

SECRETARIAT FOR POLITICAL AFFAIRS

Established by Executive Order 05-13 Rev. 1, the Secretariat for Political Affairs has three departments: the Department of Crisis Prevention and Special Missions, the Department for the Promotion of Governance, the Department for the Promotion of Democracy.

Department of Crisis Prevention and Special Missions

The main function of the Department of Crisis Prevention and Special Missions (DPCME) is to assist the Secretary General in preventing and responding to any political-institutional crisis that may or could arise in the region. To that end, the Department endeavors to combine the institution's capacity for political analysis with its capacity for preventing, defusing, and ultimately, resolving crises and conflicts. As part of that effort, it is developing a method for analyzing multiple scenarios. It is intended to serve as a tool enabling the DPCME to do a political assessment of a variety of situations, using quantitative and qualitative indicators. The ultimate objective is to be able to recommend courses of action to the Secretary General.

The DPCME organized two seminars in the area of institution building: the first in the Dominican Republic and the second in Santiago, Chile. The purpose of these events was to present and examine the lessons that the OAS and its member states have learned from their experiences, with a view to preserving and strengthening democratic institutions and promoting dialogue about the opportunities, challenges, and future prospects that await the Organization with regard to crisis prevention, management, and resolution.

In response to a request from the Nicaraguan authorities and in keeping with the provisions of the Inter-American Democratic Charter and the OAS Charter, in 2006 the OAS Secretary General deployed a lengthy mission to monitor the development of the election process in that country. The Secretary General's Special Envoy, Mr. Gustavo Fernández, headed up a Mission composed of a high-level political and technical team and 185 international observers from more than 20 OAS member states. This comprehensive electoral observation mission came in the aftermath of the political-institutional crisis that struck the country one year earlier. For ten months, the OAS followed, *in situ*, the political, juridical, and technical aspects of the process to elect regional, legislative, and executive authorities. It also facilitated dialogue across a broad spectrum of society by accompanying the national authorities and the Nicaraguan people in their quest to build understanding in the face of the political and technical challenges inherent in the process.

The OAS Secretary General also continued to provide his support to the Ecuadorian Government so as to ensure the stability of the democratic system of government and an orderly electoral process. The Secretary General responded to an invitation received from officials at the Supreme Court to commemorate the one-year anniversary of its re-establishment in 2005, following the political-institutional crisis that Ecuador experienced. Mrs. Sonia Picado, the OAS Secretary General's Special Envoy, participated in activities that examined the progress made toward strengthening the judicial system as one of the pillars of a democratic system and the challenges that lie ahead. OAS stewardship of the electoral process was enhanced with the appointment of Mr. José Antonio Viera-Gallo as the OAS Secretary General's Special Envoy to assist in the

electoral observation efforts and to help the actors involved with their efforts to find mutual understanding in the face of the political and technical challenges that the process posed. The OAS' assistance extended to the authorities-elect of the newly elected Government, even before they took office. This was done through post-election (or exploratory) missions to make available the OAS General Secretariat's assistance on political matters.

During this period the Department followed the proceedings of Bolivia's Constituents Assembly, under the terms of an agreement that the OAS Secretary General and the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Bolivia signed on April 20, 2006. That agreement established the Special Mission of Support to the Constitutional and Autonomies Process, whose objective was to provide technical and policy-related assistance to the Bolivian Government. The OAS provided assistance on techniques of legislating and techniques of parliamentary dialogue and negotiation for Assembly members.

In 2006, the OAS Mission to Support the Peace Process in Colombia (MAPP/OEA) participated in 14 demobilizations of the *Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia* (AUC). During the period covered in this report, the MAPP/OEA: (i) confirmed the dismantlement of the AUCs' military structure; (ii) followed the law-and-order situation in various regions of the country where the AUC were a presence prior to their demobilization; and (iii) verified the reinsertion of over 30,000 former AUC combatants. The Mission also began to monitor enforcement of Law 975 (Justice and Peace Act), the legal framework applicable to the former AUC combatants demobilized in the Peace Process that the Colombian Government is spearheading with this group of armed irregulars. Finally, in 2006 the MAPP/OEA completed implementation of its pilot project in the municipality of Tierralta, Córdoba, in which it trained over 50 community leaders as "conciliators in equity," to enable them to be instrumental in finding peaceful solutions to conflicts within their respective communities.

