



Número 9, Año 2, Noviembre - Enero 1997-98

| Número del mes | [Anteriores](#) | [Contribuciones](#) | [Sobre la Revista](#) | [Sitios de Interés](#) | [Directorio](#) | [Ediciones Especiales](#) |

## Mexican Women's Movment Makes Internet Work for Women

by: [Erika Smith](#)  
[erika@laneta.apc.org](mailto:erika@laneta.apc.org)

"If I'd known I was going to live this nightmare, I would have let him rape me." Claudia Rodriguez spent over a year in prison for the homicide of her would-be rapist, awaiting trial and the possibility of 15 years in prison for her act of self-defense. Women's organizations and activists in Mexico mobilized support for her case, declaring her innocence and recognizing the horrible legal precedent a guilty verdict would represent for all women and their possibility to defend themselves from assailants:

"As long as Claudia is a prisoner, we are all prisoners."

CIMAC, Centro de Informacion de la Mujer, A.C. took up Claudia's cause in their weekly e-mail news bulletin of in-depth articles on women in Mexico. The bulletin is directed to their reporter network of over 100 women working in radio, television and print in Mexico, as well as other organizations and individuals, including the women's e-mail activist network Modemmujer. Modemmujer sent out Claudia's words and situation over Internet to hundreds of women and women's organizations in Mexico, Latin America, and North America, with calls for letters to the President, the Secretary of State, and the Department of Justice. Mobilization by women's organizations in Mexico City resulted in women flooding the hearing process and public protests. Letters were sent from all over Mexico, Cuba, Argentina, Colombia, Bolivia, Canada, and the United States. Claudia was freed, although the verdict review stated that she had used "excessive force" in her self-defense, and the judge could have sentenced her to an additional five years in jail.

Internet did not free Claudia; her lawyers, community support and the actions of the women's movement in Mexico and internationally did. Internet is not a panacea for women's networking, information and communication needs, but, at least in Mexico, Internet now plays a key role in women's strategizing.

Most of the women's organizations in Mexico got their introduction to Internet via LaNeta, the sister node of the Association for Progressive Communications (APC) in Mexico. LaNeta, which is Mexican slang for "truth", provides internet service for Mexican civil society: non-governmental organizations and activists working in areas of human rights, environment, fair trade, sustainable development and women's issues.

LaNeta forms part of APC's international Women's Networking Support Program, and has promoted the use of Internet for the women's movement in Mexico since LaNeta's beginning in 1993.

Women's organizations played an important role in LaNeta's formation and one of the first additional staff hired at LaNeta - after administrator and tech director -- was that of a women's on-line networking promoter.

The position was jointly conceived by LaNeta and key women's organizations already on-line in LaNeta, and was also developed to better implement the goals of the APC Women's Networking Support Program.

The Women's Program provides women with examples of women techies, and demystifies what is frequently considered a "male" technology with hands-on training using examples of women's networking and non-technical language. The idea is not to stun trainees with how much you know about the Internet, but for them to stun you with their plans for it.

The APC Women's Program is very aware that no matter how interested, supportive and committed male techies may be to women's use of information and communications technology, there is nothing like the example of a women techie to break down stereotypes and encourage women to get involved. For this reason, the Women's Program insisted on maintaining an all-women tech team in the Communications Center that APC set up for the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing. Forty women from 17 countries speaking 24 languages staffed the NGO hub for communication with the rest of the world during this historic event, motivating hundreds of women to explore the possibilities of Internet for the first time, and offering 1,500 women temporary accounts and user support.

In Mexico, LaNeta has also realized that our predominantly male team adds to the myth that ours is a male technology by default. As a user support person at LaNeta, I have received countless calls from both women and men, who, upon hearing my woman's voice say: "Oh, but I asked to be connected to someone who can help me with a TECHNICAL problem". I assure them they've reached the right person, and yet they are persistent: "It really is a technical question that I have." It is truly difficult for many people to even conceive that a woman can be a techie.. As a result, in LaNeta we have decided to follow APC's positive portrayal of women techies in China and hire women tech staff. We have learned that women's spaces and women users are not enough to shape and transform macho cyberspace.

The APC Women's Program recognizes the gender gap in the use of and access to information and communication technologies worldwide, and has lobbied for women's participation in policy decision-making in this area, at national government levels, with financing institutions like the World Bank, and at the UN.

