



2008

The Year in Review



Organization of
American States

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2008: Progress and Challenges

Message from the OAS Secretary General



In 2008—a year that marked the 60th anniversary of the Organization of American States (OAS)—the countries of the Americas reinforced the central pillars of their cooperation and rose to meet new challenges in the region.

On April 30, 1948, 21 countries signed the OAS Charter in Bogotá, Colombia, sealing a pact to strengthen peace and security, promote democracy, and advance solidarity, based on respect for the sovereignty of each nation. Although the global political context has changed profoundly since then, the essence of our partnership remains constant. Today ours is a more diverse and more solid institution, one that draws strength from its ability to adapt to change and from the member states' ongoing commitment to work together to advance common goals.

In the past year, we made progress in our efforts to reduce poverty and promote economic development, consolidate our democracies, confront threats to hemispheric security, and defend and protect the rights of our citizens. This report summarizes some of the key accomplishments in these areas.

Despite the burgeoning financial crisis during the latter part of the year, the economies of Latin America and the Caribbean continued to

grow in 2008. Strong growth rates in the past six years, combined with sound public policies adopted by many countries, have had a significant positive impact: The number of people living in poverty in our region has declined by 27 million, and 16 million fewer people suffer extreme poverty. However, the problems that beset the global economy today make it imperative for governments to implement even more effective policies to ward off economic decline. As it did in 2008, the OAS will continue to work to meet the challenges of reducing poverty, promoting social equity, and advancing prosperity in the Americas.

Our region has developed solid democracies that hold free and fair democratic elections, as OAS observers attested in each electoral process we monitored last year. The OAS observed three presidential elections, two national referendums, and one primary in 2008, mobilizing hundreds of observers and experts on electoral issues. With the implementation of new guidelines for this process, our electoral observation missions applied uniform standards and criteria in all the

countries, lending even greater credibility to this task that has become a hallmark of the OAS.

The Organization also played an important role in addressing controversies among and within member states. Over the course of the year, two urgent situations arose that called for our participation: the disruption of relations between Colombia and Ecuador, triggered by the incursion of Colombian armed forces into Ecuador's territory; and the political confrontation between the Bolivian government and leaders of movements demanding greater autonomy as part of the country's constitutional reform process.

In both these cases, governments in our region, faced with crisis or conflict, opted to turn to the Organization of American States. The member states' response was swift, appropriate, and consistent with international and inter-American law. The General Secretariat followed through to facilitate dialogue and defuse tensions.

Meanwhile, Belize and Guatemala signed an agreement at OAS headquarters in December to submit their territorial dispute to the International Court of Justice, provided that the citizens of both countries agree to this step. Referendums will be held simultaneously in Guatemala and Belize to determine whether the case should go to the International Court for a "final and binding" decision. The bilateral agreement

culminated a long negotiation process that received sustained support and follow-up by the General Secretariat.

In another example of our efforts to promote democracy and strengthen governance, the OAS Mission to Support the Peace Process in Colombia continued its task of verifying the dismantling of the armed structure of the United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia and the reintegration of 30,000 former combatants into society. This effort has played a key role in Colombia's longstanding struggle with illegally armed groups.

Public security is an ongoing issue of grave concern to the member states. Violence and crime threaten everyone, transcending national borders and class divisions—though the lack of protection often means that the poor and disadvantaged are hit the hardest. To confront these threats, the OAS coordinated the First Meeting of Ministers Responsible for Public Security in the Americas, held in October in Mexico City. Although the inter-American system had some mechanisms in place to promote collaboration and deal with transnational threats, this marked the first time the hemisphere's security ministers met to share experiences and devise a joint approach to help reduce the violence and crime affecting our citizens.

One of the most important aspects of our work

at the OAS is the defense of human rights. The Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) plays a critical role in safeguarding democracy and the rule of law and in protecting individuals, including the most vulnerable in our societies. During its three sessions in 2008, the Inter-American Commission examined individual cases from various countries, as well as reports and documents of a more general nature addressing human rights situations in the Americas. The Commission also conducted visits to nine countries.

In recent years we have seen increases in the number of citizens of Latin America and the Caribbean who have sought recourse before the IACHR and the Inter-American Court of Human Rights when they considered their human rights to have been violated. That does not mean the human rights situation in the region has deteriorated; rather, it shows that people in the region are more aware of their rights and have greater access to the inter-American human rights system. Thanks to its credibility as a protector and defender of human rights, as well as the member states' increased willingness to collaborate with the Commission, the inter-American system has been able to expand the effective protection of fundamental rights and freedoms in the member states.

