

# ALLIANCE OF PAN AMERICAN ROUND TABLES

"One for All"



"All for One"

## "THE STATUS OF WOMEN IN THE AMERICAS"

PRESENTED BY: HELENA T.M. RICHARDS, BOARD OF ADVISORS



"For a better future through education"

XXVI ALLIANCE CONVENTION

OCTOBER 26 TO 31, 1998

LIMA, PERU

## **“THE STATUS OF WOMEN IN THE AMERICAS”**

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### **PROLOGUE**

I express my sincere appreciation to the Chairman of the Alliance **Education Committee**, Esperanza D. del Castillo, for having invited me to present this talk. I hope that the members attending this convention in Lima, my native city, will find it informative and challenging.

We shall briefly describe the non-political role played by the members of the Pan American Round Tables since the beginning of the XXth century and the struggle of american women as they claim equal rights. (XIXth and XXth centuries) We shall conclude by indicating the challenge that we face as we approach the XXI century and by mentioning some of the resources currently available to us.

( I dedicate this modest effort to the memory of my mother and to all my pan american friends who have been and continue to be an inspiration.)

### **INTRODUCTION**

At the beginning of the XXth century, when most of the american nations were enjoying their independence, women established themselves as the backbone of the family. However, they didn't enjoy the privileges reserved for men only. They were definitely absent from political, professional and academic circles. It was during this period that the first **Pan American Round Table** was born.

We are all aware of the details surrounding the founding of the first PART in San Antonio, Texas in 1916. Our founder, **Florence Terry Griswold**, was indeed a remarkable woman of great vision and a sensitive heart. She assessed the human suffering inflicted upon innocent women and children, as a result of border conflicts (USA-Mexico) and decided to do something about it. For 25 years she remained at the helm of the Table, maintaining close contact with the Pan American Union(OAS) and spreading the news about the Table's objectives. Furthermore, the San Antonio Table was fully recognized as one of the first pan american efforts to flourish within the U.S.A. During this period, 14 other Tables were founded in Texas, acting as precursors to many others that were founded later in other states and other countries of the Americas. Florence died in San Antonio on July 7, 1941, leaving behind a legacy that is still alive in the hearts of her followers: **ALL OF US.**

## **“WOMEN IN THE AMERICAS”**

### **PAVING THE WAY**

When exploring women's place within the Americas, we come to the conclusion that this continent has indeed been a pioneer in promoting women's progress. It wasn't easy to “pave the way” and we must admit that we are still struggling to get ahead. Some events that made a difference are:

**I.- Before the arrival of europeans,** the native american women were noted for their creativity and their concern for the welfare of family and community.

**II.- During the colonial period** a few doors opened, providing a certain amount of independence to women. For instance:

- a) 1724.....Mexico....The Corpus Christi convent was established in Mexico City, providing education to indian women of nobility.
- b) 1776.....USA.....Mrs. Adams requested that women's rights be incorporated to the Declaration of Independence.

**III.- After the independence of the american nations,** women struggled to claim their place in society. Some important events are: **(From A to Z)**

- a) 1825.....USA.....First women's strike. The seamstress union demands higher salaries.
- b) 1826.....Mexico.....The magazine “El Abanico” is published in Zacatecas. It was the first feminist publication to demand equal rights.
- c) 1840.....USA.....Lucretia Mott sets feminist guidelines for a new group dealing with the issue of equal rights and discrimination.
- d) 1856....Puerto Rico.....Two magazines are published, encouraging education for women: “La Guirnalda” and “La Azucena”.
- e) 1860.....USA.....Women obtain the right to inherit and to sue legally.
- f) 1867.....Mexico.....President Juarez issues a law which reforms education. A high school for girls is established. (First one)
- g) 1869.....USA.....First seeds are planted for the founding of a “right to vote” women's organization.
- h) 1880.....Mexico.....Carmen Huerta presides over the Second Worker's Conference.
- i) 1882.....USA.....Radcliffe, a women's annex to Harvard Univ. opens its doors, providing higher education to women.
- j) 1906.....Argentina.....The “Feminist Center” is founded.
- k) 1908.....Uruguay.....Divorce law becomes effective.
- l) 1910.....Chile.....The “Women's Pan American Federation” is founded.
- m) 1910....Argentina.....The first feminist conference is held in Buenos Aires.
- n) 1913.....Uruguay.....The first women's university opens.
- o) 1916.....USA.....The first Pan American Round Table is founded.
- p) 1919.....Chile.....The National Women's Council is founded.
- q) 1920.....USA.....Women win the right to vote and to get divorced.

