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PANEL VII

**The role of regional and intergovernmental organizations
in promoting gender equality**

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equality taking into account not only the position of OAS member states, but also the input of civil society, and the agencies of the multilateral system Within this context, we are actively working on the issues of the human rights of women, such as gender-based violence and the trafficking of women and children for the purposes of exploitation.

Addressing women's human rights has been an ongoing priority for the CIM, especially in the area of violence against women. One of the key achievements in CIM's 76 year history has been the drafting and adoption of the landmark convention, the Inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment, and Eradication of Violence against Women. To date, the treaty has been ratified by 31 of the 34 OAS member states and is the only instrument of its kind which focuses specifically on violence against women. The adoption of this treaty sent a powerful message to the region – that there is a strong commitment to fighting violence against women. In 2000, CIM coordinated a follow up study entitled "Violence in the Americas: A Regional Analysis Including a Review of the Convention of Belém Do Pará." This study points out that there have been positive trends in the fight to eliminate violence against women. In addition to greater public awareness regarding the problem, many countries have made progress in criminalizing gender based violence, and in some cases, family courts have been established to handle such cases. However it concluded that despite a greater understanding of the phenomenon of violence against women as a human rights violation, the OAS member states have yet to make significant inroads in eliminating the problem.

However, the OAS General Assembly has called for a stronger implementation of the Convention of Belem do Para.

With the support of the government of Mexico, the OAS recently convened a meeting of experts in drafting the statute of a follow-up mechanism to this convention. The member states are currently in the process of identifying experts in the area of violence against women that will comprise this ongoing effort to implement the convention and to eradicate violence against women.

CIM has also been actively working to combat another egregious violation of the human rights of women – and that is the Trafficking of Women and Children for purposes of exploitation. In 1999, The CIM initiated phase I of a research project on the trafficking of women and children for sexual exploitation in Central America, Brazil, and the Dominican Republic. This research project was the first wake up call that, in addition to violence against women, there was another very real violation of women's human rights that was occurring with near impunity. A quote taken from a New York Times editorial reads "Around the world, about one million women and children are seduced into leaving their homelands every year and forced into prostitution or menial work in other countries. Most are duped with promises of good jobs in more prosperous nations. These cases are not confined to remote parts of the world." Our work has expanded to other countries of the region, primarily Mexico, Bolivia and the English-speaking Caribbean.

In confronting the trafficking issue, one of the first obstacles that the CIM had to deal with was the lack of awareness of this problem. Many government officials sincerely believe that the trafficking of human beings is not a problem in our hemisphere." Research has proven that this, indeed is a serious problem, globally and it has a devastating impact on many impoverished women, adolescents and children in the Americas. We are pleased to say that, because of our efforts, the Ministers of Justice of the Americas have taken on this issue in their deliberations and the OAS will convene later on in 2005, a conference of national authorities to begin to place this issues squarely

on the agendas of the member states. In addition an Anti-Trafficking Coordinator has