

Remarks by Antonio Prado, Deputy Executive Secretary of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), at the lecture by Tarja Kaarina Halonen, former President of Finland:

“Women in the twenty-first century”

20 October 2016, Santiago, Chile

Raúl Prebisch conference room, ECLAC

Our dear friend Tarja Halonen, former President of Finland,

Markus Leinonen and María Cristina Bobadilla de Leinonen, Ambassadors of Finland to Chile,

Members of the diplomatic corps accredited to Chile,

Government authorities,

Guests,

Colleagues from ECLAC and the United Nations system,

Friends,

First, a most warm and cordial welcome to this home of Latin American thought, the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean. We are honoured by the presence of all of you this morning, as we are honoured to welcome Tarja Halonen, one of the most influential women of the twenty-first century, to whom we are united by an unwavering commitment to multidimensional equality for all, and by the vision and certainty that gender equality is a pervasive basis for sustainable development, and thence for the construction of fairer and more egalitarian societies.

Before I give Tarja the floor, and just days before the start of one of our most important meetings in Montevideo, whose purpose is precisely to address gender inequalities and the policies to overcome it, I would like to share with you some important facts about the situation of women in Latin America and the Caribbean and about the path our region has taken over the past four decades in the effort to expand women's autonomy.

Almost 40 years ago, in June 1977, the first Regional Conference on the Integration of Women into the Economic and Social Development of Latin America was held in Havana, Cuba, providing a regional forum for dialogue after the World Conference of the International Women's Year held in Mexico City two years earlier.

The Regional Conference supported the idea that social demands for women's rights and gender equality, which were starting to spread from country to country, should be turned into government commitments.

The Conference participants adopted the Regional Plan of Action for the Integration of Women into Latin American Economic and Social Development, the region's first road map for progress towards the recognition of women's contribution to society and the obstacles that they face in improving their situation.

Also at the Conference, the governments gave ECLAC a permanent mandate to regularly convene a Regional Conference on Women in Latin America and the Caribbean, at intervals of no more than three years.

The feminist and women's movement participates actively in this intergovernmental event, which is supported by the entire United Nations system. It has become the main forum for the negotiation of a wide-range, profound and comprehensive **regional agenda on gender equality**, in which women's autonomy and rights are front and centre. Policies to support development and overcome poverty have always been a key concern at its meetings.

What has come out most in the construction of this regional gender agenda are the capabilities, strength and creativity of women in Latin America and the Caribbean and their organizations, as

they have continued to press ahead during periods of dictatorship, return to democracy, neoliberalism, economic growth and also crisis.

Women have managed to overcome these obstacles, organize and build a regional perspective, while also participating actively in global discussions and making themselves heard beyond the region, striving to push the boundaries of what is possible.

For ECLAC, equality goes hand in hand with sustainable development, and gender equality is a core part of its approach. The regional gender agenda recognizes women's rights and equality as central and cross-cutting elements in all State action to strengthen democracy and promote inclusive, sustainable development.

I am proud to say that over the coming days (from 25 to 28 October), ECLAC will be holding the thirteenth session of the Regional Conference on Women in Latin America and the Caribbean in Montevideo, Uruguay. This year, the aim will be to write a new chapter in the regional gender agenda, with our sights set on the opportunities and challenges for women's equality and autonomy presented by the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

For without gender equality, sustainable development is not development, and nor is it sustainable.

Women have been increasingly to the fore in Latin America over recent years: President Cristina Fernández has been joined by Michelle Bachelet and Dilma Rousseff, who, like you, Tarja, were the first women to win the presidency in their respective countries.

Although we value the progress made, we must not forget that there are persistent gender equality deficits which, I repeat, must be dealt with if the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is to be effectively implemented.

We at ECLAC believe that the path towards gender equality must involve an autonomy that gives women the capabilities and the concrete conditions they need to freely take decisions affecting their lives.

Many different things are required for greater autonomy. Women need to be freed from exclusive responsibility for reproductive and care work, including the exercise of reproductive rights; gender violence must be ended; and all necessary measures must be taken so that women can participate in decision-making on an equal footing.

To bring about economic autonomy, Latin America needs active policies for employment, training, workplace opportunities and advancement, access to the financial system and expanded social protection for all women.

