



IAPG

Parliamentary Dialogue

Inter-American Parliamentary Group on Population and Development

The Caribbean Reaffirms its Commitment to Health and Sexual and Reproductive Rights

Content

- Meeting of the Caribbean Sub-region to Evaluate the Implementation of the Program of Action for the International Conference on Population and Development..... 1
- Regional News:
 - WHO Accuses the Catholic Church of Conducting a Disinformation Campaign 2
 - Latin American Parliamentarians Participate in Colombian Study Tour 2
 - Public Meeting about Emergency Contraception in the Peruvian Congress..... 4
- At the United Nations 5
- News Briefs 6
- Calendar of Events 7
- Links 8

This magazine is a quarterly publication of the Inter-American Parliamentary Group on Population and Development (IAPG)

120 Wall Street, 14th Floor New York, NY 10005
Tel. 917.637.3712/6 | Fax. 917.637.3715
info@iapg.org | www.iapg.org

General Production

Daniel Parnetti

Editors

Hernán Sanhueza and Carla Rivera-Avni

Design and Layout

OPCD.COM

Translation

Laura Anne Zaks

December 2003

On November 11 and 12, 2003, the meeting of the Caribbean Committee on Development and Cooperation was held in Port of Spain, Trinidad and Tobago. The event was organized by the Latin American and Caribbean Division of the United Nations Population Fund and the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean.

Representatives from 20 countries and territories in the Caribbean participated in the meeting. Delegates from different non-governmental organizations also participated, including Carla Rivera-Avni, Executive Coordinator of IAPG. Participants evaluated the sub-region's progress in implementing the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) Program of Action, created in Cairo in 1994.

The results of the meeting were extremely positive. The participants issued a declaration in which they unanimously reaffirmed their commitment to sexual and reproductive rights, gender equality, sexual health education – including services and information for youth and adolescents, – services for people living with HIV/AIDS, the adoption and implementation of appropriate legislation for the protection of children, and a global commitment to the reduction of poverty and sustainable economic and social development. Additionally, the participants stated that the ICPD Program of Action is “essential to achieve the Millennium Development Goals,” including the eradication of extreme poverty and hunger.

Among other things, the national delegates:

- Reaffirmed their “unequivocal commitment to the principles and actions contained in the ICPD Program of Action and to the document ‘Key Actions for the Further Implementation of the ICPD Program of Action, in particular with respect to ensuring reproductive rights and reproductive health, gender equality, equity and the empowerment of women.”
- Reaffirmed their “commitment to the goals contained in the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), and recognized that the implementation of the ICPD Program of Action and the Key Action for Further Implementation of the ICPD Program of Action is essential for the achievement of these goals.”
- Pledged to “further formulate and implement laws and mechanisms to protect children from the dangers they face, especially labor exploitation and sexual abuse and exploitation.”



This publication is made possible thanks to the financial support of the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and the Japanese Government Trust Fund for Parliamentary Activities.

- Committed to “continue the national legislative reform process and to strive for effective implementation in order to ensure the full realization of the goals of the ICPD Program of Action and the Caribbean Plan of Action.”

Finally, they agreed that the declaration would be presented within the framework of regional meetings in Santiago, Chile, (March 10-11, 2004) and San Juan, Puerto Rico, (June 2004), where they will commemorate the tenth anniversary of ICPD and evaluate Latin America and the Caribbean’s progress in the implementation of the ICPD Program of Action.

WHO Accuses the Catholic Church of Conducting Disinformation Campaign

The World Health Organization (WHO), the internationally renowned health organization, accused the Catholic Church of spreading false and dangerous information indicating that the regular use of condoms does not protect against the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV), which causes AIDS.

The president of the Pontifical Council for the Family, Cardinal Alfonso López Trujillo, stated in an interview conducted by the BBC that “condoms are filled with small holes that allow HIV through.” He also said that world governments should treat contraceptives “like cigarettes,” and launch national campaigns against their use.

According to different health authorities of recognized international prestige, the position of the Catholic Church is not only scientifically incorrect but it is also morally unacceptable, as it puts the lives of millions of people at risk. Especially vulnerable are groups that have limited or no access to accurate and reliable scientific information and who, therefore, are confused by this kind of information.

