XXXI ASSEMBLY OF DELEGATES
29 – 31 October, 2002
Punta Cana, Dominican Republic

OEA/Ser.L/II.2.31
CIM/doc.6/02
20 September, 2002
Original: English

SECOND MEETING OF MINISTERS OR OF THE HIGHEST-RANKING AUTHORITIES RESPONSIBLE FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF WOMEN IN THE MEMBER STATES

(Item III of the Dialogue of Heads of Delegation)

The First Meeting of Ministers or of the Highest-Ranking Authorities Responsible for the Advancement of Women in the Member States, held in Washington, D.C., in April 2000 was a breakthrough for the advancement of gender equality and women's human rights in the Americas. The Ministers and Highest-Ranking Authorities adopted the *Inter-American Program for the Promotion of Women's Human Rights and Gender Equity and Equality* (IAP) and agreed to mainstream a gender perspective into the policies, programs and projects of the inter-American system as an effective strategy to promote gender equality. Both the IAP and the gender mainstreaming approach were endorsed by Leaders at the **Third Summit of the Americas in Quebec City, April 20-22, 2001**. To ensure follow-up and implementation, Ministers and Highest-Ranking Authorities responsible for the advancement of women agreed to meet prior to the Fourth Summit of the Americas.

The Assembly of Delegates of the Inter-American Commission of Women (CIM), in Punta Cana, Dominican Republic, October 29-31, 2002, is a valuable opportunity for the Principal Delegates to **provide guidance on priorities and objectives of the Second Meeting of Ministers or of the Highest-Ranking Authorities Responsible for the Advancement of Women, to be held in 2004.**

Since the First Meeting, **substantial work has been done to advance gender equality and women's human rights in the hemisphere** including, *inter alia*, the integration of a gender perspective into the Declaration and Plan of Action of the Third Summit of the Americas, the XII Inter-American Conference of Ministers of Labour, held October 17-19, 2001 in Ottawa, Canada, OAS policy development and programming activities and studies on the implementation of the *Inter-American Convention to Prevent, Punish and Eradicate Violence Against Women* (*Convention of Belém do Pará*) and on the trafficking of women and children for sexual exploitation in the Americas.

Despite these accomplishments, there are still several challenges facing the goal of gender equality in our hemisphere. For example, women's limited access to advanced education, to ownership of land, to credit and other productive resources and to full political participation perpetuates the cycle of poverty. The UNDP's *2002 Human Development Report* indicates that

our hemisphere ranks poorly on the **gender empowerment measure** (GEM), which evaluates gender inequality in regard to economic and political participation, including decision-making, and power over economic resources. As we proceed toward the creation of the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA), these areas deserve our full attention. This is especially true considering trade is one of the main engines for the development of our societies.

The **Summit of the Americas process** provides us with an excellent opportunity to reinforce the relationship between hemispheric economic integration, principally through the FTAA, and the realization of the broader objectives of the Summit to strengthen democracy, create prosperity and realize human potential. The CIM should strive to ensure that the opportunities provided by trade and investment liberalization through the FTAA contribute to improved living standards, working conditions, health services and environmental protection. These elements are essential to progress in achieving gender equality.

For this reason, it is proposed that the **Second Meeting of Ministers or of the Highest-Ranking Authorities Responsible for the Advancement of Women in the Member States** should focus on drawing links between trade and gender equality and women's human rights. Ministers could centre their discussion on identifying ways to advance women's economic empowerment in the Americas. They could also develop recommendations on how best to take advantage of the overall objectives already established by the Summit of the Americas and the opportunities created by the FTAA so as to diminish any undesirable outcomes and **promote economic equality for all of our citizens**, allowing them to benefit equally from the advantages of trade liberalization.