



Pioneering Quotas: The Argentine Experience and Beyond

María José Lubertino

President of the Instituto Social y Político de la Mujer; Professor of Human Rights
and Guarantees at the Universidad de Buenos Aires

PAPER PRESENTED AT INTERNATIONAL IDEA WORKSHOP

The Implementation of Quotas: Latin American Experiences

Lima, Peru, 23–24 February 2003

From Women's Political Participation to the Need for Quotas

The main objective of this document is to highlight the causes and to describe briefly the history of how the Quota Law (Ley de Cuotas, Law 24,012) came to be adopted in Argentina. What was the starting point? In what circumstances did the debate unfold? What was the role of women politicians? Why was a law such as this chosen, and in the context of what strategy? I will analyse the causes that led to the process via which the law was adopted, the causes that influenced the timing of the beginning of the debate, and the factors that came into play.

The historical moment in which the conditions for the debate were created was the return to democracy in 1983. This was due not only to the return to the normal functioning of institutions, and, therefore, the necessary functioning of the political parties, but also to the participatory climate that emerged in those years, and the role that many women had played in the struggle against the dictatorship. This resulted in the effective participation of women in the political parties, on a (massive) scale hitherto unseen. Indeed, the majority of the members of all of the political parties (except the Justicialista party) were women.

So democracy was a necessary condition for the establishment of contacts and relationships between political women in Argentina and abroad, for the development of relationships with women in other social organizations and from different walks of life, and for collectively mobilizing to pursue shared

grievances. With respect to interactions between those of us who pushed for quotas and women from abroad, the most fluid and fruitful contacts took place—for reasons of history, language, proximity, ideological affinity, or financing—in Europe, with the women of the PSOE (Spain), the SPD (Germany), and the former Communist Party of Italy (PDS), and in Latin America with the Uruguayan women from the Frente Amplio (Broad Front), Chilean women from the Socialist Party, Brazilian women from the Workers' Party, and Paraguayan women generally.

At the outset of the discussion about the need for mechanisms for position discrimination, the viability of a quota system and its imposition by law, the following all had an important impact: the travel of some Argentine women to the United Nations Women's Conference in Nairobi, Kenya, in 1985; dissemination of the documents produced at that meeting and of the text of the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women; personal discussions with Spanish socialist women when they travelled to Argentina in the early years of the transition; contact with politically active women from Costa Rica; distribution of the first proposed legislation on real equality for women, in March 1988; and, finally, the resolutions of the XVIII Congress of the Socialist International, in June 1989, in Stockholm, Sweden.

A qualitative change came about in political women as a group. Their 'feminization' enabled them to become cognizant of their status as women, beyond their different political ideals or ideologies, allowing them to perceive how they were discriminated against. This led them to deepen the analysis of the causes and possibilities of their removal, which led them to make their numbers visible and felt and to detect their absence in real decision-making positions, not only qualitatively, but quantitatively, leading them in turn to alter their language, and the content of the discourse, and to initiate new practices.

It is within this framework that the adoption of the quota laws should be seen as a necessary yet insufficient instrument for accelerating cultural change. It was like a banner that made it possible to unify politically active women, leading to other more substantive discussions. For some, it was the spearhead for penetrating the patriarchal system at a very weak point, but without losing sight of the fact that one must acknowledge the differences and be able to respect them and live with them for mutual benefit, redefining 'public space' and 'private space', and devolving to politics its ethical dimension. It is an effort that clearly involves expanding democracy.

With the return of constitutional government, many changes ensued, not only because women's participation grew significantly, but also because of changes of attitude in a wide array of different sectors, all seeking common ground and specific shared objectives. The 'historical feminists' began to worry about developing practices and strategies to reach women as a whole, sharing with them their experiences in developing theory; most of the women's movement understood that the struggle against women's oppression should not be subordinated to other struggles, as it is compatible with them and should be taken up simultaneously with them. Specifically, women from the political parties with a popular base made strides in furthering gender awareness, raising and adopting feminist demands and the discourse on power. These changes in the theoretical approaches and the testing of reiterated coherent practices made it possible to remove slowly mutual prejudices, to open up the spheres that had been exclusive to each sector, to share experiences and, accordingly, to strengthen all women.