The argument made by the Catholic Church has been categorically refuted by various international centers of investigation, such as the United States’ National Institute of Health and the University of Wisconsin. One of the most convincing studies regarding the effectiveness of condoms in the prevention of HIV/AIDS was produced by the Center for European Studies on the Heterosexual Transmission of HIV. This study involved the participation of 124 couples, of whom one participant was infected and the other was not. The study concluded that, of 15 thousand sexual relations during which condoms were used, not one case of HIV transmission was proven.

In Latin America, many cardinals, bishops and priests have adopted the argument made by the Vatican. In Brazil, the Archbishop of Rio de Janeiro presented a petition (recurso) before the courts, soliciting the prohibition of the dissemination of a video that promotes the use of condoms. The Brazilian Ministry of Health, through the Director of the National Program Against STDs and AIDS, Dr. Alexandre Grangeiro, circulated a press release which disproved the position of the Catholic Church and sustained that “[the Catholic Church] makes a mistake when, with the aim of establishing the prevalence of its theological viewpoint, it casts doubts on long-proven scientific truths, putting at risk the lives of people who, by their religious observance, do not take care of their health.”

According to data provided by the United Nations Program on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS), more than two million people are living with HIV/AIDS in Latin America and the Caribbean. Estimates show that in 2002, AIDS caused more than 100,000 deaths in the region.

Triple Protection

Sexual and reproductive health specialists agree that condoms offer triple protection: by protecting against sexually transmitted diseases, (including HIV/AIDS, syphilis, genital herpes and gonorrhea,) by protecting against cervical cancer (because it prevents the transmission of the human papiloma virus, which causes this disease), and by reducing the number of unwanted pregnancies that in many occasions result in clandestine abortions occurring under unsafe conditions. WHO recommends the use of condoms as “the only effective practice in the defense against sexually transmitted HIV/AIDS.”

Latin American Parliamentarians Participate in Colombian Study Tour

IAPG organized a visit for the Argentinean, Mexican and Peruvian parliamentarians to Bogotá, Colombia, November 19, 20 and 21, 2003. The delegation was comprised of two Argentinean legislators (Senator Sergio Gallia and Representative Laura Musa), five Mexican legislators, (Representatives Lino Celaya, Blanca Judith Díaz, María Cristina Díaz, Martha Lucía Micher and Francisco Rojas) and five Peruvian legislators, (Congress members

medical and scientific aspects of emergency contraception (EC). At this meeting, Dr. Juan Carlos Vargas, PROFAMILIA's science consultant, indicated that EC is a secure method that helps avoid unwanted pregnancies – and, consequently, unsafe abortions – in the case of rape, unprotected sex or failed contraceptive methods. Likewise, Dr. Vargas emphasized that emergency contraceptive pills are not effective once the implantation process has begun, and

National Attorney General, the Institute of Legal Medicine and Forensic Science, the Colombian Institute for Family Well-being, health agencies, the municipal mayoralty, family commissaries, the education sector, the Public Defender, the Prosecutors' Office and the National Police, among others).

The Parliamentarians met with authorities from the Colombian Ministry of Social Protection and discussed achievements and char-



From left to right, Esther Vargas (journalist, Perú 21), Hernán Sanhueza (special advisor, IAPG), Maruja Alfaro (MP Peru), Daniel Robles (MP Peru), Iván Calderón (MP Peru), Francisco Rojas (MP Mexico), Martha Lucía Micher (MP Mexico), Laura Musa (MP Argentina), Santos Jaimes (MP Peru) and Lino Celaya (MP Mexico).

Maruja Alfaro, Iván Calderón, Santos Jaimes, Johny Peralta and Daniel Robles). Dr. Hernán Sanhueza and Daniel Parnetti from IAPG also participated.

The participating parliamentarians had the opportunity to visit different sexual and reproductive health programs and learn and exchange ideas with authorities in charge of producing and implementing public policies on this issue. At the headquarters of PROFAMILIA, a local NGO that provides sexual and reproductive health information and services to 65% of the Colombian population, the parliamentarians learned about a sexual and reproductive health services program for youth and received information about the

therefore do not interfere with the normal development of pregnancy.

