

**Remarks by Alicia Bárcena,
Executive Secretary of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean
(ECLAC), on the occasion of the
forty-sixth meeting of the Presiding Officers of the Regional Conference on Women in
Latin America and the Caribbean
Santiago, 28 November 2011**

Good morning, everyone. I am excited to see you here, because these machineries for the advancement of women are the result of years of work on the part of so many women and men. That is why our gathering here at ECLAC for the forty-sixth meeting of the Presiding Officers of the Regional Conference on Women in Latin America and the Caribbean is indeed a moment to be treasured.

I would like to welcome some of the authorities who are joining us at this meeting for the first time. To Iriny Lopes, Minister at the Secretariat on Policies for Women of Brazil and Chair of the Presiding Officers, I would like to say, Iriny, *bemvinda, uma mulher que tem atuado em diversas frentes mas sempre comprometida com os direitos sociais, econômicos e culturais. Iriny Lopes é uma das fundadoras do Partido dos Trabalhadores do Espírito Santo e também faz parte da história de fundação de várias organizações sociais. Ela também tem contribuído na luta das mulheres, das crianças e adolescentes, jovens, idosos, quilombolas, índios, negros e outras minorias étnicas, dos portadores de necessidades especiais e na luta por um Brasil sem homofobia. Iriny foi a primeira mulher a ocupar a presidência da Comissão de Direitos Humanos da Câmara dos Deputados.*¹ Thank you, Iriny. We are glad to have you as our Chair.

I want to welcome the Minister for Women's Affairs and Social Development of Peru, Aída García Naranjo. You can count on our full support for your efforts in the new administration. We are well aware that the familiar question of what to do with the Ministry for Women's Affairs resurfaces whenever a new administration takes office. We will be with you every step of the way, Aída.

I would like to extend a warm welcome to the Executive Director of the Salvadoran Women's Development Institute, Yanira Maridol Argueta; to the Secretary of State for Equality

¹ Welcome as a woman who has been active on many fronts but has always been committed to social, economic and cultural rights. Iriny Lopes is one of the founders of the Espírito Santo Workers' Party; she also played a role in the founding of several social organizations. She has been involved in the struggles of women, children and adolescents, young people, the elderly, descendants of slaves (*quilombolas*), Indians, black people and other ethnic minorities, as well as special needs groups. And she has fought for a Brazil without homophobia. Iriny was the first woman to chair the Human Rights Committee of the Chamber of Deputies.

of Spain, Laura Seara; to the Minister of the Institute for Women of Honduras, María Antonieta Botto; to the Women's Advocate of Puerto Rico, Wanda Vázquez-Garced; and to the Minister of Home Affairs of Suriname, Soewarto Moestadja.

We are honoured by the presence of many of the women ministers who have been with us over the years. Among them are Rocío García, President of Mexico's National Institute for Women, and Jessica Mualin, Vice Minister of the National Women's Service of Chile. We are all part of a team.

Greetings to our sister agencies in the United Nations system. This is a remarkable moment. You will remember how moved we all were in Brasilia when UN-Women was created. And now it is a reality.

Over the years we have seen how the political agenda, both at ECLAC and throughout the region, has been bolstered by the women's movement. The machineries for the advancement of women are part and parcel of this political mobilization. The rights-based approach, the role of the State and the expansion of democracy, development and peace have all been enriched by the women's movement. I have always said that the equality agenda and the human rights agenda truly got their start with the women's agenda.

These issues have gained traction during turbulent economic and social times in the region. And they are here to stay.

It is satisfying to see that key contributions of feminist thought have made their way onto the regional and global agenda. Indeed, during the 1990s the United Nations laid the policy groundwork for issues such as environment and climate change (at Rio+20); financing for development; at the Fourth World Conference in Women, held in Beijing; and demographic change, the financial crisis and the energy and food crisis. All of these issues impact women and cannot go far without women's voice and representation. These agendas are meaningless without women.

We recently presented to you the second annual report of the Gender Equality Observatory for Latin America and the Caribbean, entitled *Women's autonomy: from the margins to the mainstream*. In it, we identify the many changes brought about by the machineries for the advancement of women and the women's movement.