Through the Peace Fund, the Department of Crisis Prevention and Special Missions also continued its international political facilitation, particularly in relation to the territorial differendum between Belize and Guatemala. Through the Secretary General's Special Envoy for Belize and Guatemala, the GS/OAS has been facilitating the negotiations being conducted under the "Agreement on a framework of negotiation and confidence-building measures" that the governments of Belize and Guatemala signed on September 5, 2005.

The Office of the OAS General Secretariat in the Adjacency Zone is conducting a series of verifications and activities to provide assistance to a number of institutions in Belize and Guatemala, including the armed forces. Projects are being conducted that serve to promote the integration of the communities within the Adjacency Zone. Community-resettlement projects are also underway.

The Central American Program for Strengthening Democratic Dialogue (PCA) continued to be implemented during this reporting period. Its primary purpose is to build institutional capacity and strengthen local, national, and subregional strategies to facilitate political dialogue and establish mechanisms to manage conflict within the Central American countries. The PCA's chief focus of attention was on cultivating institutional venues to deal with security-related threats to governance, and on fostering national and regional vehicles enabling cooperation

between the authorities and the organized citizenry. This was the backdrop of the forum on “Democratic Governance, Citizen Security and State-Civil Society Collaboration,” held in Panama from April 19 through 21, 2006. This forum brought together ministers of public security and safety, lawmakers from the region charged with security-related issues, PARLACEN and the SICA’s consultative committee, as well as recognized experts of prestigious civil organizations.

The program on Rural Judicial Facilitators in Nicaragua completed its first phase in 2006 and is now being expanded to include other Central American countries. The program’s goal is to make access to justice more readily available to citizens living in Nicaragua’s remotest rural areas. The initial phase of the program involved 68 municipalities in central Nicaragua and along its Atlantic coast, home to over 345,000 people. The Rural Judicial Facilitators program, being carried out in coordination with Nicaragua’s Supreme Court, has put into place a network of nearly 50 duly trained judicial facilitators.

Department for the Promotion of Governance

The Secretary General created the Department for the Promotion of Governance in 2006 to strengthen governance by cultivating a democratic citizenry. With this goal in mind, a work plan was approved, as were a number of products that will be produced under four general projects. The following is a summary of the progress made on these projects in 2006 and of other activities that the Department carried out.

- **Right to Identity and Citizenship Building**

One of the goals that the Department set was to “begin a hemispheric dialogue among experts and policy-makers to promote the right to identity as one of the elements essential to the exercise of other rights and to put this topic on the policy agenda of the member countries.” Accordingly, a program was devised on the right to identity in Latin America; a working relationship was established with the Latin American Council on Civil Registration, Identity and Vital Statistics [Consejo Latinoamericano de Registros Civiles y Estadísticas Vitales] (CLARCIEV); working missions were sent to Bolivia, Colombia, Brazil, and Peru; meetings were held with permanent representatives of 13 member states, and preparation of projects and activities about identity and citizen participation got underway.

The most important achievement for this issue in 2006 was that the OAS, the IDB, and UNICEF signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on Universal Civil Registration. The MoU establishes the terms of cooperation among the three organizations and the bases for conducting joint activities.

In the English-speaking Caribbean, the Department continued to build up institutional capacities in the area of civil records, including the introduction of a computerized civil registration system in Saint Vincent and the Grenadines in March. Significant headway was made on the program to computerize vital records in Dominica, and two cooperation agreements were concluded with Antigua and Barbuda. A study was also completed that compares the civil records systems in the

region. In June, Department personnel traveled to Haiti to see firsthand the civil registration system in that country, with a view to launching a project to modernize it.

