregnant teenagers.
6. Establishment of an agreement with the organization of indigenous women, to teach and train teachers in indigenous languages.

Regarding the statistical data on pregnant students in the education sector, by region and educational department, the Ministry of Education stated that there were 4,466 cases of pregnant teenagers between 2000 and 2005. For its part, the Ministry of Health indicates that in 2003 there were 10,225 such cases and 11,921 children born to teen mothers.

In health, gender differences are reflected in morbidity and mortality. They are also reflected in risk factors, mental health and in lifestyles and possibility of access to services. Among the basic health problems that Panamanian women face are: malnutrition of women of childbearing age, which also affects subsequent generations; teen pregnancy, which limits the human development of young women, diminishing their possibilities for personal and professional growth; sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV/AIDS, which affects them and their children; malignant tumors and domestic violence.

According to the 2005 Report on Women in Panama, the Ministry of Health and PAHO, women's diseases can be attributed to ten main causes: upper respiratory infections, colds/influenza, infections of the skin and subcutaneous tissue, diarrhea, urinary tract infections, acute pharyngitis and tonsillitis, mycosis, anemia, hypertension, infectious and parasitic diseases. Compared with men, women have a higher rate of doctor's visits for these illness (63.2%) in almost all the provinces, with the exception of Bocas del Toro y Herrera and the district of San Miguelito in Panama Province.

Finally, it must be pointed out that the National Directorate of Women in the Ministry of Social Development coordinates the Network of Government Mechanisms to Promote Equal Opportunities for Women, which exists in most government institutions. These institutions must implement on a priority basis the actions envisaged in Law N° 4, of January 29, 1999, and Executive Decree N° 53 of June 25, 2002. The total number of offices, units or liaison services amount to 27.

#### **IV. FUTURE ACTIONS TO ADVANCE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE CIM STRATEGIC PLAN OF ACTION**

Future follow-up actions for the CIM Strategic Plan of Action would include:

1. Continuing to publicize equal opportunities for women by creating awareness and providing training nationwide, through the implementation of Law N° 4, of January 29, 1999, which establishes equal opportunities for women.
2. Promote the institutional process of raising the profile of the national women's system to have an impact on the planning and execution of gender-sensitive public policy.
3. Assistance for government offices or coordinators that advocate equal opportunity for women by promoting the steps set out in the Plan of Equal Opportunities for Women.
4. Operationalize the National Plan to combat Domestic Violence and promote Civic Coexistence Policies, which goes hand in hand with the continuing projects on gender violence implemented with technical and financial support from the Inter-American Development Bank, the UN Interagency Group on Gender—especially UNFPA and UNDP,—and the Spanish International Cooperation Agency. Some key actions would be:
  - Strengthening local domestic violence prevention and care networks (David, Chiriquí, Colón, Chorrera).
  - Integrated Care Center for Women in Colón Province.
5. Execution of the second stage of the draft economic agenda for women (UNDP-UNIFEM).
6. Execution of the regional project on strengthening governance, from a gender perspective, and political participation of women at the local level (INSTRAW).