The parliamentarians also visited the Kennedy Operative Center (Centro Operativo Localidad Kennedy), a local community center that is implementing an Integrated Services for Victims of Sexual Violence program, which was developed by the Administrative Department of Social Well-being of Bogota with support from the United Nations Population Fund. This program is extremely innovative in Latin America and is characterized by a multi-sector focus on addressing sexual violence cases, resulting in close collaboration between different governmental agencies and civil society organizations (i.e., the

acteristics of the recently approved National Sexual and Reproductive Health Policy. The policy is based on the guidelines established in the Cairo (1994) and Beijing (1995) Conferences. Its main objective is to “improve sexual and reproductive health and promote sexual and reproductive rights for the entire population, with a special emphasis on the reduction of vulnerability factors and risky behavior, the stimulus of protective factors, and attention to groups with special needs.”

At the Bogotá District Secretariat of Health, the parliamentarians met with the District Secretary of Health, Dr. José Fernando Cardona, who presented the most salient aspects of the

Public Meeting About Emergency Contraception in the Peruvian Congress

IAPG and INPPARES (the Peruvian Institute for Responsible Paternity) collaborated with Congressman Santos Jaimes – member of the Commission on Health, Family and People with Disabilities in the Peruvian Congress – on the organization of a public meeting about Emergency Contraception (EC), which took place on March 26, 2003 in the Raúl Porras Barrenechea Amphitheater in the Peruvian Congress.

The event was followed by a workshop for parliamentarians and journalists, organized by IAPG, where “myths and realities of emergency contraception” were discussed. Scientists and members of international and national civil society participated in the workshop and analyzed two main topics: (a) the reproductive health status of Peruvian women, including the high number of unwanted pregnancies in the country, and the impact of lack of access to EC on women’s health, and (b) mechanisms of action and strategies to

increase access to emergency contraception. The international speakers, including Dr. Raffaella Schiavon (Population Council, Mexico), Liliana Schmitz (PRO-FAMILIA, Colombia), Dr. Fredy Febres (PROSALUD, Venezuela) and Dr. María Elena Ortiz (ICMER, Chile), described the status of EC in their respective countries and presented current scientific information about EC’s mechanisms of action. Dr. María Elena Ortiz pointed out that a study conducted by the Chilean Institute for Reproductive Medicine (ICMER) clearly showed that EC does not affect the implantation of an embryo but rather impedes the union of the masculine and feminine gametes.

On the same issue, Dr. Juan Trelles, president of the Peruvian Society of Obstetrics and Gynecology affirmed that “it has become clearly established that Oral Emergency Hormonal Contraception acts to impede ovulation and fertilization. It does not, however, have an

abortive effect.” Similarly, he indicated that “EC should be available and form part of family planning methods offered at the national level in an open, voluntary and informed way, as recommended by the World Health Organization (WHO), the International Federation of Gynecology and Obstetrics (FIGO), and the Federation of Latin-American Obstetrics and Gynecology Societies (FLASOG).”

In August 2003, five months after the above-mentioned events took place, Congressman Santos Jaimes presented draft legislation (6384) requiring the immediate application of Ministerial Resolution 399-2001-SA/DM, which incorporates EC in the Norms of the National Family Planning Program (see box). He stated that “the decision to suspend the application of (said resolution) constitutes a grave violation of the responsibilities of the Ministry of Health which affects people’s rights and impedes national efforts for the

The State of EC in Peru

In July 2001, through ministerial resolution 399-2001-SA/DM, the Ministry of Health of Peru incorporated EC pills into the Norms of the National Family Planning Program. However, as a consequence of profound changes in the national political scene, the effective application of this resolution has been delayed. Consequentially, EC pills can be found on sale in the nation’s pharmacies (with a medical prescription) but are not available in state health establishments.

At the beginning of 2003, the Minister of Health, Álvaro Vidal, convoked a High Level Commission on EC to produce a legal and scientific report on the application of EC in response to a request presented by 68 congress members opposing EC. In December 2003, this commission presented its report and recommended that the Ministry of Health make EC available to all citizens through the national public health system. The Ministry of Health authorities are expected to follow this recommendation.

prevention of unwanted pregnancies, abortions, abortion complications and the increase in maternal mortality." Congressmen Daniel Robles,

Iván Calderón Castillo and Víctor Velarde, among others, presented similar proposals. IAPG's activities have contributed to maintaining EC on

the public agenda and to the formation of alliances to defend the health and sexual and reproductive rights of Peruvian women.

