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Additional item

Report Submitted to the Fifth Session of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women, by Angela Acuffa de Chacón, Representative of Costa Rica in the Inter-American Commission of Women

The Inter-American Commission of Women is once again replying to the invitation received from the Secretary-General of the United Nations to send a representative in an advisory and informative capacity to the fifth session of the Commission on the Status of Women.

This confirms the close co-operation which has always existed between this world Commission and the Inter-American Commission of Women and which was particularly recommended by the United Nations Economic and Social Council in its resolution 57 of March 1947.

This report presents the main features of the developments in the work of the Inter-American Commission of Women since the fourth session of the Commission on the Status of Women held in May 1950, and provides information on progress made in those aspects of the status of American women which fall within the Commission's terms of reference.

Broadly speaking it may be asserted that, as part of the over-all picture, the claims of women are gradually taking firmer hold of the American conscience and receiving more active moral and legal recognition.

/With each

With each day that passes, the Governments of the American countries are becoming more and more interested in matters relating to the complete acceptance of women as a constructive force and a vital factor in the national economy, culture and general progress; every day, therefore, great opportunities are being made available to women in all fields. Similarly, aware of the decisive role which they are called upon to play in the world today, women are becoming more and more determined to acquire a responsible and legal status.

The Inter-American Commission of Women has been able to verify the truth of this through the reports of its representatives, and also directly and tangibly at the First Regional Seminar, which was recently held in San Salvador and inaugurated the projected series of three seminars described in our previous report to the fourth session of the Commission on the Status of Women.

#### HOLDING OF THE FIRST REGIONAL SEMINAR

In accordance with Article 2 of the Organic Statute regulating the functioning of the Commission, which in its chapter relating to functions states that one of those is: "(a) to work for the extension of civil, political, economic and social rights to the women of America; to study their problems and propose means of solving them", the Inter-American Commission decided after protracted study to adopt the modern expert-group method of investigation and work, taking into account the splendid results obtained from it by such international organizations as the United Nations and the Organization of American States.

After prior agreement had been reached at meetings of the Executive Committee, the Chairman of the Inter-American Commission of Women, Mrs. Amalia de Castilla Ledon, took the first steps necessary for the holding of the First Seminar, and to that end applied in the first place to Dr. Alberto Lleras, Secretary-General of the Organization of American States, requesting the moral and economic support of the Pan-American Union in putting into practice the new method of work adopted in its programmes. The Secretary-General's Office approved the proposal and offered its co-operation as requested.

/Accordingly

Accordingly the Chairmen of the Commission made a tour of the countries falling within the area covered by the First Seminar, interviewing Heads of State, Ministers of Foreign Affairs and other high officials, who after detailed study of the proposal and the benefits it would confer, offered to co-operate actively in carrying it out, particularly by sending official delegations.

During her tour the Chairman also contacted the women and women's organizations in each country, representatives of the press and intelligentsia, and in general all the various sectors of the population, arousing their interest and explaining to them the great social significance of the work which our Commission is carrying out, together with the true structure and purposes of this official inter-American organization.

The Government of El Salvador, with a full knowledge of the circumstances, was good enough to offer its capital city as the meeting-place for the First Seminar. It was thus decided that the Seminar would be held in the city of San Salvador between 15 January and 3 February 1951.

The Office of the Commission, with the assistance of the United States and Costa Rican delegates, and with the technical co-operation of certain departments of the Pan-American Union, proceeded to prepare the documentary and other basic material for the studies and investigations on the subjects with which the Seminar was to deal, comprising specifically civil, political, economic and social, and educational problems.

The complete and unqualified success of the Seminar held in El Salvador exceeded all expectations. The Government of El Salvador was represented by 17 experts and the United States of America sent 4 delegates, Mexico 6, Honduras 4, Nicaragua 3, and Costa Rica 4.

These 38 experts, divided according to their special qualifications into four groups dealing with the four different subjects, held nine group meetings, each group in turn reporting to the plenary body on the results of the week's work.

A large number of observers also attended the Seminar, and each group devoted three special unscheduled meetings to receiving their points of view and suggestions on the various problems under consideration.

/Apart

Apart from the valuable informatory data compiled during this remarkable period of study, the Seminar itself constituted a splendid example of civic spirit, since within its sphere it mobilized all the delegates in a highly constructive effort directed towards a common ideal; it also gave our Organization a favourable opportunity to make constructive proposals to Governments on behalf of the causes it supports. An account of these proposals is given elsewhere in this report.

The Office of the Commission is already preparing a volume, complete with diagrams and comparative tables, which is to include the abundant material collected at the Seminar. We shall report more comprehensively on the Seminar's future plans at our next Assembly in Chile.

As originally planned, the Second Seminar will comprise the countries of the Caribbean and the northern part of South America, namely Cuba, Haiti, the Dominican Republic, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru and Venezuela.

