

**DECLARATION OF PANAMA ON THE INTER-AMERICAN CONTRIBUTION TO
THE DEVELOPMENT AND CODIFICATION OF INTERNATIONAL LAW**

(Adopted at the sixth plenary session, held on June 5, 1996)

THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY,

CONSIDERING:

That the Charter of the Organization of American States establishes that international law is the standard of conduct of states in their reciprocal relations;

That international order consists essentially of respect for the personality, sovereignty, and independence of states, and the faithful fulfillment of obligations derived from treaties and other sources of international law;

That the Organization of American States is the principal and irreplaceable forum in which states, on an equal footing, adopt legal provisions in both public and private international law to govern their relations at the hemispheric level;

That this has allowed the development of a rich regional legal heritage, which has been a valuable contribution by the Organization of American States to the consolidation of a peaceful, just, and equitable international order;

That full respect for the rule of law, nationally and internationally, is vital to the exercise of representative democracy, which is an essential purpose of the Inter-American system, and in this sense additional legal instruments should be developed to further strengthen democracy in the Hemisphere;

That the contribution of the inter-American legal system to the establishment of important principles of general international law has been recognized by the world community, notably the development of inter-American rules concerning human rights protection, the application of the principle of nonintervention, the establishment of procedures for peaceful settlement of disputes, the development of principles concerning the right to asylum and of rules on the law of the sea, the strengthening of judicial cooperation, the development and codification of private international law, and the creation of institutions to finance and promote economic and social development;

That, more recently, there have been noteworthy legal contributions concerning hemispheric solidarity and inter-American cooperation for the protection of minors, the prevention of violence against women, efforts against corruption, the war on terrorism, and the waging of a common battle against drugs;

That the formulation and development of inter-American international law in the framework of the Organization encourages cooperation and mutual understanding among different national legal systems as well as between the civil and common law systems represented in the Hemisphere;

That inter-American legal development is a priority undertaking that should be intensified in light of the decision by the heads of state and government meeting in Miami in 1994 in support of peace, democracy, development, economic integration, and social justice;

That this will require a search for innovative legal solutions to meet the new challenges and demands arising from the commonality of interests, the increasing circulation of people, increased trade, the existence of common threats to our societies, concerns relating to indigenous populations, and the environment;

That the Secretary General of the Organization of American States has presented an important document entitled "The Law in a New Inter-American Order," which assesses the inter-American system's contribution to the governance of international relations, analyzes legal issues in our region, and recommends steps to achieve greater efficiency in the legal area, and which the Permanent Council of the Organization and the Inter-American Juridical Committee have received with interest;

That we are living in the United Nations Decade of International Law (1990-1999), an era in which the need for the progressive development and codification of international law has been underscored; and

That it is necessary for the member states to reaffirm their full support for the progressive development and codification of international law, for dissemination of information thereon in the framework of the Organization of American States, and for measures allowing greater inter-American legal cooperation,

DECLARES:

1. Its renewed and most staunch commitment to continue promoting the progressive development and codification of inter-American international law in the framework of the Organization of American States as a suitable way to strengthen relations of peace and solidarity among the states of the Americas, with full respect for their sovereignty and the principle of nonintervention.
2. Its firm belief that the inter-American legal heritage should be preserved and enriched on the basis of the Charter of the Organization of American States and in light of new challenges and goals in our region, so that it will reflect the ongoing cooperation between the two legal systems operating in the Hemisphere.
3. Its profound conviction that international law is the standard of conduct for states in their reciprocal relations, and that the Organization of American States is the forum best suited for the development, negotiation, and adoption of inter-American legal norms.
4. Its recognition of the work undertaken by the various bodies of the Organization on the proposal and preparation of inter-American legal provisions, emphasizing the need for ongoing cooperation and coordination among the Permanent Council, the Inter-American Juridical Committee, and the General Secretariat.
5. Its appreciation to the Secretary General for presenting the document "The Law in a New Inter-American Order," which should be studied by the competent bodies of the Organization.

6. Its resolve to support initiatives aimed at legally reinforcing the institutions of the member states and their cooperative efforts in their struggle against the various scourges afflicting our peoples.
7. Its conviction that, with a view to the growing integration of our countries, it is necessary to intensify the development of private international law and the harmonization of national laws so that they will not hinder the free movement of persons and goods but facilitate regional trade.
8. Its commitment to the legal development of the purposes and principles set forth in the Charter of the Organization of American States.
9. Its determination to move forward with the adoption of legal instruments to promote inter-American cooperation in preserving and protecting the environment.
10. Its certainty that the challenges of today require not only the development of international law through international treaties but also the adaptation by each state of national law to international agreements in force.
11. Its conviction that ties of coordination and cooperation between the Organization of American States and other international organizations, the United Nations in particular, must be strengthened in the area of the progressive development and codification of international law.
12. Its intent that the Organization of American States, through courses, seminars, studies, and publications on international law and judicial cooperation, continue to perform an important task in providing training and information jurists, diplomats, scholars, and officials across the region.
13. Its interest in promoting the broadest possible awareness of the inter-American legal system and, to that end, in studying innovative and cost-effective ways of disseminating this information so that the system will be fully understood and effectively applied in national legal systems.
14. Its approval of the reorganization of the Secretariat for Legal Affairs of the General Secretariat, which is being assigned responsibility for all General Secretariat activities related to the progressive development and codification of international law, its dissemination, and legal and judicial cooperation among the states.
15. Its decision to request the Inter-American Juridical Committee to review its work approach and its agenda with a view to playing a more active role in the legal issues entrusted to it by the Organization, with access to the resources it needs to carry out its responsibilities.
16. Its decision that the Permanent Council, through its Committee on Juridical and Political Affairs, promote procedures for more effective cooperation and coordination among the various bodies of the Organization on legal matters.
17. That this declaration shall be called the "Declaration of Panama on the Inter-American Contribution to the Development and Codification of International Law."

