



STATEMENT TO THE CIVIL SOCIETY ROUNDTABLE AND SPECIAL SESSION OF THE CISC

May 2-3, 2006 Washington, DC

Civil Society Participation in the Promotion and Protection of Democracy: A Partnership

The Declaration of Florida underscores the critical role of civil society in hemispheric affairs and reaffirms a commitment to increase and improve civil society participation in the Summit of the Americas process and the important work of the OAS.

- XXXV GA Resolution 2119 invites civil society to contribute to the consolidation of democratic governance by promoting the principles, values and practices set forth in the Inter-American Democratic Charter.
- XXXV GA Resolution 2154 instructs the Permanent Council to consider initiatives to support representative democracy and good governance in accordance with the Inter-American Democratic Charter taking into consideration the Secretary General's report and proposals and the efforts and contributions of civil society.
- XXXV GA Resolution 2092 instructs OAS bodies and national governments to continue to facilitate the inclusion of civil society at the national level and in inter-American institutions, and to report on progress to the Permanent Council before the XXXVI General Assembly in Santo Domingo.

Over the past year, FOCAL has worked actively with other CSOs in the region to examine how civil society organizations can best complement governments and inter-American institutions in collaborative efforts for the promotion and protection of democracy.

We take this opportunity to reaffirm the critical role civil society plays in fostering and upholding pluralism, promoting accountability and transparency and ensuring sustained attention to issues crucial to peace and the well-being of citizens in the hemisphere.

Civil Society is innovative, flexible and diverse. Civil society has expertise in promoting dialogue, producing analysis and alternative policy options and educating citizens, and its activities effectively complement and support those of governments and international institutions. Civil society should thus count on the support and good will of the OAS to respect its work, consider its potential and recognize it as a useful partner in regional endeavours.

As the Secretary General reports back to the Permanent Council as per Resolution 2154, we hope that he will recognize the contribution and potential of civil society organizations and that the Permanent Council will in turn heed these comments and not only listen to civil society contributions, but also ensure that they are reflected in draft recommendations for the XXXVI General Assembly and the Declaration of Santo Domingo. We hope CSOs will be closely engaged with OAS bodies and look forward to working with the recently reorganized Secretariat for Political Affairs and the two newly incorporated departments, the Department for the Promotion of Good Governance and the Department of Crisis Prevention and Special Missions.

A Proactive Organization of American States

Based on these precedents and FOCAL's discussions with civil society, we feel the following ideas merit the consideration of the Secretary General and OAS member states:

- ENGAGE CSOs in processes related to regular reviews of democracy in the hemisphere, specifically with regards to an early warning system of threats to democracy, recognizing civil society expertise and the value of CSOs as independent, non-governmental actors in the collection and provision of timely, on-the-ground information. Much valuable work has been done by CSOs on standards and indicators of democracy, which should be viewed as a resource by OAS bodies and member states.
- DISSEMINATE AND PROMOTE the Inter-American Democratic Charter to civil society and the citizenry. While work is done to enhance its effectiveness and responsiveness, the Charter embodies the spirit of democracy and must be widely promoted to foster and consolidate a democratic culture in societies throughout the region.
- EDUCATE CSOs about the potential and limitations of the OAS and its role in inter-American affairs, with particular attention to its structure and the points of access for civil society to participate in and impact decision-making in its branches. Our colleagues from Partners of the Americas and the Inter-American Democracy Network have made proposals on how dialogue spaces can be made more effective and we hope that those recommendations will guide both the OAS and CSOs in ensuring positive and concrete exchanges in the future.

A Strong National Basis for Civil Society: Responsible Member States

We hope that the above recommendations will be implemented in productive partnerships with Governments. For this to come about we call on national governments to:

- REAFFIRM their responsibility to relieve poverty and inequality in their country and to provide the necessary education, infrastructure and inclusive policies to ensure structural development of prosperity.
- ENSURE freedom of expression, government-civil society consultations and where possible financial support to create a productive environment for the growth of an independent and diverse civil society.
- REPORT on existing mechanisms and procedures for national-level civil society consultations in accordance with XXXV GA Resolution 2092.

A Mature Civil Society

Essential to this partnership between players in the hemisphere is a responsible and mature civil society. Civil society organizations must maximize their potential and engage partners at all levels in a productive and responsible manner. We reiterate that CSOs must:

- REMAIN informed and up-to-date about the role and activities of the OAS and take full advantage of existing mechanisms for participation within the inter-American system.
- RECOGNIZE the central role political parties play in the articulation of interests and representation in democratic systems and foster exchange and dialogue between parties and civil society to support that role.



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