United Nations Events

In September 2003, representatives of all countries of the world met in New York to participate in the United Nations General Assembly High-Level Meeting on HIV/AIDS. There they evaluated the international progress made in the fight against the epidemic and discussed the objectives agreed upon in the Declaration of Commitment in the fight against HIV/AIDS approved by the UN General Assembly in June 2001.

UNAIDS, the agency specializing in AIDS at the UN, presented a report emphasizing certain advances in the world response to this plague, but also recognizing that in general terms "there have been few accomplishments in the reduction of new cases of HIV infection." Likewise, they noted that world financial resources for programs against HIV/AIDS continue to be insufficient even though they have been significantly increased in the last year. The report also indicated that the "lack of financial, human and technical resources" in the least developed countries constitutes one of the principle impediments to halt the advance of the illness.

Some chilling figures revealed by the report:

- One-third of all countries still have no policies to ensure that women have access to prevention and care, even though women now account for 50% of those infected worldwide.
- Only one in nine people who want to know their HIV status has access to testing.
- Programs designated to combat this disease lack a sufficiently ample scale and less than 5% of those who could benefit from a retroviral treatment have access to these medicines.
- The epidemic generates grave economic and social consequences, reducing levels of economic development, cutting productivity levels and negatively affecting national education systems as a consequence of the loss of qualified professionals to the disease.

Within the framework of this meeting, UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan, stated that "We have come a long way, but not far enough. Clearly, we will have to work harder to ensure that our commitment is matched by the necessary resources and action."

News Briefs

The United States Nears Approval of the Sale of Emergency Contraception Without Medical Prescriptions

On December 16, 2003, with 23 votes in favor and 4 votes against, two expert committees recommended that the United States Food and Drug Administration (FDA) authorize over the counter sale of emergency contraception Plan B, currently available only with medical authorization. This drug would help to prevent 89% of unwanted pregnancies if consumed up until 72 hours after sexual relations have occurred. The experts remark that this is a safe contraceptive method with only minor and limited side effects, such as vomiting and nausea. Although the final decision regarding the sale of this drug falls in the hands of the FDA director, Dr. Mark B. McClellan, it is likely that he will follow the expert's recommendation.

International Parliamentary Conference on the Implementation of the ICPD Program of Action to be Held in 2004

The Executive Committee responsible for organizing the International Parliamentarians Conference on ICPD Implementation met in Brussels, Belgium on October 17, 2003. The Committee reviewed and evaluated the results of the previous conference that took place in Ottawa in 2002 and established guidelines for the meeting in Strasbourg, France, in October 2004. The year 2004 commemorates the tenth anniversary of the adoption of the ICPD Program of Action.



Moira Paz (MP Bolivia) and Errol Humphrey (Ambassador from Barbados in Belgium) in the meeting held in Brussels

New Executive Coordinator of IAPG

In October 2003, the IAPG Board of Directors held its annual meeting. At that time, Dr. Hernán Sanhueza presented his formal resignation as Executive Coordinator of the organization. Dr. Sanhueza, however, expressed his interest in remaining connected to the organization as a special advisor. Carla Rivera-Avni was confirmed as the new Executive Coordinator with the approval of the board members.

Latin American and European Parliamentarians Participate in Study Tour to Colombia and Brazil

From May 14 to 22, 2003, a group of European and Latin American legislators participated in a study tour to Colombia and Brazil, organized by IAPG and under the auspices of the United Nations Population Fund and the Japanese Government Trust for Parliamentary Activities. This visit served to familiarize the participants with the content of different sexual and reproductive health programs. Additionally, the tour sought to augment parliamentarians' and journalists' understanding of population and development issues, placing a special emphasis on the implementation of the ICPD Program of Action and the Beijing Platform of Action.