#### THE COMMISSION'S NEXT ANNUAL ASSEMBLY IN CHILE

Article 3 of our Organic Statute provides for the holding of annual and special Assemblies and states that the meetings "shall be held in turn in the countries composing the Commission".

In accordance with this article, and on the invitation of the Government of Chile communicated by the representative of that country at our Special Assembly held in Buenos Aires in August 1949, our next regular Assembly will be held in Santiago, the capital of Chile.

At our request, the Secretary-General of the Organization of American States has already issued the prescribed invitations to Governments to send representatives, and our Office is already hard at work on the necessary preparations for the meeting. This, it may even now be asserted, will be as important as any previously held by our Organization: not only because Chile is one of the countries in which the greatest progress has been made in the status of women from every aspect, but also because the items placed on the provisional agenda are of the utmost importance, and because it will be necessary at that meeting to outline our Organization's policy and define in detail its programme of work until the next Assembly.

/Our Office

Our Office is now preparing a number of special studies which will be circulated to delegates as background material on certain agenda items. To these will be attached the carefully-prepared memorandum transmitted to the Commission by the International Labour Office on the existing legislation in favour of mothers, with special reference to working women, in each of the countries of Latin America, and the present legal position in regard to social security for women.

This study, which the Inter-American Commission of Women had asked the International Labour Office to make, clearly demonstrates how effectively the ILO is co-operating with our Organization. It will, moreover, be of great assistance in the task which our Commission is to perform in implementation of Resolution XXIII of the Final Act of Bogota, which recommends the Commission "to carry out studies and investigations on the economic status of working women in the American Republics, as well as on the rights that they enjoy in each republic during the maternity period".

The Commission will therefore later include this work in the complete report on the subject which is to be submitted to the next Inter-American Conference at Caracas in 1953.

#### RECOGNITION OF POLITICAL RIGHTS OF WOMEN

The present status of women under this head is as follows:

Thirteen countries have granted women full political rights: (in alphabetical order) Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Costa Rica, Cuba, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Panama, United States, Uruguay and Venezuela.

In four countries -- Bolivia, Haiti, Mexico, and Peru -- women may participate in municipal elections only.

In four countries -- Colombia, Honduras, Nicaragua and Paraguay -- women have no political rights at all.

The Constitution of El Salvador of 1939 already accorded women full political rights, but a noteworthy and decisive step forward was taken in the Constitution of El Salvador promulgated on 7 September 1950, the following provisions of which give women political rights in complete equality with men:

"Art. 22. All Salvadoreans over eighteen years of age, without distinction as to sex, are citizens.

/ "Art. 23.

"Art. 23. Save for the exceptions specified in this Constitution, it is a citizen's right and duty to vote.

"Citizens have the right to combine in order to form political parties in accordance with the law or to join existing parties; the right to hold public office in accordance with their abilities and the other rights recognized by the laws.

"The duties of citizens are to observe and ensure the observance of the Constitution of the Republic and to serve the State in accordance with the laws.

"Art. 27. The electorate is constituted by all citizens entitled to vote.

"Art. 28. Voting shall be direct, equal and secret.

"Art. 29. To exercise the right to vote, voters must be duly registered."

#### MUNICIPAL RIGHTS IN HAITI

Similarly, the Constitution of Haiti promulgated on 25 November 1950 constitutes a great political advance in granting women the vote in municipal elections and in also providing that after exercising that partial right women will be granted full suffrage.

The relevant article states:

"Art. 4. All Haitians without distinction of sex may exercise political rights on attaining the age of 21 if they fulfil the other conditions prescribed by the Constitution and the law.

"For the time being women may vote and be elected only to municipal office. Within a period not to exceed three years from the next general municipal elections the law shall grant to women full and complete exercise of all political rights.

"After the expiry of that period there shall be no bar whatsoever to the exercise of those rights.

"The fitness of women to perform all the civil functions of public administration is hereby recognized."

The Inter-American Commission of Women wishes to record that the advance made by the legislators of Haiti in favour of the women of that country is due primarily to the firm and decisive attitude of the women themselves and /to their

to their unceasing efforts in recent years. It ventures to express particular admiration for the last National Congress of Haitian Women held in Port-au-Prince in April, which mobilized the forces of women and on their behalf, through its delegates, laid before the President of the Republic a plea for their rights. That action undoubtedly led to the present constitutional reform, which, though incomplete, establishes a legal recognition and provision favourable to the full achievement of the aspirations of the women of Haiti towards political equality.

#### COMPARATIVE STUDY IN CONNEXION WITH THE UNIVERSAL DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS

We are particularly glad to refer in this report to the work of the Round Table on the Political Aspect during the recent seminar in El Salvador. It will interest not only our Commission but also the Commission on the Status of Women.