The APC Women's Program also recognizes that Internet use and skill varies greatly in different countries, depending on countries' infrastructure and telecommunication costs. For example in Latin America, personal Internet use (although on the rise in Mexico) is far less common than organizational use, because only institutions have sufficient capital to afford a telephone line and computer. Surfing may also be limited depending on ISP capabilities and charges, as well as local and long distance telephone costs. The Women's Program, therefore, is dedicated to making sure that women's information and networking flow via the lowest common technical denominator -- e-mail -- so as not to exclude anyone. The Program recognizes that despite our splashy world of java and live jive sound on WWW, most women's networking on Internet still gets done with the basic text tools of e-mail, lists and newsgroups. Modemmujer in Mexico is an excellent example of just that.

Modemmujer made its debut with the United Nations' Fourth World Conference on Women in China in 1995. It set up an e-mail correspondent network throughout Mexico to provide women with full coverage of the women's conference in Spanish. Three participants in Beijing at the APC Comm Center sent daily reports and commentaries on the NGO and official meetings to ModemMujer headquarters in Mexico City, which, in turn, sent out daily bulletins to correspondents in the states, who then plugged into fax trees, local newspapers, radio and community groups. The information chain also worked in reverse, with women in China learning of activities, protests and answering specific questions coming in from Mexico.

Using only an e-mail list and APC conferences, Modemmujer maintains a personalized relationship with approximately 400 women's organizations, activists and academics in Latin America, keeping women up to date on the Mexican women's movement and its counterparts in the South. Despite the geographic distance separating women and the frequently impersonal nature of internet exchange, Modemmujer is intent on creating a safe, intimate, affectionate personal space for women to explore what the Internet has to offer them. Rather than flooding low-resource organizations with an overwhelming quantity of content, Modemmujer offers a list of events, announcements, documents and analyses from the NGO and academic women's community. Organizations can request that documents be sent directly to them via e-mail or consult

the "modemmujer.mex" APC conference.

Modemmujer and the APC Women's Networking Support Program believe in making information-sharing easy and low-cost. Both networks encourage women's use of information and communication technology tools, offering step-by-step instructions to women on how to use newsgroups or surf, or simply on how to receive an attached file.

On May 28, 1996, International Day of Action for Women's Health, the Mexico City Women's Health Network held a public tribunal in defense of women's reproductive health, where, for the first time in Mexican history, individual women collectively filed suit against the Mexican State's health care apparatus. Charges of involuntary sterilization and greivous medical malpractice resulting in child or maternal death were heard by a jury of experts in human rights and reproductive health, a packed auditorium, and in APC conferences across Latin America. Modemmujer began the search for claimants and publicity of the event in local LaNeta conferences and, in April, via a simple Tribunal web site. As the individual cases and determinations were heard, ModemMujer posted analysis and results in APC conferences and to a mailing list of women activists in non-APC nodes. ModemMujer received responses from outlying regions in Mexico and Latin America reporting how the Tribunal initiative was re-packaged for other media as well as plans to reproduce this creative and informative style of protest in their countries.

In the aftermath of Beijing, these are just some examples of how the women's movement has mobilized to ensure that the Mexican government lives up to all its signed commitments at the Women's Conference. Women's organizations across the country are taking a specialized week-long course developed by the Coordinating Teams for Follow-Up of the Cairo and Beijing UN Conference Agreements on how to do lobby and advocacy work to exert pressure on the Mexican government and the new National Women's Program.. Modemmujer, CIMAC and other women's activists helped develop a communications module where communication and information networking and strategizing via Internet are a key focus... The Mexican women's movement is now fully aware of the power of the Internet and the need for women to participate in shaping it.

**CIMAC:** [cimac@laneta.apc.org](mailto:cimac@laneta.apc.org)

**ModemMujer:** [modemmujer@laneta.apc.org](mailto:modemmujer@laneta.apc.org)

**APC Women's Networking Support Program:** [apcwomen@laneta.apc.org](mailto:apcwomen@laneta.apc.org)

**LaNeta and APC:** <http://www.laneta.apc.org>

#### **About the Author:**

Erika Smith has a Masters in Latin American Studies, from the University of Wisconsin, Madison. She has been involved in women's electronic networking in Mexico since 1991, and is currently the APC Women's Networking Support Program Coordinator at LaNeta.

[Back](#)



---

[Regreso al índice de esta edición](#)

---