Women's participation in politics from 1983–89 was substantial and active; nonetheless, women's representation in decision-making positions was scant. This was the situation at the outset, which

women worked to highlight in the search for consensus recognition of the need for quotas. The basic data on which we insisted were that women accounted for more than half of the electorate, and that, by 1991, if the current situation persisted, women would account for only three percent of the representatives in Congress. In addition, we highlighted the fact that women accounted for 48 percent of all of the members of the political parties nationwide—according to data from the Dirección Nacional Electoral, September 1988—and that women were present in the same numbers as men, if not constituting the majority in most of the political parties and in most of the most densely populated districts.

From the outset, different strategies were discussed: promoting quotas in the political parties, or pushing for the adoption of a law, and whether to introduce this in the Chamber of Deputies or the Senate. It was decided to pursue all lines simultaneously, and to go with whichever moved most quickly. On 6 November 1989, the national Senator of the Unión Cívica Radical (UCR) Party for the province of Mendoza, Margarita Malharro de Torres, introduced legislation to amend the national Electoral Code so as to require all political parties to have at least 30 percent of women on the lists of candidates for elective office and in proportions such that they would have a real chance of being elected, which was based on the debate that some women had raised in the National Congress of UCR Women held in October 1989 in Santiago del Estero.

On 16 November 1989, national UCR Deputy for the City of Buenos Aires Norma Alegrone de Fonte, accompanied by deputies Florentina Gómez Miranda (UCR), Inés Botella (Justicialista), Matilde Fernández de Quaracino (Democracia Popular), Blanca Macedo de Gómez (UCR), and Ruth Monjardín (Federal Party), introduced similar legislation, according to which the lists could not include more than 70 percent of persons of the same sex, and required that, for every two candidates of the same sex, there be at least one of the other sex, alternating from the first place in the list. The proposed legislation took firm hold among the mid-level female leadership in all of the political parties, who assumed that they had found a way out of the fact that they constantly lagged behind in numbers and the frustration of always being relegated to secondary roles. On 20 September 1990, the bill was debated and approved overwhelmingly by the Senate, as the various blocs came together, with the explicit opposition of only two senators from the Justicialista party.

We succeeded in mobilizing a large number of women for the discussion of the legislation introduced by Malharro, even though it was uncertain what would come of the bill, because it was reported to the floor with an unfavourable opinion from the majority committees. Women's presence that night and the pressure that they exerted from the galleries 'turned the session around' and, one-by-one, the senators who had opposed it, albeit expressing all of their reservations, ended up voting for it. The sustained resistance of women resulted in the bill being adopted by the Senate, calling from the galleries, in the early morning hours, for their inclusion in decision-making. This proved the existence of 'women's power'. Crucial to our success was the coordinated and crosscutting work of women from all of the political parties, which took the form, in 1990, of the Red de Feministas Políticas. This formation took on Latin American scope at the Latin American and Caribbean Feminist Gathering in San Bernardo, Argentina. In Argentina, the network engaged in major media events and fostered greater awareness on a massive scale, for example through women's sessions in the provincial legislatures and the National Congress.

On 6 November 1991, the bill was debated in the Chamber of Deputies, having been approved by the Senate, and was passed, becoming law. Although its wording could have been improved, priority was accorded to passing it quickly. The law gained the consensus backing of all of the blocs except

the Unión del Centro Democrático and the Movimiento al Socialismo; the role of the executive was decisive, without its decision, the Justicialista party would not have allowed a quorum.

Table 1: Number of Women Legislators in Both Chambers, 1983–2003

Year	1983			1993			1995			2003		
Chamber	Women	Total	%	Women	Total	%	Women	Total	%	Women	Total	%
Deputies	12	255	4.71	36	257	14.0	71	257	27.6	77	258	29.84
Senators	3	46	6.52	*	*	*	*	*	*	26	72	36.11

* In terms of the Senate, the rules on the women's quota were not applied until 2001, when the provisions of the constitutional amendment that provided for the direct and simultaneous election of three senators per district entered into force.

Resistance and Strategies for Guaranteeing its Implementation

In 1992, then President Carlos Menem signed the regulatory decree for Law 24,012, which determined the place that women candidates were to occupy. While the decree violated the floor established in calculating the percentage in many cases, in others (such as when there were two seats up for re-election, which was the case in many provinces) it proved decisive for determining that the quota would be 50 percent. The regulation of the law was an important step forward, but it did not permeate the consciences of the country's political leadership.

When the lists of candidates to the Chamber of Deputies were drawn up for the 1993 elections, very few lists respected the female quota. All of the political parties violated the law, and in every province. Both in their discourse and in their arguments before the courts later on, the majority of the male leadership upheld 30 percent on the lists but not in actual legislative representation.