Good internal governance is essential for success. In 2008, the General Secretariat

implemented internal reforms to modernize its operations and make them more transparent and accountable, conscious that it has a responsibility to optimize the resources provided by the member states, observer countries, and other donors. By strengthening its efficiency, transparency, and accountability, the Organization will be better equipped to tackle the region's complex challenges and advance an agenda for the Americas grounded in democracy, human rights, security and development.

This publication provides an overview of some of the activities carried out by the OAS in 2008 in four priority areas: democratic governance, human rights, hemispheric security, and integral development. We can take pride in our record of accomplishment. Although many challenges remain, we will continue to work in the years ahead to advance peace, justice, democracy, and prosperity in the Americas, building on and always seeking to improve this partnership of cooperation that has endured for more than six decades.

José Miguel Insulza

Secretary General
Organization of American States

Democratic Governance

The Cornerstone of the OAS



The peoples of the Americas have a right to democracy and their governments have an obligation to promote and defend it.

Inter-American Democratic Charter

Democracy is the cornerstone of the Organization of American States, and thus strengthening democracy and promoting good governance is one of its primary tasks. Through its Secretariat for Political Affairs, the OAS works to reinforce democratic values and consolidate institutions. It has taken specific steps to prevent conflicts, strengthen the electoral process, work toward greater modernization of the state, and promote vigorous democratic debate.

Promoting Dialogue and Stability

Following the incursion of Colombian forces into Ecuadorian territory in March 2008, the OAS member states adopted a resolution instructing the Secretary General to use his good offices to help restore an atmosphere of trust between the two countries.

The OAS established a Good Offices Mission with a mandate to help implement a mechanism for observing compliance with the resolution and to promote the establishment of confidence-building measures, in coordination with the countries involved. As part of this effort, the Secretary General and his representative in the Secretariat for Political Affairs met at different times with President Álvaro Uribe of Colombia and President Rafael Correa of Ecuador, and held additional conversations with both countries' foreign ministers. Other meetings were organized with members of the high-level military command of both countries and at the

level of deputy foreign ministers. In September, the OAS organized a forum in Quito on "Building Bridges between Ecuador and Colombia," with support from the Latin American School of Social Sciences (FLACSO) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).

The OAS has also played an important role in Bolivia, through various missions created to support dialogue and observe the electoral process. The OAS accompanied talks—held in Cochabamba in September and October 2008—between the government and regional entities seeking autonomy. This process resulted in a constructive agreement that provided the basis for a democratic solution to the country's political crisis. Later, President Evo Morales visited OAS headquarters and expressed his appreciation for the Organization's support.

In Colombia, the OAS Mission to Support the Peace Process (MAPP/OAS) has provided continued assistance following the demobilization of the

United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia (AUC in Spanish). The OAS mission has helped verify the dismantling of this illegal group's armed structure and the process of reintegrating more than 30,000 former combatants into society. It has also conducted follow-up on public security issues in areas where the AUC had operated, and has monitored implementation of the Justice and Peace Law, working with communities on local peace initiatives. The MAPP/OAS effort has helped ensure that different state entities work together more effectively, which has in turn generated greater confidence among communities affected by the violence.

On another front, the OAS has worked to strengthen international relations through its Peace Fund, particularly in the case of the territorial dispute between Belize and Guatemala. A three-year round of bilateral negotiations—held under the auspices of the OAS General Secretariat—concluded on December 8, 2008, with the signing of an agreement on the steps forward to resolve the longstanding controversy. The agreement calls for the countries to take the issue to the International Court of Justice, pending approval of that step by citizens of both countries through referendums that will take place simultaneously.

Beyond the negotiation process itself, the OAS has carried out verification and support activities in the Belize-Guatemala Adjacency Zone. In

2008, the OAS successfully concluded the voluntary reallocation of the community of Santa Rosa, which involved building a new settlement in Guatemalan territory for 17 families that had been living in the Adjacency Zone administered by Belize.

In another initiative carried out under the Peace Fund, the OAS established the Inter-American Peace Forum. The idea is to hold a series of diverse programs and activities designed to promote a culture of peace in the countries of the Americas. Efforts will include conferences and seminars on peace promotion and conflict management; specialized reports and publications; and the creation of the Inter-American Peace Prize to recognize those who have made significant and disinterested contributions to building and promoting peace in the region. This broad effort also includes leadership promotion activities and other initiatives to encourage the peaceful resolution of disputes and the development of a culture of respect, tolerance, and inclusion.

