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INTER-AMERICAN COMMISSION OF WOMEN

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DAY OF WOMEN OF THE AMERICAS FEBRUARY 18, 2010

STATEMENT BY THE PRESIDENT OF THE INTER-AMERICAN COMMISSION OF WOMEN, DR. WANDA K. JONES

February 18, the *Day of Women of the Americas*, marks the 82nd anniversary of the founding of the Inter-American Commission of Women (CIM), a pioneering inter-governmental policy forum for gender equality and the empowerment of women. This particular celebration of the Day of Women of the Americas has a special significance for us, as the Commission continues its progress towards repositioning and reorienting itself to better respond to the priorities of women of the Americas.

In many ways this is the best of times and the worst of times. Globally, we are in the midst of an economic crisis that challenges us to be more creative and competitive in our search for funding. Despite the significant progress made in women's political representation, economic participation and social mobilization, they continue to face enormous challenges, not the least of which are widespread violence and continuing poverty. Yet, CIM has a legacy of surviving these uphill struggles, as do the women of the Americas, and I am convinced that both will continue to make strides in their quest for recognition, support and progress.

This year, the celebration of the *Day of Women of the Americas* will segue into another notable observance - the launching of the *Inter-American Year of Women 2010* on February 25th. The *Inter-American Year of Women* is an initiative to promote and advance the contribution of women at the national, sub-regional and hemispheric levels. At the OAS, the launch will begin with a Roundtable dialogue between high-level women scholars and parliamentarians to examine the theme: '*Women and Power – For a World of Equality.*' Here, women leaders from the Americas will have an opportunity to present through their expertise and experience, various and varying perspectives on leadership; women's participation in power and decision-making; and women's contribution to social changes and human development through the eradication of gender-based discrimination.

It would be remiss of me as we speak of political participation not to note that women are still relatively invisible at the highest levels of decision-making in their countries. To date, there are three women leaders in a hemisphere of 34 Member States. However, just as Costa Rica brought the current number to three, and we congratulate newly-elected President Laura Chinchilla Miranda, we will soon bid farewell to Chile's powerhouse President Michelle Bachelet, whose pioneering government placed gender mainstreaming and women's rights at the heart of its agenda.

On this *Day of Women of the Americas*, we must also take a moment for the women of Haiti – we offer our solidarity and support to those who must now begin to rebuild. As difficult as this effort will be, it grows from the legacy of five women leaders who perished in January's earthquake, and whose contributions to advancing women's status in Haiti are immeasurable and irreplaceable.

We remember in particular Myrna Narcisse, Director-General of the Ministry of the Status of Women and Women's Rights of Haiti; Myriam Merlet, author, activist, feminist leader, Chief of Staff of the Ministry of the Status of Women and Women's Rights, and founder of the NGO *Enfofamn*; Magalie Marcelin, lawyer and actress, and founder of the NGO *Kay Famn*, a women's rights organization that addresses domestic violence, offers services and shelter to women and makes microcredit loans available to women entrepreneurs; Anne-Marie Coriolan, a political organizer who served as a top advisor in Ministry of the Status of Women and Women's Rights and was the founder of *Solidarite Fanm Ayisyen* or SOFA, an advocacy and services organization; and Mireille Neptune Anglade, women's rights activist. They, along with countless other women, have left a legacy that I am sure will feed the reconstruction process and the strengthening of Haiti's Ministry of the Status of Women and Women's Rights.

The OAS celebrates this important day to usher in the *Inter-American Year of Women 2010*, let us commit as nations to accelerating the pace for more gender-equitable societies. For as we know, true democracy, true prosperity, true security and true development come about where all human rights are upheld.