Even though this law amended the national Electoral Code, the electoral judges did not accept the argument that it was a 'public' law. Accordingly, only the candidates themselves could legally challenge the lists. Women then decided on a strategy to address this situation. We communicated with the women candidates from all of the political parties whose lists did not comply with the law, and they organized operations with lawyers who would represent them in each province with resources from the Consejo Nacional de la Mujer and with the support of many different quarters. Even though we lacked a structure and the electoral deadlines were very short and strict, we had to act simultaneously in the country's 24 electoral districts, with a total of 213 lists.

An information network had to be organized to determine quickly the make-up of all of the parties' lists. Mindful of that complex situation, and there not being at that moment any possibility in Argentine law of the lists being challenged by anyone other than the candidate, 'preventive writs of

amparo were dismissed *in limine* in every case. Some judges dismissed the submissions, but did not officially accept the lists, instead sending them back to the political parties, to have them reconstituted in keeping with the law and its regulation. In this way, we obtained the first rulings by the national electoral chamber and the Supreme Court, according to which Law 24,012 became a public law.

In 1994, the amendment to the national constitution was approved, and the women's movement (which thanks to the quotas now provided 100 of the 300 members of the constitutional assembly) succeeded in introducing the following texts, which since have served as a protective umbrella and have defeated the usual traditional male argument regarding the 'unconstitutionality of positive action' as a violation of the right to equality before the law:

Article 37, second part: 'real equality of opportunity as between men and women for access to elective and political party office shall be guaranteed by positive action in regulating the political parties and the electoral regime'.

Article 75, section 22: 'the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women ... is of constitutional rank'.

Article 75, section 23, first part (among the areas of competence of the National Congress): 'To legislate and foster positive action measures that guarantee equal opportunity and treatment, and the full enjoyment and exercise of the rights recognized by this Constitution and by the international treaties in force on human rights, in particular with respect to women ...'.

Second transitory provision: 'The positive actions alluded to in Article 37, final paragraph, may not be less than those in force at the time this Constitution is adopted, and shall last as long as the law determines'.

The 1995 election found Argentina with new legal and political tools at its disposal. In that election, all of the original lists had at least one woman in the third slot. In 1996, the constitution of the City of Buenos Aires was passed; it is one of the most advanced bodies of law in this respect, and certainly one of the most progressive in Latin America. Since the return to democracy, men and women have taken many collective strides towards equality in our society. Yet many of the rights and political and legal instruments embodied in the new constitution of the City of Buenos Aires can only be explained by the ownership felt by and commitment of many members of the constitutional convention to the feminist movement, their other experiences, and the fact that they have regularly received updated information on comparative legislation in this area. This constitution recognizes women as *full citizens* in the context of a '*plural citizenry*' in which men and women are understood to be heterogeneous subjects with diverse dimensions and interests; in this respect, it stands in contrast to other provincial constitutions. Women are not stigmatized as mothers or wives. Nor is a list of rights presented for women as a sector or collective body—because, moreover, we are not that—but, instead, a truly egalitarian relationship is sought between the sexes in all areas, one that is respectful of the differences. In other words, the idea is to establish mechanisms to move towards *parity democracy*.

This is why it speaks of *real equality of opportunity and treatment* in both the public and private spheres, which will be sought through '*positive action*'. This presupposes acknowledging the search for *equality*

of outcomes, on the understanding that it is not attained via formal equality before the law or non-discrimination (Article 11) or through equal opportunity, since there is structural inequality, given the lack of ‘equality of initial conditions’ as Sartori states. Nonetheless, this is not a search for an equality in which everyone is the same—which is why the ‘right to be different’ is recognized (Article 11)—but, rather, one that involves ensuring that women and men are on the same footing. In Spanish we say ‘*se equiparan*’, that is, ‘they are placed on a par with one another’, ‘they are peers’, ‘they recognize one another as peers’; only those who are distinct, different, the others, those who are not equal. And here is one of the keys to democracy: it is only real among those who are different and recognize one another as peers. This constitution seeks to put *both sexes on an equal footing* in both public life, through positive action in politics and the workplace, and in private life, establishing equality in the exercise of sexual and reproductive rights and in the family.

The writ of *amparo* (Article 14) and the right to avail oneself of the Office of the Human Rights Ombudsman (Defensoría del Pueblo, Article 137), among others, are declared to be parity rights of male and female citizens, and they contain instruments to uphold these rights; but mainly, the state is required to incorporate the ‘*gender perspective*’ in all of its public policies, to formulate an ‘*Equality Plan*’ on a participatory basis (Article 38), and to *implement ‘positive action’* (Articles 11, 36, and others). Thus, the placing of women and men on an equal footing, to which the state commits itself, should aim to ensure ‘equal access’ and ‘equality in starting point’ (Article 12)—not only equal opportunity, but ‘equal treatment’, since we are seeking ‘equality of outcomes’.

