



## PRESS RELEASE

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### **Central America to promote women's leadership in local politics**

*United Nations Institute and Central American Ministers agree to promote greater political participation of women*

[Santo Domingo - 29 May 2006] --- Last Friday in Panama, Ministers from Central America and the United Nations Institute for the Advancement of Women signed an agreement to strengthen women's participation in decision making in local politics within the framework of a project supported by Spanish cooperation.

The agreement on women's political participation at the local level was signed at the end of two days of discussions between the Council of Central American Ministers for Women's Affairs [Consejo de Ministras de la Mujer de Centroamérica] (COMMCA) and the United Nations International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (INSTRAW).

The document, reached by consensus, stipulates that INSTRAW and COMMCA will jointly develop national and regional activities such as the preparation of research studies, technical training workshops and the dissemination of good practices by means of communications tools.

The strategic alliance between both institutions is framed within the project "Strengthening governance with a gender perspective and women's political participation at the local level" financed by the Spanish Agency for International Cooperation [Agencia Española de Cooperación Internacional] (AECI) and carried out by INSTRAW in countries of the Andean region, in Central America and in Mexico.

According to statistics compiled by INSTRAW, the political participation of women in Latin America has slowly increased over the past decade, from 9% to 14% in executive positions, from 5% to 13% in the senate, and from 8% a 15% in the lower house or in single house parliaments.

"At the national level, there has been evidence of a feminization of political life in Latin America," the Director of INSTRAW, Carmen Moreno commented in the press conference. "However, there is stagnation at the local level. Women who represent more than 50% of the population in Latin American are leading in only 5% of all the municipal governments", added the head of the only UN institute working exclusively for women's progress.

"This is totally unacceptable. Not only for women. The still fragile democracies in Latin America cannot advance if half of the population is wasted and if women's presence in political life continues to be ignored", emphasized Carmen Moreno.

The Panamanian Minister for Social Development and President pro tempore of COMMCA, María Roquebert León explained that "thanks to the technical assistance provided by INSTRAW, the capacities of national gender institutions and COMMCA will be strengthened in order to place the issue of women's political participation on the agenda as an issue of democracy".

Also signing the document as honorary witness was Leire Pajín, Spain's State Secretary of International Cooperation, who attended the meeting with INSTRAW and the Central American Ministers in Panama while concluding a round of scheduled visits that included Mexico, El Salvador and Honduras.

Participating at the international encounter held in Panama from 25 to 26 May were the Ministers or heads of institutes for women from the Central American region: Zoila de Innocenti (El Salvador), María Ester Vanegas (Nicaragua), María Roquebert León (Panama), Jeannette Carillo (Costa Rica), Leandra Pastora Bonilla (Honduras) and Patricia Espinosa Torres (Mexico).

*[Photographs and videos of the event are available to journalists upon request.]*

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INSTRAW is the only United Nations Institute devoted to serve as a vehicle at the international level to promote and undertake research and training programmes to contribute to the advancement of women and gender equality worldwide.