**(Continued – From A to Z)**

- r) 1924.....Honduras....The Feminist Cultural Association is founded.
- s) 1932.....Uruguay.....Women win the right to vote.
- t) 1942-48.....The remaining american nations pass laws giving women the right to vote.
- u) 1962.....Mexico... The Labor Federal Law is reformed. Equal rights and responsibilities are given to both sexes.
- v) 1966..Dominican Rep... President Balaguer appoints 26 women as Governors and one woman as Cabinet Chairperson.
- w) 1970.....Chile.....During the period of Salvador Allende's presidency, women establish the JAP. (Board which regulates prices and distribution of goods)
- x) 1973.....Peru....."ALIMUPER" is established. It deals with women's rights.
- y) 1975....Venezuela"... President Perez promotes the first Women's Conference.
- z) 1979....Nicaragua....The Women's Association is renamed as: "AMNLAE", in honor of Luisa A. Espinoza, a victim of the 1970 civil war.

**NOTE:** The above mentioned events are by no means the only ones which helped change women's status in the Americas. Each country has produced feminist groups which struggled to obtain equal rights and made it possible for laws to be issued, providing legal protection to mothers, wives, students, laborers and professionals.

**THE LAST TWO DECADES OF THE XXth CENTURY**

The **eighties and nineties** have indeed been the most significant decades as far as the **technological and economic** development of the Americas and the world. Women with access to a higher education have proven that they can certainly excel in any career and at the same time, be able to succeed as mothers and wives. Men have adapted to this change and are more willing to cooperate in the family chores. Unfortunately, in less developed areas of the Americas, **education** is not available to women and as a result, their condition is even worse than it was during the colonial era. This problem, plus the typical existing "**machismo**" maintains women in a state of oppression. In other words, whatever was accomplished during this century is not at the disposal of many of today's american women.

Those of us who have been fortunate to receive an education and to lead a life which agrees with our own personal ideals, have a responsibility towards our less fortunate sisters. The **Pan American Round Tables** certainly play an important role by trying to raise educational levels. Our valuable **contribution** should not be ignored. In fact, these contributions could probably be published in **several books**. Unfortunately, we don't have the time nor the statistical data for being able to do it.

However, we will mention that each one of the existing **185 Pan American Round Tables** contributes towards **education** in a variety of ways, such as: **scholarships, donations to schools, libraries, health centers, literacy programs**, etc. etc. Furthermore, they promote conferences and **cultural events**, aimed at increasing **understanding** of neighboring countries. In other words, there is no doubt that we can honestly affirm that we are living up to the commitment expressed in our "**Oath**".

### **WHERE ARE WE HEADING?**

The enormous **disparity** that exists within the Americas is perhaps the main cause of women's **oppression**. These differences apply to the **economic and socio-cultural** development levels. In many instances, the influence of native indian cultures may have affected women's development. Many barriers have been lowered during the last century and a half, but we still have a long way to go. The future depends on what we will accomplish today and of course, collective actions are more effective than individual ones. Therefore, many national and international conferences and summits have been held in order to promote basic results.

Progress and deficiencies were discussed at the **Fourth World Conference for Women** (U.N.), held in Beijing, China in 1995. At that time, many **plans of action** were approved concerning the following subjects, as they relate to women:

- |                               |  |
|-------------------------------|--|
| a) Sharing political power    | e) Access to education, health and work. |
| b) Protecting women's rights. | f) Violence against women.               |
| c) Poverty                    | g) Results of armed conflicts.           |
| d) Economic participation.    | h) Means of information & development.   |

Although these **plans of action** that are agreed upon at general **conferences** are not legally binding, they do express the will of the people and they produce **recommendations** which are later **adopted** by governments. They also include suggestions for **financing programs and distributing resources** at a national, regional and international level. Undoubtedly, all these activities provide hope for a more **promising future**.

### **THE CHALLENGE**

As we enter the **XXIst** century our main challenge is to find a **viable strategy** that may **liberate** women from **oppression** and that may offer alternatives for her individual **development**. We, as members of a **non-political organization** are in no position to intervene directly in a political or legal fashion. However, we can help in the process of changing the **dominant social order** through actions based on resourceful means. In conclusion, as we try to **grow** individually and collectively within our own **Table**, we should be facing another challenge: To help in the **growth** of those thousand of women who don't have many **choices** in carving a **future** for themselves.



## **RESOURCE GUIDE**

In order to be fully aware of the current status of women in the Americas it is necessary to be well **informed**. Here is a short list of magazines and books which you may find informative. Also, a list of feminist organizations which might shed some light on the subject.

