

•GINA VARGAS

## FEMALE CITIZENSHIP DAY

More than a year after the Beijing Conference, few advances have been made on the level of planning for the commitments made in the World Action Platform (WAP). Many regional governments have still not defined the areas of urgent action and aims to deal with these, nor have the national civil societies significantly broadened their commitment to gender justice. This places us, once again, face to face with one of the most crucial «knots» of the regional democracies: the non-existence of civil society mechanisms to pressurise/monitor the governments making sure they fulfil their commitments to the population and/or make their fulfilment or non-fulfilment clear to society. These mechanisms are often «heroic creations» of the social movements, as our democratic tradition is still not very widespread, deep or imaginative.

Perhaps it is worth bringing to mind that the Latin American feminists have been committed to regional democracy from the outset, seeking to enrich, deepen and requalify it, starting by confronting exclusions and discriminations of all types, especially those suffered by women in all their enormous and rich diversity. That is why we think the WAP – product of the IV World Conference on Women, which was influenced and enriched by the contributions of women's movements from all regions of the world – is a fundamental instrument in generating more democratic conditions for women at the moment. The fulfilment of this Platform will alleviate the more drastic situations of exclusion and discrimination and will broaden the horizon for female reference, making it easier for us to think and contribute to our democracies, demanding in turn that they offer and advocate the full citizenship of women.

In order to do this, the feminists have created two strategies, expressed in one instrument: the Fulfilled Index of Commitment, and a symbolic day: September 8, Female Citizenship Day.<sup>1</sup>

The Fulfilled Commitment Index is an instrument of citizen control which we adopted to negotiate politically and measure the fulfilment of the WAP by the governments.

This instrument takes on its full meaning within a broader proposal: that of promoting a citizen focus for the use and fulfillment

of the WAP – symbolised by September 8. For us, the most important strategy in relation to the World Action Platform – and the greatest challenge we face – is that the recommendations be assumed not as isolated measures, not as a product of the political sensitivity or interest of the governments, but as citizen rights; rights with which women will feel themselves able to demand, to express their opinions and become responsible for claiming their rights, and then they can use these claims and opinions to commit civil society, the women's movement and, of course, the State.

Given the size of the task, it is clear that one day is not enough. But what is also certain is that it is a day to raise the visibility of all the days, nights, the hopes and the dreams which a great many Latin American and Caribbean women have every day, to achieve a world free of exclusion and subordination. Discrimination against women will not be turned back by merely one day of affirming our proposals. But for the present, it allows us to demonstrate the importance of generating a solid «common floor» for the citizenship rights of women, not only of a certain number, not only of those who are actively fighting for this, but as an unavoidable norm of the State and society. Our transformation agenda includes the WAP, precisely because its fulfillment will guarantee this common ground so that all women –whatever their way of life– will be given the possibility of approaching their utopia in better conditions and with a well-formed independence in the physical, economic, political and socio-cultural ambits. This will allow us to advance on more radical proposals and start to approach the moment when the recognition of equal rights between women and men and the decision to combat sexual discrimination will be considered as important an achievement as the abolition of slavery and the end of colonialism, as the 1995 UN Human Development announced.

- Regional Co-ordinator for Latin America and the Caribbean towards the IV Conference on Women at Beijing

<sup>1</sup> September 8 marked the closing of the IV World Forum, held in Huariou, China, prior to the IV Conference on Women. This powerful, creative, forum which produced multiple expressions, searches and proposals to affirm the undelayable need and right for equality between men and women, outlined the conditions we want to have in the new millenium. This Forum of 30,000 women was our best letter of introduction to the new millenium.