An Eye on the Electoral Process

The independent, impartial observation of elections lends transparency and confidence to the electoral process and is one of the basic tools the OAS has to help strengthen democracy in the region. In line with OAS policy, in 2008 observation missions were created in response to requests by the governments of member

states holding elections. Six such missions were deployed during the year, with the participation of a total 350 observers and experts in election matters. The missions covered the following elections in 2008:

- Paraguay: general and departmental elections, April 20—president, vice president, senators, congressional representatives, parliamentarians for MERCOSUR, governors and members of departmental councils
- Dominican Republic: general presidential elections, May 16
- Grenada: general elections, July 8
- Bolivia: recall referendum, August 10
- Ecuador: referendum to approve or reject a new constitution, September 28
- Honduras: primary elections, November 30

The OAS has also provided support in the aftermath of elections, helping countries in their own efforts to strengthen the electoral system and make it more transparent. Through their final reports, these missions make a series of recommendations about how to improve the election system the OAS has just observed. Thus, the impact of the OAS extends far beyond the casting of ballots. This was the case in the post-election phase in Bolivia and in Guatemala, where the OAS had observed elections in November 2007. The Secretariat for Political Affairs

prepared a detailed plan of operations, working in conjunction with the Supreme Election Tribunal of Guatemala and the National Election Court of Bolivia to put into practice the recommendations made by the electoral observation missions deployed in those countries.

It should be noted that in 2008, the practice of election observations was institutionalized and standardized with the implementation of the publication entitled “Best Practices in OAS Electoral Observations: 2004-2007.” This manual summarizes the criteria and methodologies the OAS brings to the task, recounts the experience gained through its observation missions, and incorporates legal instruments the observers use in the course of their work.

The Secretariat also moved forward in working with other international bodies on elections. For the first time ever, the OAS collaborated on an electoral observation mission with the African Union. The OAS sent four specialists to observe Angola’s legislative elections of September 5; the specialists worked in coordination with the African Union’s electoral mission.

In 2008, the OAS also began a strategic partnership with the European Commission, the UNDP, and the International Institute for Development and Electoral Assistance (International IDEA), by joining the Global Training Platform. This will serve as a tool to provide

training in electoral assistance to election authorities, the donor community, and experts from around the world.

The OAS also strengthened its cooperation in 2008 with the organizations that signed the Declaration of Principles for International Election Observation; these include the Carter

Center, the National Democratic Institute, the African Union, and the Electoral Institute of Southern Africa. In terms of providing training for electoral authorities, the OAS began working with FLACSO and International IDEA through the First Electoral Conference held in Mexico. The OAS also signed cooperation agreements with electoral bodies in Mexico and Peru.



Nuts and Bolts of Elections

At the request of member states, the OAS provides technical assistance to electoral authorities in such areas as the modernization and strengthening of institutions; installation of new information systems; legislative reforms; and communications channels to facilitate greater citizen participation. Following are examples of these types of activities carried out in 2008.

El Salvador A technical cooperation project provided support and guidance on the implementation of recommendations that came out of a full audit of the Salvadoran electoral registry by the country's Supreme Electoral Tribunal (TSE). In October, the OAS presented the TSE with the final versions of institutional manuals outlining operating procedures and responsibilities involved in implementing the recommendations.

Haiti Training in the area of information systems was provided to members of the Provisional Electoral Council's Department of Technology. Steps to strengthen the technology infrastructure included: installation of a system for filing documents electronically; design of an online library to archive and search for documents; creation and application of vote-counting software to increase the speed and credibility of the election process; and development of a computerized candidate registration system. A pilot plan was also implemented for a civic education program to be transmitted by radio for rural areas lacking other media outlets.

Honduras The Project to Strengthen the Supreme Electoral Tribunal (TSE) covered various activities related to the electoral process. A system was designed to give TSE officials access to online information on the electoral census and the names of all registered voters. In the area of mapping, a working plan was developed to integrate digital election mapping into a geographic information system that will eventually include voting centers and road networks around the country. The project also included an analysis of the Honduran legal framework, including regulations regarding modifications to the national electoral census.

Panama Implementation of a quality management and certification system was begun, under standards set by the Supreme Electoral Tribunal. Tasks included an analysis of the Electoral Tribunal's organizational structure, the development of strategic plans for each area, and the preparation of manuals, among others.