We are also pleased that all of the countries have endorsed the *Brasilia Consensus* and are working on implementing its eight thematic areas, as can be seen in the reports from Brazil, Colombia, Cuba, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Panama, Paraguay and Spain.

The Consensus is a political action roadmap for the Governments. It has been recognized by the agencies of the United Nations, the Ibero-American Summit of Heads of State and Government, the Inter-American Commission of Women, the Council of Central American Ministers for Women's Affairs and other government forums.

Economic, political and physical autonomy for women are established goals. But they are subject to institutional capacities, political will and budgets. Enhancing women's autonomy is still a vulnerable issue that depends a good deal on government decisions to honour their commitments. Institutions for the advancement of women must be kept at the highest decision-making level and provided with budget resources above all during times of crisis, as explained in this year's annual report of the Gender Equality Observatory for Latin America and the Caribbean.

Governments sometimes think that machineries for the advancement of women have finished their work or are no longer necessary because the country's president is a woman. We are honoured, to be sure, but that is not the solution, either.

I think we have reached a milestone. The struggle to bring these issues to the table is behind us. But now we must redouble our efforts to make them a mainstay of government policy. We must do this in the midst of an economic crisis, when the easiest thing to do would be to propose that the ministries of women's affairs be folded into ministries for social affairs like health or education. But that is not the way. We have to remain alert to what is happening in our region and in our countries.

Several countries are working to boost women's participation in the public arena. In Brazil, President Dilma Rousseff is organizing the third national conference on policies for women. The conference, to be held in December, is a shining example of citizen involvement in public policymaking.

So, as we engage the whole of society we will reach a better understanding of what the women's autonomy agenda is all about. Above all, we will see what economic autonomy means as one of the keys to advancing towards public care policies. That is, when women stop subsidizing the care economy in our countries and we move on to State-based public policies and national care systems as is being done in Costa Rica, Uruguay and Ecuador.

The debate about national care systems involves society as a whole. This is not just a women's issue, nor should it be confined to the machineries for the advancement of women. This is one of the main topics I hope we can address at this meeting of the Presiding Officers and in our other forums over the next few days.

I also think we should strengthen public programmes for women entrepreneurs, like in Panama, and public policies combined with legislation guaranteeing women's access to ownership of productive assets, like in Cuba.

Colombia, Ecuador and Guatemala are among the countries making strides in the area of gender statistics and in recognizing unpaid work and measuring it with time-use surveys. Developing the satellite account for unpaid work in the household will make the contribution of women more visible, as in Mexico, where it is estimated that unpaid work equates to 23% of GDP.

There is a statistical silence that is holding us back, and breaking it is a major challenge. Here lies a face-off with our economist colleagues, who say that if women are not in the labour market there is no way to put a value to their unpaid work. I ask you: why not? We already know that they make a significant contribution to GDP.

Why don't we measure unpaid work? Why isn't it measured like before? That's why I am congratulating us all (including myself) for mainstreaming this issue. I know that the tenacity and commitment of Sonia Montañó and her team have been critical in taking the issue beyond the Division for Gender Affairs of ECLAC per se. So has the work of the all-important Statistics and Economic Projections Division and, through it, of the national statistical institutes. Thank you all.

Now that the sixth meeting of the Statistical Conference of the Americas has been held, just a few days ago, this is an established issue. There is no turning back. What we want to do is measure, because measuring will enable us to position equality in the discourse of our Governments, our States and our societies.

A few minutes ago I was telling my colleagues about an important meeting of entrepreneurs in Chile that drew my attention last week because there was not a single woman in attendance. The name had a *vox populi* cast to it but half the population was ignored. What is missing? Not the political will of the Government. It is society that needs to understand. This is worrisome; we must get women's voice and gender issues on the agenda.

In Latin America we want growth for equality, and equality for growth. There will be no progress on the economic front without equality. If women cannot enter the labour market with rights, we will not advance the equality agenda, let alone the growth agenda. So we have to keep rights, opportunities and responsibilities from depending on being born male or female or on economic status. We believe that equal rights are based on ownership of rights, not access to them.

