

CIVIL SOCIETY AND VENEZUELA

Remarks by FOCAL Chair, John W. Graham

Summary of the Intervention by John W. Graham at the Civil Society Meeting, June 1, 2002, with the Secretary General, ministers, and delegates attending the OAS General Assembly in Barbados

I would like to begin by congratulating the OAS on its swift and appropriate application of the provisions of the Democratic Charter, following the coup-d'état in Venezuela.

Because circumstances were difficult, the validation of the Charter was more resoundingly achieved. However, the testing of the Charter's effectiveness continues. There are serious on-going anxieties about the erosion of democratic norms in Venezuela – not least the absence of adequate checks and balances.

We must also recognize that there are limitations on what the OAS can do. The Democratic Charter does not give away all of Venezuela's sovereign prerogatives. Substantive follow-up and reform will require Venezuelan Government consent and Venezuelan cooperation. The premium therefore, will be on effective diplomacy by the OAS together with effective supporting pressure by OAS member states.

In this context, vigorous – and I emphasize – well targeted lobbying by Civil Society remains crucial. I refer not only to Civil Society as represented in this room, but most particularly and significantly to the different strands of Civil Society in (a perilously divided) Venezuela.

June 2002