Bolivia An audit of the electoral rolls included an analysis of the legal framework, procedures for managing the electoral registry, procedures for filing complaints, and security mechanisms. An analysis was also made of updating registry procedures, as well as the use of identification documents for voter registration. The audit also focused on determining the level of reliability of the electoral rolls and looked at challenges faced by the system.

Defending Human Rights

An Inter-American Commitment



Every human being has the right to life, liberty and the security of his person.

American Declaration on the Rights and Duties of Man

The Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) has played a critical role in the defense of human rights and democratic institutions since 1959, providing recourse to individuals who have suffered violations of their rights and helping OAS member states in their efforts to strengthen their laws and legal systems to provide greater human rights protections. The Commission's role has been consolidated through its individual case system, on-site visits, and rapporteurships on specific human rights issues, as well as through a wide range of reports on cases, issues, and countries.

In 2008, the Commission held three sessions and approved 92 reports on cases, including reports on admissibility, inadmissibility, friendly settlement, on the merits, or on publication of reports on the merits.

The number of complaints the IACHR received has more than doubled over the past decade, to a total of 1,323 in 2008.

The Commission analyzed 301 requests for precautionary measures in 2008 and granted 28 of them. It also held 67 working meetings and 93 hearings, sent 9 cases to the Inter-American Court of Human Rights. The Commission also asked the Court for a consultative opinion on one matter, the use of corporal punishment as a method of disciplining children and adolescents.

In 2008, a number of OAS member states took important steps to meet their human rights obligations. In some cases, they paid compensation to victims and publicly apologized for past wrongs; in others, they repealed unjust laws or enacted legal reforms. These positive steps demonstrate how the inter-American human rights system can make a difference for individuals, communities, and even countries.

Rapporteurs at Work

Members of the Inter-American Commission made working visits to nine countries—Argentina, Bolivia, Canada, Chile, Colombia, Jamaica, Paraguay, the United States, and Uruguay—in their capacity as country rapporteurs or rapporteurs on particular issues of priority to the Commission. Here are

some examples of IACHR activities in member states.

In December, the Commission conducted an on-site visit to Jamaica, the first visit of this kind that the Commission had made to an English-speaking Caribbean country since 1994. The delegation met with representatives of the government, civil society organizations, academic institutions, and victims of human rights violations, among others.

A visit to Bolivia gathered information on the situation of the families of the Guaraní indigenous people known as captive communities.

The Rapporteurship on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples also conducted a visit to Colombia in November, in which it met with the National Indigenous Organization of Colombia and received information on deaths and forced disappearances that have affected indigenous peoples.

For its part, the Rapporteurship on the Rights of the Child conducted three working visits in 2008 —to Montevideo, Buenos Aires, and Bogotá—to gather information for the preparation of a report on Juvenile Criminal Justice and Human Rights in the Americas.

The Rapporteurship on the Rights of Women held meetings of experts in Buenos Aires and Caracas to gather information on the situation of women in the sphere of political participation in the region.

The rapporteurship also participated in various promotional activities, including a national symposium on Sexual Violence: A Problem of Public Health and Social Justice, which took place in La Paz.



In August, the Rapporteurship on the Rights of Persons Deprived of Liberty conducted an observation visit to Chile, where it visited various detention centers as well as internment centers for minors. The delegation also conducted an observation visit to the Asunción Neuropsychiatric Hospital in September in order to verify compliance with precautionary measures that had been granted by the IACHR on July 29, 2008.

The Rapporteurship on the Rights of Migrant Workers and Their Families met with members of civil society, as well as U.S. authorities, to gather information on the situation of migrants who have been detained in the United States.

Cooperation on Best Practices

During the year, the Commission published

several documents and signed agreements designed to strengthen the rule of law in the hemisphere.

It approved the document Principles and Best Practices on the Protection of Persons Deprived of Liberty in the Americas, which seeks to contribute to the OAS Permanent Council's preparation of an inter-American declaration on the rights and the care of individuals who have been detained or imprisoned.

The Commission also approved the document entitled "Guidelines for the Preparation of Progress Indicators in the Area of Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights". This document lays out a series of guidelines developed by the Inter-American Commission for evaluating and monitoring the rights established by the Protocol of San Salvador. It will also serve as a



tool for the states parties to design a permanent internal evaluation mechanism on economic, social, and cultural rights, as well as for the presentation of reports on the Protocol.

The IACHR signed a cooperation agreement with the Norman Manley Law School at the University of the West Indies. The agreement, signed in Kingston, seeks to promote awareness

of the inter-American human rights system in the Caribbean.