The same constitution enshrines the need for ‘positive action in all entities and at all levels, which cannot be less than those now in place’ (Article 36). Accordingly, the legislature must pass legislation on the subject (Article 80, section 7) and the executive must adopt those measures ‘in all areas, at all hierarchical levels, and in all agencies’ (Article 104, section 28). Concrete positive action is also included in this constitution, explicitly referring to: the composition of the lists of candidates for the legislature, the Juntas Comunales; the composition of the Judicial Council in terms of judges and attorneys and of the list for the *jurado de enjuiciamiento* (tribunal to try a judge’s malfeasance or misfeasance) in terms of judges, attorneys, and legislators (as arises from a consistent interpretation of Articles 36, 130, 115, and 121); the list of collegial bodies designated by, or requiring the approval of, the legislature (such as, the Office of the Attorney General (Procuración General), the Office of the Auditor General, the Single Regulatory Agency of Public Services; the composition of the Judicial Council—Articles 36, 134, 136, 139, and 115; and the composition of the neighbourhood courts and of the Superior Court of Justice (Transitory clause 12(e) and Article 111).

This is a major advance in relation to the national constitution, which only provided for ‘positive action’ for the legislative branch, and for the conduct of the political parties. Here, too, it is required that the political parties take action to make effective women’s access to *leadership* positions, but it also adds to accede to ‘financial management’, which anticipates a whole debate on the financing of the political parties and on the relationship between women and men and money, and it clarifies that at all levels and in all areas’ (Article 36). In addition, the state should promote and encourage such measures designed to put women and men on an equal footing in private enterprises—as is already done in other countries of the world, which call them ‘women-friendly’ measures—when they reorganize their personnel and salary structures to ensure equality between the sexes.

The state’s obligation to incorporate a gender perspective into the design and implementation of all public policies, with special mention of education (Article 24) and the participatory preparation of

the Plan for Equality of Men and Women (Article 38), presupposes the existence of a women's policy area in the government that can coordinate movement towards real equality with all other areas of the cabinet. There are numerous precedents in Europe and Latin America, at both the national and local levels, of public policy-making incorporating a gender perspective, and the design of equality plans, as government instruments, with the involvement of various non-governmental organizations (NGOs) devoted to the issue. The provincial laws were brought forward in this decade by the effort and pressure of women. In general, laws similar to the national law were adopted, with various mistakes and one aggravating factor: they failed to consider the particularities of the provincial electoral systems. See Table 2.

Table 2: Provincial Laws Passed with Quota Provisions

Province	Law No.
Buenos Aires	11,733, November 1995
Catamarca	4,916, July 1997
Córdoba	8,365, March 1994
Corrientes	4,673, November 1992
Chaco	3,747, May 1992
Chubut	Decree 813. Adopts National Law 24,012, a decree is issued for each election. 1999.
Entre Ríos	None
Formosa	1,155, July 1995
Jujuy	None
La Pampa	1,593, December 1994
La Rioja	5,705, May 1992
Mendoza	5,888, August 1992
Misiones	3,011, April 1993
Neuquen	2,161, March 1996
Río Negro	2,642, June 1993
Salta	6,782, January 1995
San Luis	5,105, March 1997
San Juan	6,515, October 1994
Santa Fe	10,802, May 1992
Santa Cruz	2,302, November 1992
Santiago del Estero	6,286, May 1996
Tucumán	6,582, September 1994
Tierra del Fuego	408, July 1998

The adoption of laws with errors, which were not corrected afterwards by appropriate regulation, was a serious limitation in most cases. The exceptions were those provinces that had a history of women's organization and leadership, and sufficient political clout to adapt the laws and their regulation, and to wage a political battle when it came to defining the final make-up of the lists. In the provinces, women's presence on the lists continues to depend on their will, given the absence of guarantees of automatic judicial enforcement of the law. Of the 24 jurisdictions, at present, the provinces of Entre Ríos and Jujuy do not have a quota law.

Due to the pressure brought to bear by the women's movement, on 8 March 2001, President Fernando de la Rúa issued National Decree 1246/2000, regulating Law 24,012, which resolved any outstanding doubts, improved on the wording of the previous decree, and provided for future senatorial elections (henceforth, three instead of two senators would be elected per province, and in a single election).

