

STATEMENT BY LAURA LÓPEZ, SECRETARY OF THE COMMISSION,
AT THE OPENING SESSION OF THE
FORTY-FIRST MEETING OF THE PRESIDING OFFICERS OF THE
REGIONAL CONFERENCE ON WOMEN IN
LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN
Bogotá, 24 and 25 April 2008

The Honourable Fernando Araujo, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Colombia,
The Honourable Martha Lucía Vásquez, Counsel to the President, Counselor's Office for Women's Equity of Colombia,
The Honourable Bruno Moro, Resident Coordinator of the United Nations system in Colombia,
The Honourable Ximena Abarca, Chair of the Presiding Officers and Executive Director of the National Women's Council (CONAMU) of Ecuador,
Distinguished Presiding Officers,
Distinguished representatives of intergovernmental bodies,
Distinguished panellists,
Ladies and gentlemen,

I am honoured to be opening this forty-first meeting of the Presiding Officers of the Regional Conference on Women in Latin America and the Caribbean. There are two reasons why I feel particularly fortunate to be here with you today. One is that this is the first meeting of the Presiding Officers which I am attending as Secretary of the Commission and, as such, as the head of the ECLAC delegation. This will, I am sure, be the first of many such meetings at which we will work together to uphold and improve the standards of service which the Secretariat furnishes to the member Governments.

The second reason is that this is also the first meeting of the Presiding Officers that is being attended by the Commission's recently created Women and Development Division. We are extremely pleased to have successfully completed the necessary steps at United Nations Headquarters to convert the Women and Development Unit into an ECLAC Division. This will provide us with access to more of the human resources we need to strengthen our technical capabilities – capabilities that will allow us to continue supporting dialogue and debate within the Regional Conference and to respond properly to its changing demands and needs.

On behalf of the Executive Secretary and the entire ECLAC team, I would like to thank you for your ongoing support for this initiative at every step along the way.

Madam Chair,

Nine months ago in Quito, the consensus that bears the name of that distinguished and beautiful city was adopted. Today, we have gathered together in order to evaluate

what we have achieved since then. Each of us will report to this gathering on the steps we have taken in our different areas of responsibility to implement the agreements reached at Quito.

For ECLAC, moving forward with the creation of a gender parity observatory for Latin America and the Caribbean is a high-priority initiative which addresses, at one and the same time, our agreed objectives, existing opportunities and a growing need on the part of the countries of the region.

Through this initiative we seek to contribute to the analysis of the actual situation in the region, to monitor gender policies and to provide technical support and training to machineries for the advancement of women and national statistical offices.

A more accurate knowledge of the situation will enable use to design better means of evaluating and improving existing public policies and of designing new ones.

The proposal that we will be presenting is the outcome of a joint effort on the part of ECLAC and other bodies of the United Nations system. It is also the outgrowth of a long tradition of collaboration among ECLAC, UNIFEM, UNFPA, PAHO and INSTRAW to construct gender indicators in the region. It is line not only with the mandate embodied in the Quito Consensus but also with those issued by the Statistical Conference of the Americas of ECLAC when it created a working group on gender statistics.

Yesterday, during the Fifteenth Meeting of Specialized Agencies and Other Bodies of the United Nations System on the Advancement of Women in Latin America and the Caribbean, each of our institutions reaffirmed its commitment to this initiative.

This meeting of the Presiding Officers is a valuable opportunity for the representatives to assess the merits of this proposal and to help build this monitoring system by furnishing the relevant information for their countries.

Distinguished Ministers,

This year is the Commission's sixtieth anniversary. In the 60 years that have passed since its founding, ECLAC has been a source of technically rigorous ideas, proposals and guidelines for the socio-economic development of Latin America and the Caribbean. And, although our activities mainly concern the region, we have also devoted attention to the relationship between changes occurring in our own region and processes taking place in the rest of the world.

During 30 of those 60 years we have been working to achieve gender equity in the region. We can be rightly proud of all the progress we have made. But we must also remain receptive and open to new leadership and new energy that can help to advance the gender agenda in the region with renewed forcefulness.

This coming June, we will hold the thirty-second session of ECLAC in Santo Domingo in the Dominican Republic. As you know, the biennial session offers the representatives of the member States of the Commission an opportunity to analyse the region's economic and social development process and to map out the directions of the ECLAC Secretariat's future work. For this upcoming session, the Secretariat has prepared a document entitled *Changing Production Patterns - 20 Years Later. Old problems, new opportunities*, which will be presented to the Commission by our Executive Secretary.

Within the framework of the session, we will also hold a regional consultation in preparation for the Follow-up International Conference on Financing for Development to Review the Implementation of the Monterrey Consensus.

In addition to providing a forum in which to review progress, share experiences and identify the obstacles and difficulties encountered in the various spheres covered by the Monterrey Consensus, this regional consultation will serve as a useful framework for an exchange of views among the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean regarding new challenges and emerging issues for our region. As its contribution to the discussion, the Secretariat of the Commission has prepared a background paper that offers an overview of achievements and challenges together with up-to-date information on some of those emerging issues. The findings of the regional consultation will be conveyed to the Secretary-General and will serve as inputs for the preparation of documents to be used in the following preparatory phases for the Follow-up International Conference on Financing for Development to Review the Implementation of the Monterrey Consensus, to be held in Doha from 29 November to 2 December 2008.

In keeping with this year's slogan for International Women's Day, "Investing in Women and Girls", the regional consultation is a very fitting occasion for considering the difficulties which, for example, the lack of financing poses for the achievement of equality between the sexes, the empowerment of women and the attainment of the Millennium Development Goals, particularly Goal No. 3.

In the message he delivered this past eighth of March, the Secretary-General of the United Nations said: "As we know from long and indisputable experience, investing in women and girls has a multiplier effect on productivity and sustained economic growth. No measure is more important in advancing education and health, including the prevention of HIV/AIDS. No other policy is as likely to improve nutrition, or reduce infant and maternal mortality."

Your presence in the delegations attending the forthcoming session is therefore both necessary and very welcome, not only so that you can report upon the outcome of the tenth session of the Regional Conference on Women in Latin America and the Caribbean, but also so that you can take an active part in this consultation, as well as in all the other discussions to be held there.

Madam Counsel to the President,

I would be remiss if I were to close my remarks without expressing our gratitude for the professionalism, commitment and efficiency exhibited by your team of collaborators in the preparations for this meeting. I am sure that I speak for all of us when I express our gratefulness for the kindnesses and courtesies you have shown us, courtesies to which we have come to be accustomed every time we step on Colombian soil.

Thank you very much.