In addition, the Commission signed an agreement with the International Committee of the Red Cross to intensify cooperation in the promotion and strengthening of international humanitarian law and international human rights law.



Justice in action

The development of shared international legal standards has been a central objective since the beginnings of the inter-American system. The OAS has built a solid foundation of treaties and agreements, and it continuously seeks to strengthen international jurisprudence and reinforce cooperation among the member states.

The OAS also strives to make access to justice a reality for citizens. The Inter-American Program for Judicial Facilitators—now active in Nicaragua, Paraguay, and Panama—has worked with national judicial authorities to provide training for mediators to help resolve local conflicts and disputes, particularly in remote rural areas where people have more limited access to courts.

In Nicaragua, where the OAS initiative began several years ago, people in more than 100 municipalities now have access to alternative dispute resolution. Some 20,000 mediations have been conducted, and the level of conflict and tension has dropped appreciably in areas where such facilitation is available. In 2008, the National Autonomous University of Nicaragua introduced a course of studies for National Judicial Facilitators, and by early 2009 nearly 350 people had earned a diploma. Paraguay, for its part, now has more than 200 trained facilitators at work. The program was launched in Panama in November 2008, and is expected to be expanded to other countries in the region.

In another initiative to strengthen justice, the OAS Secretariat for Legal Affairs has begun to coordinate efforts the Organization carries out on several fronts to promote the rights of indigenous peoples. The program has offered seminars on how to best use the inter-American human rights system and other OAS resources, with a special emphasis on gender issues and the rights of children. Training workshops have been held in indigenous communities on such topics as promoting good governance and the political participation of indigenous women.

On another front, the Inter-American Children's Institute works to promote and strengthen respect for the rights of children. It created an online Inter-American Observatory to compile research on the sexual and commercial exploitation of children and to raise awareness about the problem.

The member countries have increased their cooperation in a number of legal areas. For example, all of them now belong to an OAS information network to advance mutual assistance on criminal matters and extradition. Through a secure electronic system, national authorities from the different countries can communicate with each other instantly and exchange pertinent documents, thus improving coordination in fighting crime. The member states have also stepped up their anti-corruption efforts and have developed a follow-up mechanism to track implementation of the Inter-American Convention against Corruption. In 2008, reports were adopted on 10 countries and on anti-corruption efforts in the hemisphere as a whole.

The Multiple Challenges of Security



Peace is a value and a principle in itself, based on democracy, justice, respect for human rights, solidarity, security, and respect for international law.

Declaration on Security in the Americas

The concept of security has come to be understood from a more complex perspective than in decades past. Security threats go beyond the traditional military sphere to include problems that have a direct impact on people's lives, such as gang violence, cybercrime, trafficking of illegal drugs, firearms, or human beings—even problems such as pandemics, food shortages, and economic crises.

In 2008, the Secretariat for Multidimensional Security moved forward to strengthen cooperation on a number of security fronts and to develop regional policies and strategies to address a range of threats.

Illegal drugs The OAS takes a multifaceted approach that includes programs to reduce demand, treat addiction, train law enforcement officials in the control of synthetic drugs, and address the problem of money laundering.

Humanitarian demining The OAS has a long track record in this field and currently provides support to Colombia, Nicaragua, Ecuador, and Peru in the removal of landmines that were buried during periods of conflict.

Trafficking in persons Training seminars are held to raise awareness about how to recognize and prevent this crime as well as protect victims. In 2008, several workshops included the participation of military personnel and security

forces who would be working in peace missions.

Seaport and airport security As part of its efforts to confront the threat of terrorism, the OAS offers extensive training to border-control personnel across the region. Other areas of training include cybersecurity and tourism-related security.

Tackling Crime and Violence

In 2008, the OAS convened the First Meeting of Ministers in the Area of Public Security in the Americas. The meeting, held in October in Mexico City, brought together the hemisphere's highest-level authorities in charge of strengthening citizen security and combating violence and criminality. This adds a new area of focus to a series of ministerial meetings held through the OAS to increase cooperation on a range of challenges in the Americas.

In Mexico, the ministers approved the

“Commitment to Public Security in the Americas,” which expresses concern not only about interpersonal violence and common crimes, but about the broad scope of criminal activities seen in many countries and the increase in youth as both victims and perpetrators of crimes. The document notes, among other points, that “the effective exercise of the rule of law depends on enforcement of the laws that govern it”; that “violence and crime negatively affect the social, economic, and political development of our societies”; and that “the actions of public security institutions should be governed by respect for human rights, and the principles of legality, objectivity, efficiency, professionalism, and honesty.” It outlines five priority areas for the countries: public security management; prevention of crime, violence, and insecurity; police management; citizen and community participation; and international cooperation.