We refer particularly to the comparative study of the constitutions of the countries represented at that seminar in relation to the principles set forth in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights promulgated by the United Nations General Assembly on 10 December 1948.

This study will form part of the volume which is being prepared by the Commission and which will give a consecutive account of the results of the First Seminar, which has already taken place, and of the two succeeding seminars.

It should also be noted that the work of the Seminar aroused in women from participating countries whose laws do not yet grant them political rights a determination to fight for and obtain those rights.

In Chile the granting of political rights to women in 1949 led, during the supplementary elections for deputies in the Province of Concepcion, to the election for the first time of a woman to fill such a high public elective office. She was a lady of distinction who had previously been lieutenant of that province.

#### RATIFICATION OF THE CONVENTIONS ON EQUALITY OF CIVIL RIGHTS AND POLITICAL RIGHTS

These conventions, signed at the Ninth International Conference of American States in Bogota, were ratified by Ecuador, Cuba and the Dominican Republic in 1949; and in 1950 Brazil ratified the convention on political rights. It is significant that during the First Regional Seminar the President of the Commission and the Director of the Seminar approached the Heads of State and the legislatures of El Salvador, Panama and Costa Rica, the only Central-American countries whose legislatures were in session at that time, with a plea for ratification.

Ratification by those countries resulted immediately and the appropriate instruments were deposited last April with the Secretariat of the Organization of American States.

#### ACTION ON RESOLUTION XXI OF THE CHAPULTEPEC CONFERENCE

During the Chapultepec Conference on problems of war and peace the Inter-American Commission of Women put forward through two of its delegates resolution XXI recommending that governments should include women in their official delegations. The Commission is pleased to note that some governments, though not very many, are concerned to apply the principle contained in that resolution.

Recently, for the inauguration of the present Head of State in El Salvador, Mexico appointed a woman to its delegation with the rank of Minister Plenipotentiary.

El Salvador appointed two women with that rank to represent it at the inauguration of the present President of Guatemala.

Cuba appointed this February a woman as Ambassador Extraordinary on Special Mission to head the Cuban delegation attending the transfer of power in the Republic of Uruguay. She was thus the first woman in the history of American diplomacy to head a mission.

/The Inter-American



The Inter-American Commission of Women is always alert to promote compliance with that resolution, which has been supported in our Buenos Aires Assembly by resolution XXVIII, recommending the implementation of the relevant provisions of the Chapultepec Conference by all available means.

Accordingly the Commission approached its delegates and requested them to press their respective Foreign Offices to appoint women to delegations participating in the XXXIVth conference of the International Labour Office meeting in Geneva this June.

Chile and the Dominican Republic each have a woman delegate with the rank of Minister Plenipotentiary in their permanent delegations to the United Nations.

The United States has in the United Nations one plenipotentiary delegate and two counsellors who are women. Both the United States and Mexico included a woman with the rank of counsellor in their delegations to the fourth Foreign Ministers' Conference held recently in Washington.

In addition Mexico, Cuba, the Dominican Republic and Haiti are officially represented by women delegates on the Commission on the Status of Women.

#### WOMEN IN THE FOREIGN SERVICE AND OTHER REPRESENTATIONAL POSTS

In the diplomatic service and other important representational posts women are also called upon to hold high office in the executive, legislative and judicial branches of government, although their number is admittedly small.

At the present time there are women in the legislatures of Uruguay, the United States, Chile, Panama and Cuba.

In Panama a woman holds the post of Minister of Labour, Social Welfare and Public Health. In Cuba a woman is a Minister without portfolio in the cabinet. Nicaragua has a woman Under-Secretary of Education.

/In Brazil

In Brazil the Government has for the first time given a woman the title of Minister Plenipotentiary in the Foreign Service.

The United States has a woman with the rank of Ambassador in Denmark, and another with the rank of Minister in Luxembourg.

In Mexico two woman lawyers sit as magistrates, one in the superior court and the other in the fiscal court.

In Colombia for the first time there is a woman judge of the Supreme Court. In Ecuador a woman is serving as a law officer, fourth grade, before the courts.

Bolivia has for the first time a woman as chairman of the Municipal Council of its capital.

In the United States, although women have been under-secretaries before, for the first time a woman now holds that highly responsible post in the Department of Defense. A woman is Director of the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation of the Federal Security Agency, and a woman lawyer is a Director in the Department of Labor.

In Panama a woman is director of the Office of Statistics and the Census. She is the only woman in America filling a post of that kind, and was appointed by the Government of Panama as a member of the Statistical Commission of the United Nations.

This is a summary of the principal developments on the American continent affecting the status of women since our last report.

It is to be hoped that in the near future all countries will conform to the current trend and the lofty principles of social equality needed for the permanent stability of the modern world, and introduce a state of law and practice in which women will have not merely sporadic but ample opportunities to achieve once for all the position to which as human beings they are entitled in all departments of society.

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