Article 12: "The thirty percent (30%) of posts to be filled by women as prescribed by Law No. 24,012 is a minimum. In those cases in which the mathematical application of this percentage were to result in fractions less than one, the concept of minimum quantity shall be the next greater unit, and shall be governed by the table which, as Annex 1, is an integral part of this Decree."

Table 3: Minimum Number of Women on Party Lists

Seats up for election	Minimum	Seats up for election	Minimum
2	1	21	7
3	1	22	7
4	2	23	7
5	2	24	8
6	2	25	8
7	3	26	8
8	3	27	9
9	3	28	9
10	3	29	9
11	4	30	9
12	4	31	10
13	4	32	10
14	5	33	10
15	5	34	11
16	5	35	11
17	6	36	11
18	6	37	12
19	6	38	12
20	6	39	12

Evaluation of the Results of Quotas

Positive action has been implemented in Argentina since 1991. In 1994, the *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women* was made part of the national constitution. Article 4 stipulates that transitory positive action should not be considered discriminatory, and that, to the contrary, it should be promoted to attain real equality between women and men. In addition, in 1994, a paragraph was incorporated that authorizes Congress to adopt legislation to achieve real equality of opportunity and equal treatment between women and men, and, specifically, positive action.

At the national level we have implemented the 30 percent quota for deputies and senators in the national Congress; 22 of the 24 provinces also have quota laws. These laws have been applied with different results, depending on the different electoral systems, and, in addition, the fate of the women who have filled the quota-based positions has varied. Many have been disappointed by the lack of a gender commitment on the part of these women, and by styles that we thought were going to be changed with the inclusion of women, who had been excluded from traditional power practices.

Evaluating the situation ten years after these laws were first enforced, what lies behind all of this—beyond the political right of women to gain equal access to decision-making positions—is actually the backdrop to the dramatic socio-economic and human rights situation confronted by women in Argentina. This is what leads us to the conviction that, while it is true that many women may hold decision-making positions without having much of an impact, without modifying the reality of the majority of women, we also know—and this is an empirical and scientific finding—that, if there are no women in decision-making positions, it is difficult for there to be public policies, legislation, and case law that account for, modify, and are sensitive to the human rights situation of most women.

This does not mean that only women can be sensitive. Indeed, we believe that it is good and necessary that there be more men involved in the commitment to human rights, and, therefore, to parity between the sexes. Yet we also believe that the process of integrating diversity and promoting democratic participation benefits when the persons directly affected by human rights violations—those who have suffered from segregation, domination and exclusion—become the ones who explain and lead initiatives to emerge from such situations

In the 2002 shadow report to the 1979 Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), prepared by a group of Argentine NGOs, we indicated, with empirical findings, which human rights violations women continue to experience today. In general, the most critical areas are sexual and reproductive rights, economic and social rights, violations of which are felt most keenly by women, including the sexual exploitation and violence with which we are all familiar. International human rights organizations have issued repeated recommendations, including in regard to: non-punishable abortions being performed in public hospitals in dignified conditions; a gender perspective being incorporated into the national budget; value being attached to unremunerated work by women, which should be included in the national accounts; the more precise data that needs to be collected on the situation of women involved in prostitution; and the state of sexual exploitation in Argentina. By simply looking, in this assessment, at the areas in which the state has not taken action, it is clear that we must demand that the candidates in the next election—both men and women, but mainly those women who will be included in the lists via the application of the quota law—come up with solutions to these problems,

which are continuing to violate women's human rights.

In this regard, our evaluation of positive action in the legislature is favourable, not only in terms of numbers, but also because many laws—such as those on violence and reproductive health in the provinces—would not have been passed had there not been women parliamentarians committed to these issues. We also saw other advances that turned on the presence of women in the legislature, such as the incorporation in the constitution of the city of Buenos Aires of positive action at the judicial level, as well as in some executive agencies, such as the Board of Directors of Banco Ciudad, the Ombudsman, the public services regulatory agencies, and the Judicial Council.

Nonetheless, there is still a long way to go, especially in two respects. On the one hand, in the legislative branches, in addition to the two provinces that have not adopted any form of quota law, we believe that the concern that needs to be raised is linked to the debate over the electoral and political reform called for by citizens. The calling into question of 'straight ballot' voting (*la lista sábana*) in Argentina may endanger the representation of women, minorities, and the minority political parties.

