



**COMMENTS BY THE CANADIAN FOUNDATION FOR THE AMERICAS
(FOCAL) TO THE SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON INTER-AMERICAN SUMMITS
MANAGEMENT OF THE ORGANIZATION OF AMERICAN STATES**

**GIVEN BY: NOBINA ROBINSON, MANAGER, INTERNATIONAL PROGRAM
DEVELOPMENT**

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Good Afternoon.

FOCAL'S Contribution to the Summit of the Americas

FOCAL thanks the OAS and this Committee for an opportunity to share our views once again on progress in implementing the Plans of Action of the Summit of the Americas. For those of you who may not know us, FOCAL is an independent, Canadian policy centre, dedicated to deepening Canada's engagement with the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean. Very specifically, we have devoted considerable energy and resources to supporting all of this region's multilateral initiatives and institutions, including the OAS and the Summit of the Americas process. We were active, indeed proactive, participants in the civil society consultations preceding the Quebec City Summit. Our presence, along with several other key civil society actors, at the formal meeting with Foreign Ministers during the Summit in April 2001 was a high point of our Summit-related work.

Now, almost a year after the Quebec City Summit, FOCAL continues to dedicate substantial effort to keep track of and inform our networks in Canada and throughout the region of developments relating to the Summit. We do this because we understand that the Summit was not a one-off event, because we believe that the agenda and actions plans of all the Summits can make a significant contribution to improving the quality of the lives of the citizens of this hemisphere. Our Summit work over the past few months has involved attempting to learn more about the progress achieved since April, and for this we rely heavily on what (little) information is made public by all governments and

agencies about their Summit activities. Based on this we put forth the following general assessments of the how things are developing.

FOCAL'S Assessment of Summit Implementation to Date

Perhaps the main achievement of the past year will remain the finalization of the Inter-American Democratic Charter in September 2001. This was the strategic and philosophical core of the Canadian Summit, and responded to an increasing concern about setting minimum standards for participation in this high-level forum called the OAS and the Summit. The fact that such a document has been approved within less than a year of the Canadian Summit is proof of the fact that when leaders task their ministers and officials to deliver an initiative, it can and will be done. That there was scope for civil society input into the process of drafting the Inter-American Democratic Charter is also proof of the fact that Summit initiatives are not merely government-led, but at the end of the day, respond to vital and vocal concerns of the citizens of the Americas.

As we have seen today, there have been important meetings held as mandated by the Quebec City Plan of Action, and we commend the lead governments, agencies and the OAS for their work on Summit actions items such as Justice, Corruption, Natural Disasters, Political Parties and Health and the Environment

So far, the good news. Now, perhaps we should have a look at what can be done better.

Governments can do more to fight Summit fatigue

Summit fatigue, an apt expression is hitting all of us, government and civil society alike. It is hard to maintain the momentum on all 300 and more Summit initiatives at all times, especially once the media spotlights have been turned off. As an event itself approaches, the heavy work of drafting and consulting takes place under public scrutiny and interest, and the sense of urgency dominates. Once this event is over, and the vocal NGO interest groups have moved on to the next event in some other continent, many are left with the task of figuring out what to do, and how to meet the lofty words of the Summit Plan of Action, how to mobilize resources to get there, and how to convince our own constituencies of the importance of undertaking this work. Many are left being skeptical, if not cynical, that the Summit will actually achieve any progress. Sustaining interest in the Summit process is a principal challenge now, especially for participating governments, several of whom have failed, in our view, to envision or implement a supporting permanent structure for the Summit process itself. The burden on governments would have been reduced if a real and sustained strengthening and reform of regional institutions (most particularly the OAS) had been agreed to and achieved.

Civil Society Participation – is it working?

In FOCAL's view, the Quebec City Summit broke new ground with respect to the active inclusion of constructive civil society representatives and actors in the process leading up to the April meeting. There was real hope and willingness to cooperate, as was demonstrated by the January 2001 Miami meeting of civil society co-hosted by Participa, Esquel and FOCAL. There was a danger of losing this momentum at the Summit itself, as the host government hesitated to invite civil society experts to be present at the Summit. And yet this invitation did come, and another breakthrough took place. What has happened since then, however? Not much.