### **ORGANIZATIONS**

Program for Women's Development and Health .- Defensa 120, Ofic. 4080, Buenos Aires, **Argentina**

Study Center for the Care of Women and Children.- Enrique Foster Sur 24, Dto. 10, Santiago, **Chile**.

Feminist Center for Action and Information.- Apt. Postal 5355, San José 1000, **Costa Rica**.

National Union of Women from Ecuador.- Versailles 1103, Quito, **Ecuador**.

Committee for Human Equal Rights.- Plaza Los Dolores, Edif. 447-A, Tegucigalpa MDC, **Honduras**.

Women's Center for Information and Service.- Box 22025, Santa Rita, Rio Piedras, **Puerto Rico** 00931

Peruvian Women's Center "Flora Tristán", Hernán Velarde #42, Lima, **Perú**.

CIMAC.- Balderas 86, Col. Centro, México D.F. 06050, **México**.

Graduate Consortium in Women Studies.- Radcliffe College, 6 Ash St., Cambridge, Mass. **U.S.A.**

National Women's Studies Assoc.- They will hold their XXth annual conference in **Albuquerque, N.M.** from June 17 to 20, 1999 at the Radisson Hotel. If you are interested in attending or presenting a resolution, please contact: Ellen Cronan Rose, Univ. of Nevada, 4504 Maryland Pkway, Las Vegas, NV 89154. Fax: 702-895-0850

### **MAGAZINES**

**NACLA**, a report on the Americas.- P.O. Box 77, Hopewell, PA 16650-0077

**NORTH-SOUTH MAGAZINE**.- Univ. of Miami, P.O. Box 248205, Coral Gables FL 33124-3027

### **BOOKS**

Figuereido, Maritza.- "La Liberación de la Mujer", Editores Asoc. México.

Langer, Marie.- "Maternidad y Sexo", Editorial Paidós, Argentina, 1978.

Oakley, Ann "- La Mujer Discriminada", Editorial Debate, Madrid, 1972.

Spacks, Patricia.- "La Imaginación Femenina", Edit. Debate, Madrid, 1980

Urrutia, Elena.- "Imagen y Realidad de la Mujer" Sep.-Diana, Mexico 1979

Jaiven, Ana Lau.- "La Nueva Ola del Feminismo en México, Editorial Planeta México, 1987.

Friedan, Betty.- "The Second Stage", Summit Books, New York, 1981.

If you have access to the **Internet**, the informative supply is unlimited.

(Continued)

## RESOURCE GUIDE

In each country there are **local groups** which concentrate on **raising** the status of women. They are not necessarily very solvent, but they are formed by individuals who join forces in an effort to find solutions to common problems. Definitely, their actions deserve praise and support. We shall mention some of these groups and hope that we may help them in some way.

Young Women's Assoc.- Buenos Aires, **Argentina**.- They strive for positive changes and for creating opportunities at a social and political level.

Independencia Center for Services.- Totonicapan, **Guatemala**.- A group of women that cook marmelade as a business enterprise, so as to attain economic independence.

Support Group "Aquelarre".- Santo Domingo, **Dominican Republic**.- They explore personal development and help victims of domestic violence.

Center for the Development of Northern Women.- Trujillo, **Perú**.- They fight discrimination and promote participation of women in politics, culture and society.

"Las Golondrinas" Women Center.- Managua, **Nicaragua**.- They offer medical and psychological aid to victims of violence. They also try to prevent violence.

Women's Center, La Paz, **Mexico**.- They offer courses in health and train for jobs.

Feminist Collective "La Manzana" < Cali, **Colombia**.- An editing group that publishes ideas and actions pertaining to the personal development of women.

Women's Collective for Health and Social Welfare.- Santiago, **Chile**.- It strives for finding new strategies which will allow women to participate fully in real life.

Maria Guare Foundation.- Guayaquil, **Ecuador**.- It concentrates its efforts in education and prevention of the abuse of women.

Telemanita, Cuernavaca, **México**.- They produce and distribute videos for the purpose of creating a more just environment for men and women.

Women's Net of Community Radio Stations.- Lima, **Peru**.- They promote radio programs helpful to women entrepreneurs.

Coordinating Agency for Native Women of Central and South America.- La Paz, **Bolivia**.- They work towards raising the status of indian women at a national and international level.

## THE GLOBAL FUND FOR WOMEN

This fund was created in **California** in 1987 for the sole purpose of giving financial aid to groups such as the ones mentioned above, which try to raise the status of women.

Any group that qualifies may receive up to \$10,000. If you know of one that needs assistance, (even your own Table), they may contact:

"The Global Fund for Women" - 2480 Sand Hill Road, Suite 100, Menlo Park, California, 94025-6941