Two countries—Trinidad and Tobago and the Dominican Republic, respectively—have offered to host ministerial meetings on public security in 2009 and 2010, and a meeting of experts will be held in Uruguay in advance of the 2009 ministerial meeting. These commitments will help ensure the continuity of the process.

Progress against Drugs

The problem of drug trafficking and illegal drug use has long been a priority concern for the region. The Inter-American Drug Abuse Control Commission (CICAD) has been tasked to strengthen countries’ human and institutional capacity in this area and harness the collective energy of the member states to address that challenge.

More than a decade ago, CICAD created the



Multilateral Evaluation Mechanism (MEM) to measure performance on drug issues in 34 member countries and the region as a whole. The MEM collects and evaluates key data, based on a series of benchmarks; looks at steps each country has taken to control various aspects of the drug problem; and makes recommendations for improvements. Four full rounds of evaluation have been completed.

Based on this experience, in 2008 CICAD began an evaluation of the region's progress toward meeting 10-year goals set by the United Nations in 1998. This report was presented to the UN Commission on Narcotic Drugs in early 2009. This document was the only regionally focused assessment considered at that forum, demonstrating the leadership of the Americas in dealing with the drug problem.

On the ground, CICAD supported school-based substance abuse prevention programs in seven countries, and is currently conducting scientific evaluation of their impact. It also was a strong advocate for innovative court-supervised treatment for some drug-dependent offenders. In another area, responding to a major administrative problem for member countries, CICAD launched a project to help governments (initially Argentina, Chile, and Uruguay) manage seized and forfeited assets from money laundering.

Confronting the Threat of Terrorism

The member states also cooperate closely on measures to confront the threat of terrorism. In 2008, the Secretariat of the Inter-American Committee against Terrorism (CICTE) provided training and technical assistance to more than 2,700 participants in capacity-building activities throughout the region. The largest program, in maritime and port security, trained more than 1,200 people from 18 countries, while nearly 500 officials in 12 countries received training on international standards governing aviation security. Hundreds of prosecutors, judges, legislators, and law enforcement personnel participated in training courses on counter-terrorism legislative assistance and combating financing of terrorism. Other workshops have focused on such areas as detecting fraudulent documents and creating teams to respond to incidents involving cybersecurity. A program on tourism security also got underway in 2008. CICTE has developed strategic partnerships with other organizations around the region and worldwide. The Executive Directorate of the UN Counter-Terrorism Committee cites CICTE and its Secretariat as a model for other regional organizations in preventing and combating terrorism, and the UN Office on Drugs and Crime's Terrorism Prevention Branch considers the CICTE Secretariat an effective partner in the Americas.

Advancing Integral Development in the Americas



Poverty, illiteracy, and low levels of human development are factors that adversely affect the consolidation of democracy.

Inter-American Democratic Charter

The OAS places a priority on combating poverty and promoting development, working on these issues in conjunction with other regional and global agencies, the private sector, and civil society. The OAS has two primary roles to play in the development arena. On a political level, it promotes dialogue among the member states and forges consensus on how to best address the complex problems of poverty and raise the levels of development in the region. The OAS also coordinates programs and mobilizes resources so the member countries can implement projects in key areas.

Education and culture, trade and tourism, sustainable development, social development and employment, science and technology—these are all areas in which the OAS Executive Secretariat for Integral Development (SEDI) plays an active role. It provides valuable technical support to various ministerial-level meetings held as part of the Summit of the Americas process. In 2008, it supported the first such meeting on social development, held in Chile, as well as ministerial meetings on culture (Barbados) and science and technology (Mexico). This process allows for more effective policy coordination among the member states.

The OAS also carries out an array of programs to implement the countries' policy goals. In 2008, these included efforts to strengthen early childhood education, improve the efficiency of public services through e-government, help

small business access opportunities for trade and investment, and develop renewable energy technologies, to name a few. One major initiative coordinated through the OAS/SEDI focuses on the importance of achieving universal civil registry in the Americas to ensure that citizens can fully exercise their rights.