Information Session on Emergency Contraception in Uruguay

IAPG organized an information session on emergency contraception at the Congress of the Republic of Uruguay on June 12, 2003. At this meeting, parliamentarians and participating agencies were made aware of the importance of emergency contraception for the sexual and reproductive health of women. In addition, the state of reproductive health of adolescents in Uruguay was addressed in an effort to generate a favorable attitude for legislators to implement new parliamentary activities on these issues.

Meeting of the Council of the Inter-European Parliamentary Forum on Population and Development

On May 26 and 27, 2003, IAPG participated in the meeting of the Council of the Inter-European Parliamentary Forum on Population and Development (IEPPFD) in Lisbon, Portugal. IAPG accompanied Representative Laura Carneiro (Brazil), who gave a presentation on sexual and reproductive health in her country and on IAPG's work in the region. Approximately 50 European parliamentarians participated in the meeting, as well as NGOs working on issues related to sexual and reproductive health, representatives of regional parliamentary networks on population and development, and the Parliamentary Network of the World Bank, (PNoWB).

Calendar of Events

E V E N T	D A T E
Caribbean Parliamentarians Meeting on HIV/AIDS – Trinidad and Tobago	March 2004 (tentative date)
Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) Ad-Hoc Committee on Population and Development – Santiago, Chile	March 10 - 11, 2004
Meeting of Argentinean Parliamentarians – Buenos Aires, Argentina	March 2004
Meeting of Mexican Parliamentarians – Mexico City, Mexico	March 2004
International Round Table on ICPD + 10 and the Millennium Development Goals, organized by International Planned Parenthood Federation, Population Action International and Family Care International – London, England	August 31 - September 2, 2004
International Parliamentarian Conference on the Implementation of the ICPD Program of Action Strasbourg, France	October 18 - 19, 2004
Latin American Parliamentarians Meeting on ICPD + 10 and the Millennium Development Goals – Rio de Janeiro, Brazil	November 2004

Latin American Parliamentarians Participate in Colombian Study Tour

Continued from page 3

Inter-Institutional Agreement for the Strengthening of Fertility Regulation and of Sexual Education of Adolescents and Youth in the Capital District. (Convenio Interinstitucional para el Fortalecimiento de la Regulación de la Fecundidad y de la Educación Sexual a Adolescentes y Jóvenes del Distrito Capital). This agreement, signed by the municipal agencies in charge of health, education and social well-being, and the NGO PRO-FAMILIA, represents a successful model of collaboration between public and private sectors in the provision of sexual and reproductive health services.

Finally, the parliamentarians met with authorities from the Seventh Commission of the Colombian Senate, which handles health and social development issues, among other issues.

As a result of the visit, IAPG agreed to hold meetings in Argentina and Mexico at the beginning of 2004. At these meetings, parliamentarians will discuss, among other issues, the formation of national parliamentary groups devoted to studying and addressing questions related to the field of population and development, with a special emphasis on the issues of sexual and reproductive health.

Links

Websites that contain additional information about the United Nations General Assembly Session on HIV/AIDS:

<http://www.un.org/av/photo/ga/ga58hiv aids.htm>

<http://www.un.org/News/Press/docs/2003/ga10153.doc.htm>

http://www.unaids.org/en/events/un+special+session+on+hiv_ aids/follow+up+to+the+2001+un+special+session+on+hiv_ aids+-+september+2003.asp

<http://www.unaids.org>

Board of Directors

Billie A. Miller, MP (Barbados)

President

Álvaro Alonso, MP (Uruguay)

Treasurer

Jean Augustine, MP (Canada)

Vice President

Laura Carneiro (Brasil)

Balbina Herrera, MP (Panama)

Secretary

Alexandra Sánchez de Lozada (Bolivia)

Secretariat

Executive Coordinator

Carla Rivera-Avni

Special Advisor

Hernán Sanhueza

Program Associate

Daniel Parnetti

IAPG is now on the Internet! www.iapg.org

Thanks to the financial support of the Japanese Trust Fund for Parliamentary Activities and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), IAPG has been able to launch its own website. The site can be found in English at <http://www.iapg.org> and in Spanish at <http://www.gparlamentario.org>.

Parliamentary Dialogue is a newsletter produced by the Inter-American Parliamentary Group on Population and Development (IAPG) that promotes sexual and reproductive rights in the Americas.