

May 23, 1997

To: DRL - Steve Coffey

From: DRL - George Lister

Subject: Sonia Picado - Costa Rican Ambassador - Women's Rights

Yesterday I was invited to the Woman's National Democratic Club (WNDC) luncheon addressed by Sonia Picado, Costa Rican Ambassador. Bra. Picado is a well known advocate of human rights, and is the former Director of the Inter-American Institute of Human Rights. She has won many awards and is currently considered a high contender for the position of U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights. She is an intelligent, authentic activist.

Picado speaks excellent English and made a lively, articulate opening presentation on women's rights in Latin America. There was a good audience response. Attendance came to around 65, including four men. During the question period I remarked that one of Latin America's major problems is the failure of most upper class women to support the rights of poor women (and men). Picado agreed immediately, although she had made no reference to that problem in her presentation. My comment was prompted by the following experience.

About twelve years ago I attended a meeting of some 150 U.S. and Latin American women, addressed by a U.S. left-wing Catholic feminist friend. She compared the rights of women in both areas. When she concluded a well dressed Brazilian woman arose and said: "Thank you very much, my dear. I found your speech very interesting, and I hope you won't be offended if I tell you that you don't really understand the difference between women's rights in the U.S. and Latin America. We Latin American women are much better off than you are. You see, my dear, we Latin American women have

servants".

Obviously it had never occurred to our Brazilian visitor that the discussion included all women, not just upper class women. This problem of "class alienation" or "marginalization", as it is sometimes called, is so deeply embedded and accepted in Latin America that it is seldom mentioned. We, of course, have many millions of poor people in the U.S., but they are considered to be an integral part of our country and society. Not so in Latin America.

This is a major human rights problem in Latin America and I suggest that, after some careful thought and consideration, we begin to include it in our Human Rights Reports.

cc: John Shattuck, Gare Smith, Peter Eicher, John Bergeron
G - Jeff Neer, Theresa Loar
ARA - John Hamilton, Harriet Babbitt