

VI. PERMANENT OBSERVERS

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Permanent observer status in the Organization of American States was established by the General Assembly at its first regular session, held in San José, Costa Rica, in 1971 (AG/RES. 50 (I-O/71)). The permanent observers participate in the Organization's activities and contribute to its programs. As of the date of preparation of this report, there were 59 permanent observers in the Organization.

The Office of External Relations is in charge of day-to-day activities associated with the permanent observers. Through informational meetings, exchange of documents and special events, the Office of External Relations promotes active participation and collaboration by these countries in the work of the General Secretariat.

There are now a total of 59 permanent observers to the OAS. Two new states, Slovenia and Nigeria, obtained permanent observer status with the Organization in 2003, followed by the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg in February 2004. As a result, the current permanent observers are: Algeria, Angola, Armenia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Egypt, Equatorial Guinea, Estonia, the European Union, Finland, France, Georgia, Germany, Ghana, Grand Duchy of Luxembourg, Greece, the Holy See, Hungary, India, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Japan, Kazakhstan, Korea, Latvia, Lebanon, Morocco, the Netherlands, Nigeria, Norway, Pakistan, the Philippines, Poland, Portugal, Qatar, Romania, the Russian Federation, Saudi Arabia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sri Lanka, Sweden, Switzerland, Thailand, Tunisia, Turkey, Ukraine, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, Yemen, and Yugoslavia.

During the period covered by this report, the Organization received contributions in cash totaling approximately US\$12 million from the following permanent observer countries: Denmark, the European Union, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, the Holy See, Italy, Japan, Korea, the Netherlands, Norway, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey, and the United Kingdom. The OAS also received significant contributions in kind of close to US\$500,000 from France, Israel, Korea, and Spain. The main areas supported by these countries included democracy, human rights, settlement of disputes, the fight against drug trafficking, and sustainable development and environment, among others. The OER hosted a number of donation ceremonies in public recognition of the support provided by permanent observers to the Organization's work, and coordinated the distribution of the respective press releases.

With respect to visits by senior government authorities of permanent observer countries, special mention should be made of the visit of the President of Italy, Carlo Azeglio Ciampi, to the Organization's headquarters, where he addressed a protocol session of the Permanent Council. At that time, the Italian Head of State spoke optimistically of the dialogue undertaken by the European Union and the OAS. As the first Italian head of state to visit the Organization, President Ciampi took the opportunity to announce that Italy would once again have a permanent mission to the OAS.

This period also saw the first consultations between the OAS and the European Union, organized by this office and dealing with a variety of Western Hemisphere topics that could benefit from greater cooperation between the two entities. The European Union delegation was headed by Italy's Vice Minister of External Relations, Mario Baccini, and its Director General for the Americas, Ambassador Luigi Ortona. Ireland, which was to succeed Italy in the presidency of the European Union, was represented by Patrick Walshe, Assistant Secretary General of his country's

foreign office. Representatives of the European Commission and the Council of the European Union also attended.

Another important event organized by the OER during the year was the high-level meeting between the Secretary General of the Council of Europe, Walter Schwimmer, and the Secretary General and Assistant Secretary General of the OAS. The main purpose of this meeting was to establish contact and exchange information on topics of mutual interest, such as human rights, combating drugs, corruption, terrorism, and strengthening democracy.

The OER also maintains and regularly updates its web page on permanent observers, which includes information and documentation on the status of permanent observer, detailed information on each observer country, and general data on observers' contributions and their participation in the Organization's activities. During the period covered by this report, the office produced a Spanish version of the web page, which had previously been available only in English.

In close cooperation with the technical areas, the office also prepared and distributed a folder with detailed information on the financing needs of technical cooperation projects administered by the General Secretariat, for consideration by the governments of observer countries.