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European Languages

زبانهای اروپایی

By Marco Terrugi
19.10.2019

First International Women's Congress calls for unity and solidarity

*The following is based on a slightly modified translation by Resumen Latinoamericano,
published Sept. 21.*

The First International Women's Congress for Peace and Solidarity among Peoples, held in Caracas [Sept. 19-21], assembled representatives of 110 organizations from 23 countries from all over the world. The proposal and plans for the Congress stemmed from agreements [to hold international events by sector] reached at the São Paulo Forum, held in July in the Venezuelan capital.



Outside the First International Women's Congress, Caracas, Venezuela, Sept. 19-21

“It is one of the events in which sectors of the country conduct discussions, because within the framework of the Forum, topics are developed in a very collateral way. This

allows us to carry out and fulfill our agreements,” explained Gladys Requena, vice president of the United Socialist Party of Venezuela (PSUV) — Women’s Sector, which promoted the organization of the Congress.

This is not the first Congress held since the Forum. In August, the Workers’ Congress took place, and the Indigenous Peoples’ Congress will be held soon.

“On the one hand, this is about developing discussion and organizing each social sector,” said Requena. “On the other hand, it is about reaffirming the solidarity of the world with the revolutionary project and with the agreements aimed at condemning the unilateral sanctions and criminal blockade undertaken by U.S. imperialism against the people of Venezuela.”

Deciding to hold the Congress in Caracas was politically significant, as it was for the São Paulo Forum. “We are showing Venezuela that it is not alone, that the women of the world are following its cause and that we are here to see the reality they are living. More importantly, we are here to tell the world why Venezuelan women are defending the process of the Bolivarian Revolution,” said Gloria Inés Ramírez Muñoz, vice president for Latin America and the Caribbean of the Women’s International Democratic Federation (FDIM).

Ramírez Muñoz, representing Colombia, was present at the opening session, sharing the stage with other world leaders and representatives of the Venezuelan revolution’s political leadership, including Diosdado Cabello, president of the National Constituent Assembly. Also present on the stage was Wafi Ibrahim from Lebanon, who is the coordinator of the José Martí Arab-Latin American Solidarity Association and vice coordinator of the FDIM’s Arab region.

Ibrahim underlined the dimension of the common enemy: “All the peoples of the world who have been victims of the same policy and the same aggression adhere to this type of solidarity with fervor because no one wants any nation in the world to endure the tragedy that we in the Arab region have experienced as a result of all the plans implemented by the United States and Israel.”

Venezuelan women came from all states

Five hundred Venezuelan women attended the Congress. They included representatives of diverse political, territorial and state organizations: the PSUV, different Chavista [pro-government] parties, the Ministry of People's Power for Women, the National Constituent Assembly, peasants, commune members and women of African descent. Also participating were members of the Bolivarian Militia and military members of the Ministry of People's Power for Defense — where an organization exists to address gender inequality.

There was nationwide representation, with women coming from all 24 states in the country. It made visible both the different expressions of women's organizations and public policies. Ramírez Muñoz explained, "We are able to [offer] evidence about the situation of women's rights because the government has implemented public policies to defend women's rights."

Requena, who served as minister for women and gender equality, highlighted this point: "The Bolivarian Government promotes public policies for women's economic, political and social empowerment, as well as policies for the integral protection of women and that guarantee the lives of women and children — such as the right to breastfeed and humanized childbirth, two major programs that we are carrying out."

The International Women's Congress provided a forum where women could get acquainted with the policies developed during the years of the Chavista government and those which are still being implemented during this period of siege. Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro referred to this issue during a ceremony where he appeared with Vice President Delcy Rodríguez and Requena. He emphasized the policies implemented by the national government to meet women's needs from pregnancy and childbirth and until children attend school.

'War targets women'

Women are "the first ones to be impacted by war — in our bodies, in our territories and in our country," said Ramírez Muñoz. "Women are part of the day-to-day construction of the social fabric of this society, and as such, the central target of wars in their different forms. In Colombia, where one of the main objectives is to build peace with social justice, this

attack is expressed, for example, in the murders of social leaders and human rights leaders. Most of them are women.”

In Venezuela, Requena explained, a “multifactorial war” is taking place. Women have been targeted because of their key roles at home, in the countryside, in organizational processes, and in political and social mobilizations. Women play a central role in the popular sectors — organizing food distribution, building solidarity networks, [participating] in the Bolivarian Militia, mobilizing for electoral campaigns and [carrying out] political acts.

Requena stressed: “The right wing in Venezuela and abroad, bourgeoisies and oligarchies, have identified that everything in Venezuela is [being] sustained on women’s shoulders. We are the political target. They seek to depress us and disconnect us from the Bolivarian project. We are a target of the imperial power because the U.S. empire has identified the mobilizing strength of women.”

‘We know how to resist’

“We have proven that we know how to resist and that we have an agenda for a counteroffensive,” continued Requena. “We are manufacturing soaps, toothpastes, eco-friendly cloth diapers. We are sowing and producing corn meal. Here the empire does not find women have surrendered. Women are developing [their] creative capacities and potential for struggle.”

Ibrahim emphasized: “The U.S. policy of siege — as it is with their weapon of the economic blockade — is not only being implemented against Venezuela.” She explained that she brought her voice from Lebanon in the Middle East to “shake the hands of Venezuelan women and tell them we are with them ... [and we have] a view to developing a joint road map with them.”

“We need to coordinate actions,” stated Ibrahim. “The enemy is doing it. People who are struggling, people who have a cause, must coordinate their steps and yell at the same time and push in the same direction to reach our goal. The enemy cannot catch us divided and distanced. We have to understand each other and get closer.”

President Maduro affirmed that a joint road map is part of the government's central policy. He delivered a draft of the final statement of the Congress opposing an open war against Venezuela — a threat that comes from both the diplomatic siege by the Inter-American Treaty of Reciprocal Assistance and from actions taken by the Colombian government and its elites.

Ramírez Muñoz emphasized: “We are calling on Colombian and Venezuelan men and women not to fall into hatred and confrontation, but to strengthen and deepen our bonds of unity; to revive our joint history and roots and to denounce what is taking place at the border — and condemn the paramilitary groups there, backed by the Colombian state.”

The International Women's Congress is expected to establish a road map for actions, debates and mobilizations within the current context, which is marked by major scenarios of conflict, joint [hostile] efforts and multiple common enemies.

Additional sources: Internationalist 360° (Sept. 22), Orinoco Tribune (Sept. 20 and Sept. 26).

(Credit: Orinoco Tribune)

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