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**Executive Summary**  
**Summits of the Americas Virtual Platform**  
**Virtual Gender Forum**

This Executive Summary brings together the main observations and recommendations taken from the *Virtual Gender Forum*, held from February 18 to 27, 2009, by the *Inter-American Commission of Women* (CIM/OAS), in coordination with the *Summit of the Americas Secretariat*, in the context of the follow-up to the recommendations of the Third Meeting of Ministers or of the Highest-Ranking Authorities Responsible for the Advancement of Women in the Member States (REMIM-III) (November 2008, Chile) of CIM/OAS, for incorporation of the gender perspective as a crosscutting theme in each and every thematic area of the Draft Declaration of Commitment of Port of Spain – Fifth Summit of the Americas. Participating in the forum were representatives of international organizations, academia, the private sector, and civil society organizations of 15 countries of the region.<sup>1</sup> Efforts were moderated with collaboration from the Latin American and Caribbean Committee for the Defense of Women’s Rights (CLADEM).<sup>2</sup>

**Main comments and concerns**

1. The Forum’s main participants suggested that, in promoting human prosperity, the States pay more attention, as a basic premise, to the existing marked inequality and inequity in the region and, in that context, ensure access by all men and women, on equal terms, to basic services, health, education, decent work, water, housing, etc., as human rights.
2. With regard to *Human Prosperity*, it is of concern that both poverty and inequality have “*a woman’s face*,” and it was asked whether they should be categorized as “vulnerable groups.” The wage gap, job segmentation, and the many forms of discrimination faced by women are exacerbated when crossed with factors of race, ethnicity, Afro descendance, class, sexual orientation, gender identity, and disability; as well as by a lack of recognition for domestic work, the legal distinction made regarding paid domestic work, etc. Of concern is the grave situation leading to maternal mortality and weak public policy and legislation, to ensure sexual and reproductive health, by taking a rights-based approach. Sociocultural patterns remain sexist and strategies to change them have not been sufficiently taken into account in education. Additionally, barriers remain to access to information, the media, and new technologies - especially for poor women.

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<sup>1</sup> Participating in the forum were representatives of the following regions: Southern Cone (*Argentina, Paraguay, and Uruguay*), Andean (*Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, and Venezuela*), Central America (*El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras*), and the Caribbean (*Dominican Republic, Saint Kitts and Nevis, and Trinidad and Tobago*), as well as of *Guyana and United States*.

<sup>2</sup> In methodological terms, both forum discussion and the presentation of this report were organized based on the five main thematic areas of the Draft Declaration: Promoting *Human Prosperity*, Promoting *Energy Security and Environmental Sustainability*, Strengthening *Public Security*, and Strengthening *Democratic Governance*, and also includes the topic *follow-up to the Fifth Summit* and its implementation from a gender perspective.

3. With regard to the *Energy Security and Environmental Sustainability* areas, the causes for concern are: unequal access to natural and energy resources; inequitable land distribution; indiscriminate use of agro-toxins and agro-fuels which affect the health, lifestyles, the right to food, and forms of production of women, especially those of the poor sectors. States do not take account of the effects of natural disasters on women; neither do they include in housing policy aspects of the human rights to housing, access to water, or food security where the active participation of women could ensure inclusion and equity in the distribution of benefits.
4. With regard to *Public Security*, participants emphasized gender-based violence and, especially, human trafficking and its effects on women, children, and adolescents. They also underscored the prevalence of aggression, intimidation and the abuse of women and children from disadvantaged sectors, which is being inflicted in the name of the fight against crime and terrorism in areas of the region occupied by armed forces members. Also, of concern were the displaced migrant women who become victims of violence and violation of their human rights, as a result of policies which do not utilize a gender and human rights-based approach. In the framework of security, it is crucial also to review policies and programs aimed at the youth - and those which address criminal groups - for their implications for women.
5. Lastly, regarding *Democratic Governance*, it was indicated that the Declaration of Commitment of Port of Spain should contain a clear ethical framework to provide for the development of women and other populations. It should also ensure law enforcement, as one of the challenges that States and their leaders must address in seeking democratic governance. States should also formulate policies and legislation that remove cultural barriers to promote political participation by women, girls, and youth, as a way to eradicate stereotypes and discriminatory practices. Civil society participation in monitoring mechanisms and social control actions is essential to governance that is democratic and inclusive.

### **Main recommendations**

Provided below are some of the notable recommendations for the Draft Declaration of Commitment of the Fifth Summit:

6. The gender perspective should be incorporated as a crosscutting theme throughout the Declaration of Commitment of Port of Spain. It should ensure that its language is inclusive and non-sexist, including accessible alternative forms and formats for persons with disabilities; and that all strategies and mechanisms for action – including the follow-up and implementation of the Declaration – incorporate a gender and intersectional approach, providing for the existing diversity of women and an approach based on the comprehensiveness and interdependence of human rights.<sup>3</sup>
7. The States, in conjunction with international organizations, are faced with the challenge of promoting and ensuring higher levels of human development, growth with equality and equity, inclusion of women; ensuring decent work; health and free public education of quality, with a special focus on: sexual and reproductive health, and commitments to reduce maternal mortality;

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<sup>3</sup> It is recommended that special reference be made to, among other documents, OAS General Assembly resolution AG/RES. 2435 (XXXVIII-O/08), "Human Rights Sexual Orientation, and Gender Identity"; the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development (No. 4, "access to reproductive health services, including family planning and sexual health care ") and to the concepts of the Convention of Belém do Pará, the International Convention for the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Their Families, and the protocols to the Palermo Convention, as fundamental inputs for incorporation in the Declaration wherever pertinent, especially in the human prosperity thematic area.

education by taking into account of women's needs and demands, free from discrimination in all its forms and promoting women's participation and empowerment.

8. The States should commit to ensure environmental sustainability and energy sovereignty in a framework of solidarity, collaboration, and integration as a legacy of the peoples, including joint emissions-reduction-deforestation-forest-degradation strategies as an integral part of debate among the States of the Americas. There should be recognition of the contribution made by women, and the effects of energy security and environmental sustainability policies on women made visible, strengthening alternative energy projects and alternative production models that incorporate their needs and demands.
9. Compliance by the States with the human rights standards should be ensured, based on the development and implementation of an integral development model, combining public security policies with economic and social policies, with a view to reducing existing gender, ethnic, racial, and socioeconomic inequalities in violent and discriminatory institutional and social practices. The Declaration should include gender-based violence and, especially, domestic and family violence within the scope of the public security, making specific reference to human trafficking.
10. The States and international organizations should commit to develop policy and legislation to remove cultural barriers to promote political participation by women as a component of governance, seeking to eradicate stereotypes and discriminatory practices toward women. It is recommended that a commitment be made to ensure civil society participation in monitoring mechanisms and social control actions, with a view to inclusive democratic governance.