

**Challenges for the full access to development  
of women, young women and girls in the Americas,  
in their diverse and concomitant situations of vulnerability**

OAS Permanent Council and the Inter-American Council  
for Integral Development on International Women's Day

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*Remarks by Commissioner **Roberta Clarke**, Rapporteur on the rights of women*

On the 30th anniversary of the Beijing Platform for Action, we must recall its transformative vision addressing global political economy, environmental impacts that flow from unsustainable patterns of production and consumption, militarisation, and unequal power dynamics between women and men but also between countries.

The B+30 national reviews undertaken in 2024 by all States by the Americas and Caribbean bear out progress. But also, regressions, stagnation and pushback framed by a rise in populist authoritarianism, inequalities, and multi-dimensional insecurities.

In its analyses of these reports, Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) identified four structural barriers to the exercise of women's and girls' rights.

- a) Socioeconomic inequality and the persistence of poverty
- b) Discriminatory, violent, and patriarchal cultural patterns
- c) Rigid sexual division of labour and unfair social organization of care
- d) Concentration of power and hierarchical relations in the public sphere

Despite improved access to education, women still participate less and earn less in the workforce than men, while they devote more time to unpaid or underpaid domestic and caregiving responsibilities.

In 2022, 51.7% of women participated in the labour market, compared to 74.5% of men. One in four women has no income of her own, while the proportion for men is 1 in 10.

Understanding why women have lower participation rates, higher unemployment rates and higher rates of poverty requires an analysis of social protection as well as of the division of labour in households. Women in the region spend nearly triple the amount of time on unpaid

domestic and care work that men do, which limits their participation in all domains, in particular the labour market, and increases inequality in all its forms.

Access gaps in social protection also contribute to inequalities. Young people, Afrodescendants, Indigenous Peoples, persons with disabilities and migrants, are overrepresented in sectors that are less productive and more informal, and they frequently lack social protection and access to social services.

We can agree that achieving inclusive development, and decent work with gender equality requires transforming the sexual division of labour, redressing the unfair distribution of care work and advancing women's economic participation and autonomy.

The region has made strides in addressing gender-based violence against women and girls. I want to join the congratulations to the delegation of Canada for the signing of the Belém do Pará Convention.

However, 14 countries have enacted comprehensive laws addressing gender based violence, 19 have criminalized femicide or gender-related killing of women, and 15 countries prohibit child marriage without exceptions. This is progress.

Despite this progress between 63% and 76% of women have experienced gender-based and femicides have increased over the last 10 years in at least 5 countries in the region.

Girls facing multiple forms of discrimination, such as afrodescendants, indigenous and rural girls, girls living with disabilities, experience sexual violence with impunity.

Child marriages or early unions limit girls' opportunities and often result in pregnancies and early parenthood which further aggravate their vulnerability.

In this regard, the Commission has observed amendments to existing laws and the passage of new legislation that criminalizes sexual and reproductive health services, as well as the defunding of programs that ensured access to contraceptives and comprehensive sexual education.

Absolute criminalisation of pregnancy termination persists, even in cases of non-viable pregnancies, threats to women's lives and health, or rape, including rape of children.

Let us remember that thirty years ago states committed to enhancing women's sexual and reproductive rights, essential for women's autonomy and empowerment because women's development is directly linked to their ability to make decisions about their own bodies.

Progress in women's participation in representative bodies is notable, but barriers to their full and effective participation persist. 35.8% of seats held by women in national parliaments; 40.7% in the Caribbean. The figure is even lower for local government.<sup>1</sup>

Yet only nine have adopted reforms aimed at fostering parity and 9 countries have quota laws for representative elections.

Addressing power concentration and hierarchical relations is crucial, not only for representation but also for accountability and gender-responsive institutional.

All of these challenges are exacerbated by democratic regression and the weakening of the rule of law. Globally, there has been a rise in discourses rolling back rights and dismantling institutions that are fundamental to democratic societies.

However, most states maintain commitments to gender equality. We recognize women who resist regression and demand freedom, including journalists, activists, human rights defenders, whether working on the environment, climate crisis, rights historically marginalised and exploited populations or LGBTI issues.

Civil society actions are fundamental to promoting gender equality and democracy. Women's participation and engagement must be assured and without persecution, harassment, violence, or silencing. Civil space is essential.

Moving forward, we need well-resourced gender institutions, governance, and institutional capacities. Information systems providing timely and accurate data on policy effects on women's lives are essential and most of all we need implementation of the domestic and international commitments to gender equality.

Opportunities like today, reaffirm our goals to take the steps to accelerate action. I want to close with the words that we were reminded of by ambassador Arce: for all women and girls rights, equality and empowerment.

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<sup>1</sup> 27.2% Proportion of seats held by women in deliberative bodies of local government.

Thank you very much for giving me this opportunity to participate.