

**Remarks by Alicia Bárcena, Executive Secretary of ECLAC, at the opening ceremony of the eleventh session of the Regional Conference on Women in Latin America and the Caribbean, Brasilia, 13 July 2010**

Celso Amorim, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Brazil  
Nilcea Freire, Minister of the Secretariat on Policies for Women of Brazil  
Michelle Bachelet, former President of Chile  
Ministers and representatives of the member States of ECLAC  
Representatives of the agencies of the United Nations system and, especially,  
Rachel Mayanja, Assistant Secretary-General and Special Adviser to the Secretary-General on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women  
Delegates of the international organizations represented in the Federative Republic of Brazil  
National authorities  
Representatives of non-governmental organizations and of civil society  
Sonia Montaña, Officer-in-Charge of the Division for Gender Affairs of ECLAC, and colleagues of the Division for Gender Affairs of ECLAC

Dear friends

First of all I would like to extend to you all a very warm welcome to this, your conference, the foremost political forum in Latin America and the Caribbean for the discussion and adoption of the region's agenda for the gender affairs.

As the first female Executive Secretary of ECLAC, I am honoured to open the eleventh session of the Regional Conference on Women in Latin America and the Caribbean. As I do so, I am both moved and thankful. I know I am here because long before me, other women conquered a first right, the most important of all, the "right to have rights". For that I owe profound gratitude and acknowledgement to the pioneers of the feminist movement and to all those women from different stances and origins who have added their own strengths to this immense wave of justice and equality that is the women's movement in Latin America and the Caribbean.

Dear friends,

A few weeks ago we came to Brasilia emboldened by "prudent ambition" to propose to our Governments a development agenda that revolved around equality. This we did, in the time-honoured ECLAC tradition, with a document entitled "Time for equality: closing gaps, opening trails", in which we affirmed that equality is entitlement to rights, that the State plays an irreplaceable role in achieving minimum thresholds of well-being and that equality takes nothing —neither strength nor resources—from economic growth.

Today we have returned to present to you a document which forms the first strand of this development proposal. This document, entitled "What kind of State? What kind of equality?", which I will shortly have the privilege of presenting, focuses on the role that the State is called upon to play in order to ensure that progress made in the public sphere is carried through to the private sphere as well, and that achievements in the labour market extend into the sphere of caregiving, bringing into the light the nexus between productive and reproductive work, and between caregiving and the productive performance of the economy.

We have come to Brasilia to propose pathways to equality, pathways that begin by winning and maintaining women's physical, political and economic autonomy.

We understand physical autonomy to mean the ability of women to control their own bodies, to be free of all forms of violence and to fully enjoy and exercise their sexual and reproductive rights.

We see political autonomy as a steady path towards parity.

And we maintain that economic autonomy will be possible only to the extent that the total work burden—that is the burden of unpaid and paid—is redistributed.

In the first case, we must distribute care responsibilities more fairly, by creating social infrastructure and investing in proper services for the care of children, older persons and the sick, and making it a matter of social responsibility. In the second, we must break away from workplace segmentation and have the countries develop policies to remove women from the worst paid and most precarious jobs, those most vulnerable to labour flexibility measures and lacking social protection. We must also break through the glass ceiling that prevents women who have formal jobs from reaching leading positions in the business world.

Dear Nilcéa

Brazil was one of the first countries to recognize the principle of equality. The constitutional reforms of 1988 marked the start of a long period of gender mainstreaming in the region and served as an example to many countries desirous of enshrining in the constitution or in law the institutions designed to bring to fruition the aspirations for equality.

A clear example of this was the creation of the Secretariat on Policies for Women, which today enjoys a higher position in the Brazilian administrative hierarchy in line with a region-wide tendency to enhance the status of the machineries for the advancement of women. Another example was the creation of Women's Commissariats, an initiative which sought to transform repressive State bodies into mechanisms for the protection of battered women. This example has been emulated in many countries of the region, indeed in many countries across the world.

Brazil has also embraced a different public policy approach and for this we must recognize the role of Nilcéa Freire. As Minister, she made it possible for civil society organizations to participate in the national women's conferences. This was a key element in achieving advances in health, education, political participation as well as in the twelve spheres of concern identified in the Beijing Platform for Action.

Following in her footsteps, we are pleased today to welcome in our midst a representative of civil society, the first to attend an opening ceremony at a session of the Regional Conference on Women. Surely this is cause for celebration.

Fortunately, in this long process of building gender equality, Brazil has not been alone: Chile has carried out far-reaching social security reforms, recognizing for the first time the life-long difficulties women face in negotiating the labour market. Accordingly, Chile created a system of day-care and made the morning-after pill available to all citizens, among other laudable efforts pursuit of parity. Uruguay also merits recognition for its social security reforms.