Open meetings (which include civil society participation) of this Special Committee on Inter-American Summits Management have not taken place. While we welcome the initiative to open the Committee on Civil Society this morning, we can see that only 50 or so civil society groups have received accreditation to the OAS, and thus the most minimal access, to the Summit process. Many non-governmental organizations, including FOCAL, have had difficulty in accessing funding to sustain our work related to the Summit. While we welcome the initiative taken by the OAS Office of Summit Follow-up, the fact is that the information available on their website is often out of date, often hard to filter, and there have been very few opportunities for true interchange of views. FOCAL urges the member states of the OAS to commit more resources to this Office which is the only point of access for outside groups into the Summit.

FOCAL notes that the OAS passed a resolution at the last General Assembly tasking the OAS Permanent Council to “elaborate strategies to increase civil society participation in the OAS” (Resolution 1834). As we approach another General Assembly in June, can we learn what these proposed strategies are? From a civil society, and thus outside perspective, the following problems are being faced by those civil society groups dedicated to working with the Summit process:

- lack of information
- lack of input into implementation discussions
- lack of involvement in implementation
- lack of interest on the part of governments to including civil society.

FOCAL believes that with these supports for direct participation, civil society could make an effective contribution to the implementation of Summit deliverables in the hemisphere. To date, civil society experts can be credited with encouraging national governments and international financial institutions to undertake public consultation exercises, implement measures for increased public transparency and develop independent policy recommendations.

Browsing through websites, I came across two reports produced by the Inter-American Development Bank and the World Bank dating to October 2001 on their respective Summit activities. Let me tell you that not one section of either report was devoted to initiatives involving civil society actors from the hemisphere, or specifically related to the Quebec City's lofty words on civil society participation. Similarly, again based on web research, we at FOCAL cannot find any documents of the Summit Implementation Review Group (SIRG) which date after January 2001, a meeting which took place prior to the Quebec City Summit. The current Work Plan of this very Committee, the Special Committee on Inter-American Summits Management is not on the web. Reports from each Ministerial or high-level issue meeting related to the Summit which have taken place are equally inaccessible. We know the meetings took place, but what was discussed, what was decided and how will the objectives be achieved?

Priority setting and Accountability

Beyond these important process issues, there remain even more significant accountability problems. Most Summit action items have no mechanisms for evaluating progress, no mechanisms for informing the wider citizenry of progress achieved. At a time when international cooperation and development aid policies are relying on the use of such indicators, Summit initiatives have no built-in indicators to help governments and citizens alike assess progress.

When we read the IDB or World Bank or OAS reports on Summit work, we get the impression that we are all working on the Summit, all the time. This may not be a bad thing in itself. However, the time has come to be strategic and selective. If the Summit Plan of Action is seen as a broad road map of initiatives which must be undertaken to improve the lives of our citizens, perhaps we can prioritize the work of governments and civil society. As an example, such priority-setting for the coming year can be done by agreement within the SIRG using actions items from the Quebec City text itself, concentrating specifically on:

- the most urgent action items, such as Growth with Equity, with specific attention to development financing, or;
- items which will require the most negotiation and consultation between now and the next Summit (Trade, Investment and Financial Stability, with immediate discussions on corporate social responsibility), or;
- the ones that respond to the most pressing regional crises (Hemispheric Security and Fight Against Terrorism).

Need for leadership

What FOCAL is diagnosing is the need for continued and renewed strong leadership from the Executive Committee of the SIRG, the international financial institutions, and specifically the most recent host government, Canada.

Leadership of the kind that is necessary requires one or more of these actors to commit seriously to increasing civil society participation in the Summit processes both in the inter-American system and in their own national consultation processes. Regular meetings between the SIRG members and civil society groups actively committed to the Summit process might be such a practical next step. Devoting small portions of Bank funds to promoting civil society dialogue and involvement in Summit implementation would be another concrete step forward. This kind of initiative will only happen at the behest of member states of the OAS, and once again, at the behest of the SIRG Executive. Actively fostering a conducive climate of dialogue and cooperation across all sectors of society within Argentina in advance of the next Summit of the Americas in that country is also vital at this point. Making national government reports on Summit implementation public and widely accessible will further help to fight Summit skepticism. Providing the OAS Office of Summit Follow-Up with the necessary resources (financial and human) with which to deliver their enormous mandate is more urgent now than ever before.

FOCAL's next project

FOCAL is currently considering how best to develop a public information document which assesses progress in specific areas of the Summit Plan of Action. Our objective is to sustain the engagement of all interested sectors in Canada and beyond in the Summit process itself, and to demonstrate that we all have a role to play in turning the words into action. We are glad to have had the opportunity to be present here today, to learn from this meeting, and to meet with many of our partners in the hemisphere. We encourage the Chair of this Committee to make these meetings a regular occurrence.

Thank you.