

***”WE THE PEOPLES OF THE UNITED NATIONS  
DETERMINED (...) to reaffirm faith in fundamental  
human rights, in the dignity and worth of the  
human person, in the equal rights of **men** and  
**women** and of nations large and small”***

UN Charter Preamble

Our first encounter with the American woman delegate and the British women alternates was neither pleasant nor reassuring. Miss Gildersleeve invited us to a very modest tea, which most of my colleagues were wise enough not to attend. During it she started to ask me questions about my qualifications since, as she put it, she wished to place me.. To this I merely answered: Try Percy B. Martin's "Who's Who in Latin America". She went on to say that she hoped I was not going to ask for anything for women in the Charter since that would be a very vulgar thing to do. I informed her that on the contrary the need to defend the rights of women was the main reason why the Brazilian Government had put me on the delegation, Miss Wilkinson explained that she was on the King's Privy Council, that she was the first woman to gain that distinction and that nothing further was needed since it proved that women had arrived. "I am afraid not" I had to tell her "it only means that you have arrived. Furthermore when I was last in England Miss Bondfield was already a member of the Privy Council."

“Perhaps in the backward countries where women have no vote and few rights of any kind, spectacular feminism might still be necessary”

- *Virginia Gildersleeve*



## **Short History of the Commission on the Status of Women<sup>1</sup>**

### **1946: Birth of the Commission on Status of Women**

United Nations commitments to the advancement of women began with the signing of the UN Charter in San Francisco in 1945. Of the 160 signatories, only four were women - Minerva Bernardino (Dominican Republic), Virginia Gildersleeve (United States), Bertha Lutz (Brazil) and Wu Yi-Fang (China) – but they succeeded in inscribing women's rights in the founding document of the United Nations, which reaffirms in its preamble “faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity of the human person, in the equal rights of men