One of those rights is recognition that a person's time, especially the time spent caring for others, has become an indispensable and scarce resource as population growth and longevity increase the demand for care of older persons, children, the sick and the persons with disabilities. Such care is a public good that has value for society.

Tomorrow we are launching *Social Panorama of Latin America 2011*, in which we report that fertility is declining in our region. But since most of the countries are far from achieving

universal child care and preschool education, we are saddened and worried to see that the biological reproduction of society is falling to the poorest. The future of our society will be impoverished if we fail to break the cycle of poverty. Not only must we address mother and child mortality, but also adolescent pregnancies among less-educated women and those whose social status is most precarious.

The figures expose an unequal distribution of the care burden between the State and families that is unfavourable for families, and between men and women. This will not improve without a national system for care issues.

Data on total work time are not comparable from one country to the next, but here is an example. In Ecuador, women work a total of 107 hours a week, men 87. Also in Ecuador, women spend 67 hours a week on unpaid domestic work, and men spend just 39. Women work twice as much, for half the pay.

Three out of every ten women have no income of their own. That is to say they do not have a paid job, either in the formal or the informal sector. They receive no transfers from the State or from relatives, or any alimony. They neither receive nor will be entitled to retirement benefits and own nothing in their own name. Almost one third of the women of Latin America depend on others for subsistence. Marital break-up or widowhood makes things even worse for them. Such vulnerability can trap a woman in a couple relationship even if it is violent. Just one out of every ten men is in the same situation.

Progress on the legal and social front has not been enough to end inequality and discrimination. In *Time for equality: closing gaps, opening trails*, and in other reports, ECLAC argues that the new State architecture will not be possible without a new State-market-society equation. Such an equation must expand the resources available for achieving development, and it will require fiscal reforms. We must tackle the fiscal issue to determine the cost and who will pay. Will women continue to pay for this? Should families continue to pay? Or is it time for society as a whole to commit to reform that will get us there?

I think we are at a turning point. We do have better institutions, and the Governments have accepted the need for advancing a gender agenda. But there are questions. Should that agenda stand alone or be linked to others?

We at ECLAC work with the entire United Nations system, so strengthening national capacities to record and measure all forms of violence is especially important to us. We know that this is a cross-cutting issue, so we will continue to work on raising the profile of statistics on violence against women.

I also want to tell you that we are designing a gender mainstreaming strategy right here at ECLAC. This is important: mainstreaming the agenda should begin at home. Our international trade, economic development, social development, population, sustainable

development, natural resources and infrastructure divisions, the Latin American and Caribbean Institute for Economic and Social Planning and the Statistics and Economic Projections Division are all brainstorming about the policies needed to mainstream the gender perspective in strategic planning. Not only in our own work, but in the work we do with the countries of the region through our subsidiary organs, including the Statistical Conference of the Americas and the Caribbean Development and Cooperation Committee, in Central America, and in all of the forums where we participate. To give you an example, I just came from a meeting of finance ministers and central bank representatives where the debate centred on the new regional financial architecture. We hold that the gender agenda should be put forward there, too.

Rest assured that we are fully behind your efforts.

This meeting of the Presiding Officers will be charting the course for the region until 2013. It will determine how we will flesh out this agenda, identify gaps and get all heads of State, men and women alike, on board so that gender issues are not sidetracked. We, men and women together, need to get down to work on the important task of putting this issue on the region's political and economic agenda and, especially, ensuring its place in this new State-market-society equation.

I want to thank the specialized agencies of the United Nations system. At their meeting this morning they endorsed the 2011 annual report of the Gender Equality Observatory for Latin America and the Caribbean—a truly collaborative effort.

We are especially grateful to the Government of Spain. Mr. Ambassador, please convey our appreciation to your Government, to the Spanish Agency for International Development Cooperation and to everyone in Spain who has backed this gender agenda. And please let Prime Minister Elect Mariano Rajoy know that this important matter is here to stay.

I extend my warmest welcome and hope that your work goes well. Thank you.