Women in Argentina agree that many males in politics are the first to embrace slight electoral reform that accepts that some things change, and that does away with the d'Hont method of vote tabulation to produce a cosmetic reform. This is so, because they know that it will be the political parties that will continue to nominate the candidates, and if the party decides on the candidates using the closed mechanisms of secluded circles of power, it will not change the quality of the candidates, even though it may change the electoral system.

In the shadow report submitted to the CEDAW, the participating NGOs pointed out that where the discussion of the mechanisms for selecting the candidates really gets bogged down is within the political parties, in the way politics is financed internally, not so much in the electoral system. The tools do not change the content; changing it requires more structural changes.

Furthermore, the question of positive action in the judicial and executive branches needs to be raised once again in the Congress. In the Constitutional Convention of 1994, the quota was only included in the legislative branch and in the political parties, in Article 37; it also ended up with a vague generic clause in Article 75, indicating to the Congress the need for positive action in other areas. Few of the women members of the national Congress have introduced legislation along these lines: María Elena Barbagelatta, Diana Conti and Elisa Carrío were among the few who sought to extend positive action to the executive and judiciary. It was achieved in the constitution of the City of Buenos Aires, drawing on German laws and the equality plans of German cities. We were able to include it in the constitution of the City of Buenos Aires, but, unfortunately, at the national level there has been little progress—beyond the title of the 1998 Equality Plan—in extending positive action not only to the executive and judicial branches, but also to specific policies, and the indicators and results of those public policies.

One of our objectives at this time is to be able to find common ground on some draft language for legislation along these lines, but also in other areas. One must bear in mind that, with regard to professional schools, universities, professional councils and other areas where women play a role, there is room—with the CEDAW and the existing legislation—to propose positive action and parity, equal opportunities and equal treatment of men and women. In this context, women scored one of the greatest successes in judicial arguments, such as that put forth in the case involving the

Public Bar Association of the City of Buenos Aires, in which we challenged the lists that did not include women, by supplemental application of the Electoral Code.

Also in 2002, the Law on the Trade Union Quota was adopted. It provides: 'The lists put forth in internal trade union elections should include at least thirty percent (30%) women, unless the women members account for fewer than 30% of total members, in which case the representation may never be less than that proportion'. At the same time, in the cases of constituting collective bargaining units, women's participation is also to be at least 30 percent. The challenge is to begin actually to implement it.

Internationally, in 1995, during the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing, China, 189 governments from all over the world committed themselves to 'take measures to ensure women's equal access to and full participation in power structures and decision-making' and to 'increase women's capacity to participate in decision-making and leadership'. To attain these strategic objectives, the main action they agreed on was to establish 'the goal of gender balance in governmental bodies and committees, as well as in public administrative entities, and in the judiciary, including, *inter alia*, setting specific targets and implementing measures to substantially increase the number of women with a view to achieving equal representation of women and men, if necessary through positive action, in all governmental and public administration positions'.

In 2000, at the Beijing+5 United Nations conference, several women's organizations from different parts of the world, in coordination with the Women's Environment and Development Organization (WEDO), launched the '50-50 campaign' as a first step towards meeting the commitments assumed in Beijing in 1995 to attain balance between men and women in decision-making positions. This campaign demands that the governments work to achieve a 'minimum target of 30% representation of women in cabinet ministries and legislative bodies by 2003 and equal representation by 2005'. This is summarized in the slogan of the '50-50 by 2005' campaign, 'Get the balance right!!!' In 2000, the Instituto Social y Político de la Mujer agreed to be the focal point for this campaign in Argentina, declaring its commitment to '50-50 by 2005'.

The process to place women and men on a truly equal footing will continue its slow course. It will depend mainly on the impetus of the women's movement and on women's awareness of the tools within their reach, as well as the gender sensitivity of men and women holding positions in government and in the public administration. Implementing all of these actions entails and contributes to deepening democracy, modernizing the state and placing equality between men and women on the state, political, and social agendas. It commits the governments, and brings about greater efficiency in the public policy-making process. The latter requires considerable interaction between the state and civil society, which may occur gradually, but with a continuing tension at this time, given the weakness of social policy and the backsliding of the state in regard to social welfare programmes, together with the lack of a tradition of equality, an impoverished and in many cases inefficient, clientelist or corrupt state, and women's areas with structural difficulties when it comes to acting horizontally in order to make an impact on the highest echelons of power.

Despite these complexities, the existence of legal bases for generating change is extremely encouraging. From there, women with gender consciousness along with males committed to the equality proposals, within and outside of government, will build alliances through projects and accomplishments that bring our dreams closer to reality.