Social Protection Network

The OAS/SEDI is working to identify and promote successful strategies to combat poverty through the establishment of an Inter-American Social Protection Network, an initiative that stems from the Summit of the Americas process. In July 2008, the First Meeting of Ministers and High Authorities of Social Development, held in Reñaca, Chile, reaffirmed the importance of facilitating access, especially by the region's

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The OAS has developed broad experience in the area of civil registration in Latin America and the Caribbean, recognizing that the absence of a legal identity can deprive people of their civil, political, economic, social, and cultural rights and make it impossible for them to vote or have access to social services. The member states have given the OAS a mandate to promote the improvement of civil registry systems to ensure that all citizens enjoy the “right to identity.”

According to the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), one of every six children born in Latin America is not registered at birth. While reliable statistics are not available for the adult population, millions of citizens in Latin America and the Caribbean—particularly in rural areas with extensive poverty—lack a registered identity.

The Program for Universal Civil Registry in the Americas (known by its Spanish acronym, PUICA) is a broad initiative that seeks to provide these invisible members of society with an ID. Through technical assistance, research, and the exchange of best practices, this program is helping to strengthen and modernize institutions responsible for civil registration so they can provide full recognition to citizens and collect more reliable vital statistics that will help shape development priorities. Currently, PUICA technical assistance projects are being implemented in ten countries of Latin America and the Caribbean, and that number is expected to increase by three in 2009.



Civil Registry and the Right to Identity

Here are some of the projects underway:

In Haiti, the OAS has provided extensive support to strengthen the civil registry system, beginning with a massive voter-registration campaign in 2005. OAS efforts have helped register a total of 4.2 million citizens, more than 600,000 of whom were added to the civil registry in 2008. The OAS has also provided training to more than 2,500 registration personnel in Haiti and helped create an electronic database so that all records can be digitally fed into the system. This process will facilitate the decentralization of services and enhance data security. The OAS is also helping to strengthen the National Office for Identification, which has 141 computerized, solar-powered offices all over Haiti. This permanent institution for civil registry is critical to the development process, not only for its impact on voting but also for the information it will yield to help shape policies in areas such as health, education, and labor.

In El Salvador, a system is being developed that will integrate the registration process with maternity hospitals so that infants can be registered immediately after birth. In 2008, the National Registry of Individuals and the PUICA implemented the system at the National Hospital in Sonsonate, which operates the country's second largest maternity ward (more than 500 births per month), located in an area in which most of the mothers giving birth live in poverty. A local cooperation network has been developed to raise awareness about the program and about the importance of the right to identity. In the PUICA project's first two months, more than 400 newborns were registered. The project will continue to operate in Sonsonate and is being expanded to other hospitals in the country.

In Guatemala, mobile registration and awareness campaigns are helping to increase registration. The first campaign was conducted in 2008 in the municipality of Chichicastenango, where over 97 percent of the population is rural and indigenous. The PUICA and the local office of the National Registry of Individuals partnered with various community authorities, indigenous leaders, and others to promote public awareness. Thanks to the training and cooperation of local leaders, more than 400 people were registered for the first time. Beyond that direct impact, the project served to consolidate a network of local agents who continue to promote civil registration in the area, and plans are underway to replicate the effort nationally.

In Peru, the PUICA has worked with the National Registry of Identity and Marital Status to conduct registration and identification campaigns in eight schools in the Huaycán community, a shantytown on the outskirts of Lima. In coordination with school authorities, the project carried out awareness campaigns, provided identification documents to 4,776 minors, and issued 190 birth certificates. A methodology for replicating the experience is being developed; this will facilitate three additional campaigns in 2009 and 2010.

most vulnerable communities, to food, health, education, housing, and employment. It called for the OAS/SEDI to promote the exchange and transfer of experiences among member countries on innovative programs to combat poverty and inequality.

As part of this effort, a program was begun in 2008 to provide technical assistance to Saint Lucia, Jamaica, and Trinidad and Tobago, taking into account lessons learned through Chile's Puente Program. Financed initially by the Canadian Agency for International Development, the program also has received funding from the government of Chile and backing from the participating countries. The cooperation effort has carried out activities and strategies designed to strengthen the capacity of social development personnel; these include workshops, internships, field visits, and virtual technical support. Each country has developed its own program—"Koudemain Ste. Lucie" in Saint Lucia, "Bridge Jamaica" in Jamaica, and "STEP-UP" in Trinidad and Tobago—to reflect different needs and circumstances.

In May and June 2008, three visits were conducted to monitor developments in this technical cooperation program. Officials of Chile's Solidarity and Social Investment Fund (FOSIS), along with representatives of the University of the West Indies and the OAS Department of Social Development and Employment, visited

the three participating countries to observe the national teams and give them feedback to help them achieve their objectives.