Argentina has made outstanding progress in relation to quotas and women's progress in the legislative branch of government. Costa Rica offers another example

of creativity in the areas of equality within the family, responsible parenthood legislation and parental leave.

Other countries such as the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, Ecuador and the Plurinational State of Bolivia have placed gender equality at the heart of their constitutional reforms and are making headway in eliminating all forms of discrimination against women. Mexico has adopted legislation on equality, which strengthens the role of the machineries for the advancement of women.

The Caribbean countries have made tremendous efforts in many public policy areas, making enormous strides in combating violence against women and in reforming family laws, one of the foremost objectives being to ensure that women do not lose their economic autonomy in the event of a breakdown in their marital relationship. Significant efforts have also been made in combating the HIV/AIDS pandemic and its increasing feminization.

Friends,

Three years ago this Conference adopted the Quito Consensus, a genuine roadmap for public policies on gender in the region. Today, countries, international agencies and civil society measure our progress on gender issues with that Consensus as a benchmark. Furthermore, in the framework of this Conference we will learn about ISOQUITO, an innovative civil society initiative created precisely for this purpose.

I should also like to draw attention to the remarkable progress achieved in recent years in giving juridical, legal, constitutional and political form to the commitments adopted in Quito. Fourteen countries in the region have included questions on time use either as modules in their censuses or as surveys in their own right, and at least four countries have made concrete efforts to measure the contribution of unpaid domestic work to GDP and will soon be implementing household satellite accounts.

One of the most important outcomes of the Quito Consensus was the establishment of the Gender Equality Observatory for Latin America and the Caribbean. We can report that we now have access to more and better statistical information, which is being processed through this initiative. I take this opportunity to thank the Spanish Agency for International Development Cooperation (AECID) and the Ibero-American Secretariat (SEGIB),<sup>1</sup> for their support for the Governments which requested the launch of the Observatory. I should also like to applaud the inter-agency collaboration between the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), the Pan American Health Organization PAHO), the International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (INSTRAW) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), which played an important part in launching this initiative.

The Observatory drew on the experiences of Colombia and Mexico and we are now pleased to note that new observatories have been set up, notably in Brazil, in the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela and in Argentina; an observatory on violence against women has been set up in Peru, there is an observatory in Panama and, lastly, that of the Council of Central American Ministers for Women's Affairs (COMMCA).

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<sup>1</sup> For the design phase of the Observatory, support was received from the Trust Fund of the Government of France.

The Gender Equality Observatory has become a tool which will help to monitor implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action, fulfilment of the Millennium Development Goals and of the regional agendas. Furthermore, the countries of the Caribbean and Latin America are being encouraged to set up horizontal exchange networks in order to make improvements and face up to challenges.

I take this opportunity to express the Commission's deep satisfaction at the adoption of the resolution in which the General Assembly of the United Nations has agreed to create UN Women. This new entity raises consideration of the equality and empowerment of women to the highest level within the United Nations. Our success in tying in global objectives with regional and local ones will be key for giving this new entity the leverage needed to move gender policies forward at the global level. We also see this initiative as an opportunity to articulate and deepen further coordination with agencies outside the United Nations system, such as the Inter-American Commission on Women (CIM) of the OAS and the Ibero-American Secretariat (SEGIB).

Dear friends,

It would be remiss of me to end this address without welcoming two women of stature who are here with us today. Each is a key figure in her country and throughout the length and breadth of this continent. The first, an ECLAC staff member from early days, is an eminently intelligent and prestigious academic and the inspiration of generations of economists in Brazil and Latin America. We honoured her recently at ECLAC and humbly look up to her as an elder sister. The second, a doctor by profession, led her country with great success and resoluteness through the worst economic crisis in the past 80 years, without sacrificing the social protection policies that were a hallmark of her Administration. She is admired and hailed worldwide for her courage, integrity and leadership. The women's movement claims her as part of its heritage. Both these women, albeit from different spheres, have fought relentlessly for justice and equality. It is with great pleasure, tinged with a sense of humility and admiration, that I now welcome *Maestra* María Conceição Tavares and Michelle Bachelet, former President of Chile.

Friends,

In our path to equality, we have moved forward unflaggingly, building day by day, constantly introducing civilizing initiatives, which then become the heritage of society as a whole. These range from the right to vote to the right to control one's own body, from parity and quota laws to renegotiating care tasks, from rereading history and understanding the cultural mechanisms that have contributed to the oppression of women to building a better future.

We continue to move forward constantly, resolutely, uncompromisingly. This is who we are and this is why we are here, to commit ourselves to making further progress, to swear not to lose ground, to arm ourselves with new arguments and new skills and to return to our countries with the conviction that gender equality and equity are synonymous with freedom and democracy.

I have great pleasure in welcoming you to the eleventh session of the Regional Conference on Women.