- Citizen Participation and Transparency: Access to Public Information

The Department promoted analysis of the issue of access to public information as one of the key elements of democratic governance, as well as a mechanism for citizen participation. Over the course of the year, meetings were held with experts and organizations active in this area. The Department also participated in the special meeting of the Permanent Council on access to public information, where it gave a presentation on how vital access to public information is for democratic governance. Finally, in November, the Department had an opportunity to co-sponsor two events on this issue: one in Chile and one in Dominica. It gave presentations at both.

- The Challenges That Decentralization Poses for Democratic Governance: Current Situation and Prospects

This program serves as technical secretariat of the Inter-American Network on Decentralization, Local Government and Citizen Participation (RIAD), established to help achieve the commitments made at the Summits. In that capacity, it has worked with the Chair of the Network, held by Brazil, and with the four vice chairs, held by Chile, Costa Rica, Jamaica, and Mexico. The emphasis has been on sharing information and coordinating with other offices of the General Secretariat that are conducting programs in local governance, such as the Executive Secretariat for Integral Development. Internal coordination continues to combine this issue with others that the Department addresses.

The decentralization program has also started to examine the relationship between decentralization and governance. It has devoted special emphasis to strengthening relations with the actors instrumental in the decentralization process by participating in key events on the issue and circulating information on the OAS' role in it. It also provided assistance for the June 2006 signing of a framework agreement for cooperation between the General Secretariat and the *Federación Latinoamericana de Ciudades, Municipios y Asociaciones* [Latin American Federation of Cities, Municipalities and Associations] (FLACMA).

- Access to Justice and the Inter-American Program on Education for Democratic Values and Practices

During this reporting period, the Department did the *travaux préparatoire* to put together a document on the status of access to justice in the countries of the region. Working in partnership with the Department of Education and Culture, it supported execution of the Inter-American Program on Education for Democratic Values and Practices. It also formed a steering group of ministerial representatives, held the first meeting of the Inter-American Program's Advisory Board, in Bogotá, April 17 – 19, 2006; created a Web site for the Program and launched it in June 2006; organized an International Seminar on Best Practices in Citizenship Education, held in Mexico City in July 2006; and produced two issues of the Program's e-bulletin.

Department for the Promotion of Democracy

The election-related activities that the Department for the Promotion of Democracy (DPD) conducts are in response to a combination of various mandates, all calculated to make elections in the Hemisphere more transparent, effective, and efficient, and to ensure that all citizens' political rights are respected in those elections. Accordingly, the Department has specialized in promoting and supporting stronger electoral systems and institutions. It also helps ensure that the elections held are transparent and credible. It does this through its Electoral Observation Missions (MOE) in the Organization's member countries.

What made the year 2006 remarkable in the Hemisphere was the number of electoral processes staged. The OAS was a presence in many of these elections, as an observer and/or supplier of advisory services and technical assistance. In 2006, the OAS deployed 13 electoral observation missions to 11 of its member states. These missions involved a large team of international observers and election specialists. The following are the Electoral Observation Missions conducted between March and December 2006:

- Bolivia: Elections for the Constituents Assembly (July 2, 2006)
- Nicaragua: Elections in the northern and southern Atlantic coastal regions (March 5, 2006)
- Colombia: Legislative elections (March 12, 2006) and presidential elections (May 28, 2006)
- El Salvador: Municipal and congressional elections (March 12, 2006)
- Peru: Presidential and legislative elections (April 9, 2006 and June 4, 2006)
- Dominican Republic: Legislative and municipal elections (May 16, 2006)
- Guyana: Presidential and legislative elections (August 28, 2006)
- Ecuador: Presidential and legislative elections (October 15, 2006 and November 26, 2006)
- Panama Referendum on the expansion of the Panama Canal (October 22, 2006)
- Peru: Regional and municipal elections (November 19, 2006)
- Venezuela: Presidential elections (December 3, 2006)
- Saint Lucia: General elections (December 11, 2006)

In the area of technical assistance, the DPD continued to develop and support initiatives aimed at enhancing the transparency, efficiency, and credibility of the electoral processes. To accomplish that objective, the electoral area provided electoral authorities in various member countries with assistance in the following areas:

- Institution building
- Modernization of electoral systems
- Automation of electoral processes
- Modernization of civil registers
- Civic education and encouragement of citizen participation
- Analysis and investigation
- Promotion of horizontal cooperation

- Colombia

In 2006, the program of Technical Assistance to the National Registry of Vital Statistics of Colombia, in cooperation with Colombia's National Data Processing Management Office [*Gerencia Nacional de Informática*], did follow-up and monitoring work that equipped the National Registry with a tool for constant evaluation of procedures, installed infrastructure and other important processes employed during the practice exercises and the elections in 2006.

- Ecuador

The support provided to Ecuador's Supreme Electoral Tribunal (TSE), which began in 2006 and continued into 2007, features products and services intended to enable the TSE's internal procedures to function to maximum effect and to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of the electoral procedures. They include development of software to standardize the data processing platform, support to implement the program enabling Ecuadorians abroad to vote, application of programs that relay voting results at higher speeds, and training of the TSE's data processing staff.

- Guatemala

The OAS and the IIDH/CAPEL have partnered with Guatemala's TSE since 2005, working on the introduction of the approved election reforms, institution building for the TSE, and coordination with international cooperation. The activities conducted in 2006 focused on strengthening the TSE in the area of data processing systems for the voter roll and for purging the voter roll, informative campaigns, updating the electoral map, a contact plan and plan for heightening awareness of the second-generation electoral reforms, a plan for publicizing the 2007 election process, a plan for selecting and training the persons who will man the polling stations, support with election planning and logistics, advisory services on the vote tabulation system, transmission of results, and assistance during the post-election activities.

- Haiti

In 2006, the OAS Electoral Technical Assistance Program in Haiti (ETAPH) continued to provide assistance to electoral authorities and helped mount the presidential, legislative, municipal, and local elections held at various times during the year, mainly by assisting the Provisional Electoral Council (CEP) with data processing and by helping with the tabulation, transmission, and announcement of the election results.

- Honduras

In 2006, the Program to Assist the Honduran Electoral System conducted, among other activities, study workshops, a review and analysis of the Law on Elections and Political Organizations, within the framework of the primaries and presidential elections in 2005. It also provided input for the administrative restructuring of the TSE, which gave it a new organizational structure, reshuffled staff into new positions, and produced a list of training needs.

- Paraguay

Through the Program to Modernize the Civil Registry of Paraguay (MORECIV), the OAS is helping Paraguay's Ministry of Justice and Labor to standardize civil registration practices using cutting edge records-management software.

- Other regional activities

One of the activities that the DPD conducted with election authorities in the Hemisphere was the IV Inter-American Meeting of Electoral Authorities, held in San Salvador, El Salvador, September 12 and 13, 2006. The themes of the meeting were “The Goals and Challenges of Electoral Observation Initiatives” and “Speed, Quality and Reliability in the Systems Used to Relay Election Results.” During that meeting, the reactivated Web site for the OAS-administered *Red Interamericana de Procesos Electorales* [Inter-American Network of Electoral Processes] (*RIPE*) was introduced. It features relevant information on electoral processes and bodies in the region.

As part of the process of consolidating the theory, method, and practice of electoral observation, significant progress was made in 2006 on an initiative titled “Systematization and Standardization of an Electoral Observation Method for the OAS.” This effort seeks to develop a rigorous and objective methodological framework for electoral observation that will allow the Organization to improve and professionalize the procedures and practices it employs in observing electoral processes in the Hemisphere and systematizing the follow-up to the recommendations that the OAS makes as part of every Electoral Observation Mission.

As part of its effort to consolidate and improve the practice of election observation, in 2006 the DPD also collaborated and interacted with counterpart agencies in the United Nations, the European Union, and with the Carter Center, and participated in events such as the meeting on Principles of International Election Observation, sponsored by the Commonwealth Secretariat in May, and a workshop that the Carter Center organized in November 2006 on the subject of “Developing a Methodology for Observing Electronic Voting Technologies.”