In September 2008, an evaluation workshop in Trinidad and Tobago examined the first phase of the program; this was immediately followed by a Caribbean Conference on Horizontal Cooperation in Social Protection, which brought together high-level social development officials from the Caribbean Community (CARICOM). The conference shared information on the program with the countries and with development agencies working in the region, with the goal of hearing their views and encouraging broader participation in the future.

The second phase of the cooperation effort is expected to be carried out in four additional Caribbean countries in 2009: Suriname, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Saint Kitts and Nevis, and Barbados.

Energy and the Environment

Promoting sustainable energy has long been an area of focus for the OAS, and this issue is becoming even more critical for the countries of the Americas. In 2008, the OAS held a meeting of high-ranking authorities on sustainable energy, and subsequently organized three conferences on the subject: in Chile (for the Southern Cone), The Bahamas (for the Caribbean), and El Salvador

(for Central and North America). In September, the General Secretariat and the Permanent Council organized the first “Green Week” at OAS headquarters to promote awareness about climate change. The event included a series of panel discussions that examined various aspects of environmental management and sustainable development, giving countries the opportunity to learn about and share information on best practices.

In 2008, the OAS also launched a project on Increasing the Sustainability of the Energy Sector in the Caribbean. The goal is to strengthen governance and management in the energy sector and thus speed up the move to cleaner and more sustainable energy. The project, funded under a \$2 million grant from the European Union Energy Initiative, operates in seven countries: Antigua and Barbuda, The Bahamas, Dominica, Grenada, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia, and Saint Vincent and the Grenadines.

Under the auspices of the Renewable Energy and Energy Efficient Partnership, the OAS works with member countries on policies and mechanisms to develop renewable energy and energy-efficient technologies. Six current projects are underway in this area. A meeting held in September in Mexico City brought together senior officials from the energy sector in Latin America and the Caribbean to examine the impact of such projects and update the

program’s priorities.

In addition, the OAS provides support to the U.S.-Brazil Biofuels Partnership, which by the end of 2008 also included the participation of seven countries in Central America and the Caribbean: El Salvador, the Dominican Republic, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Haiti, Jamaica, Honduras, and Guatemala. The OAS has carried out biofuels feasibility studies and provided support in policy and planning in several participating countries. It has also organized meetings and brought together experts from the project countries.

A Commitment to Youth

In 2008, at the OAS General Assembly in Medellín, Colombia, the member countries focused on the theme of “Youth and Democratic Values,” underscoring the importance of promoting the participation and inclusion of young people in society. They reaffirmed “the commitment of the member states to promote and strengthen in the youth of the Hemisphere the values, principles, and practices of a democratic life, including liberty and social justice, progress, respect for human rights...and the rule of law.”

Young people constitute a majority of the population of the Americas, and the OAS recognizes the need to establish a solid foundation for their future through expanded opportunities for education and employment.

The General Secretariat promotes the development of human capital through such efforts as the OAS Fellowship and Training Programs, the Leo S. Rowe Pan American Fund, and the Educational Portal of the Americas. The Organization awards academic scholarships at the university and post-graduate level, as well as professional development fellowships that provide opportunities for citizens of member countries to expand or update their knowledge in fields related to OAS priorities. All scholarships are awarded in the most equitable way possible, opening doors so students can attend recognized educational institutions at costs that are reasonable for the Organization. The OAS has expanded its partnerships with universities throughout the region; the consortium now includes 77 institutions in 16 member countries. This gives participants a wide range of options and furthers understanding and the exchange of ideas throughout the region.

Another program, the Leo S. Rowe Pan American Fund, has been providing loans to support study and research by Latin American and Caribbean students in U.S. universities for 60 years. In 2008, the Rowe Fund helped organize two international education events in Washington, including a seminar on “Multilateral Partnerships and Strategies for the Development of Loan Programs for Education.”

On another front, the Educational Portal of the Americas offers opportunities to strengthen and broaden access to different types of professional development using information and communications technologies. In 2008, the Educational Portal continued to expand its efforts within and outside the OAS. Here are some of the new initiatives:

- The implementation of an e-learning project for the United Nations Development Programme, to train those who train others in strategies and principles of corporate social responsibility.
- The development of an online course in agroecotourism for the Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture. The purpose is to offer the theory and practice needed to develop programs that combine these fields.
- A cooperation agreement with the School of Public Administration of Colombia to provide virtual courses already offered by the institution in government administration and management, adapted to reflect the needs of the region.
- Technical support to the General Secretariat for the incorporation of a virtual participation tool into the Summit of the Americas process.