Women's economic participation in our region was 52.6% as of 2014, compared to 78.9% for men.

Furthermore, almost 30% of Latin American women have no income of their own, and while this figure is lower than a decade ago, it is still very high.

In terms of total work, that is, work done for the labour market and unpaid work in the home, women have systematically larger total workloads than men.

Current figures show that women give a third of their total working time to the market and two thirds to unpaid work, while for men it is the other way round.

We are convinced that balancing paid and unpaid work, with working days shorter than they currently are, would allow the total workload to be better distributed between men and women.

And then there is still the wage gap: when women do enter the labour market, they are paid less than their male colleagues for the same work.

The more educated women are, the wider the gap.

As regards physical autonomy, there is still much to do on gender violence and respect for women's reproductive rights.

As of 2010, 13% of Latin American adolescents aged between 15 and 19 had become mothers, and the rate of adolescent motherhood is higher among adolescents belonging to indigenous

peoples. Furthermore, one in every four women aged 20 to 24 entered her first conjugal union before she was 18.

It is essential to guarantee girls and adolescents a universal right to social protection, integrated care policies, sex education and sexual and reproductive health.

Together with this, we need to put a stop once and for all in our countries to gender violence, to which we have been horrified witnesses in the last few days. According to official data, such violence claimed the lives of 1,903 women in 18 countries of the region in 2014. No more - not one woman less! Violence against women must be stopped! This is a cross-cutting task involving all actors in our societies.

In the region's current state, with its progress but also its many challenges, we are presented with a unique opportunity to map out a route that can put an end to inequalities in all areas of life.

The thirteenth session of the Regional Conference on Women in Latin America and the Caribbean will be the opportunity for governments to design a strategy for implementing the commitments they have already undertaken, namely the regional gender agenda. This strategy will also provide a basis for each country to draw up its own diagnosis, set priorities and formulate innovative and effective public policies.

In short, looking towards 2030, the Montevideo Strategy may be the road map towards the gender equality we long for.

Friends,

Today we have the invaluable opportunity to listen to Tarja Halonen and learn about the experience of Finland, the first country in the world to give women the right to vote in elections and stand for office (in 1906), and currently ranking third (just behind Iceland and Norway) for gender equity, according to the Global Gender Gap Report 2015 of the World Economic Forum.

Tarja Halonen is a trade union lawyer, and on 1 March 2000 became the first woman ever to take office as President of Finland.

She was born in Kallio, a traditionally working-class area of the Finnish city of Helsinki, and became Social Affairs Secretary and Organization Secretary of the National Union of Students. In 1970, she began working as a lawyer for the Central Organization of Finnish Trade Unions (SAK).

A supporter of the principles of the Finnish Social Democratic Party, from 1974 to 1975 she was parliamentary secretary to Prime Minister Kalevi Sorsa, and in 1977 she was elected to Helsinki City Council, where she remained until 1996.

In 1979 she was elected to the Finnish parliament (Eduskunta), where she would later become Chair of the Social Affairs Committee and Vice-Chair of the Legal Affairs Committee.

She was Minister of Social Affairs and Health from 1987 to 1990, and in 1989 she also served as Minister of Nordic Cooperation. From 1990 to 1991 she was Minister of Justice.

She also served as Minister for Foreign Affairs, a position she held until she was elected President as the candidate for the Finnish Social Democratic Party in the 2000 presidential election.

She took office as President of Finland on 1 March 2000 for a six-year term, during which her public approval ratings were as high as 88%, a popularity that led to her being re-elected in 2006.

While President, she headed the ILO World Commission on the Social Dimension of Globalization and was a member of the Panel of Eminent Persons of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development and a board member of the Oslo Centre for Peace and Human Rights.

She also chaired the United Nations Millennium Summit in 2000, jointly with Sam Nujoma, a former President of Namibia.

During her terms of office, she paid special attention to human rights, democracy, gender affairs and education.

The Finnish education model is considered a global standard-setter: because of the priority given to education, the country was able to make the leap from being an exporter of raw materials to becoming a manufacturer of high-technology products. Tarja has said that this was achieved through investment in “education, education, education”.

My dear President Tarja Halonen, thank you so much for being here and, once again, welcome to this, the home of everyone in Latin America and the Caribbean—and your home as well.

Thank you very much.