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Presentation to the Summit Implementation Review Group at the OAS
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Washington D.C
December 8, 2003

Preliminary Findings from the “Civil Society Follow-Up Strategy on the Quebec City Plan of Action”

As a member of the Inter-American Democracy Network, FOCAL is pleased to present the preliminary results of the first stage of the implementation of the Civil Society Follow-Up Strategy on the Quebec City Plan of Action, particularly as it relates to the strengthening of democracy.

These proposals are the result of a project implemented by civil society organizations in 20 countries from throughout the Americas, which collected information via a structured questionnaire using quantitative and qualitative indicators that measure the degree of implementation of five summit mandates. The five themes being examined are:

- Access to Information
- Freedom of Expression
- Strengthening of Civil Society
- Access to Justice and Independence of the Judiciary
- Decentralizations and Strengthening of Local Governments

National reports from each of the 20 countries participating in this project will be completed and circulated in mid January 2004. Four regional reports (North America, Caribbean & Central America, Andean Region and Mercosur) will be presented and circulated in early February 2004.

A network of partner organizations from across the region is managing this project. The lead project coordinator is Corporación PARTICIPA of Chile, with the collaboration of FOCAL from Canada, the University of the Andes from Colombia, FLACSO Chile, the Regional Coordinator for Economic and Social Research (CRIES) and the Inter-American Democracy Network (IADN)

The project has received funding from the Canadian International Development Agency, the United States Agency for International Development, Partners of the Americas and the Inter-American Democracy Network, the Inter American Development Bank and the OSI Development Foundation. We are happy to announce that the project has just been approved for funding by the FEM CIDI of the Organization of American States.

The proposals are based on the priorities identified by civil society and aim to ***support governments in their efforts to promote concrete actions for the strengthening of democracy in our countries.***

The CSOs participating in this project ***consider it essential that these proposals be included in the declaration that will be signed by the heads of state at the Special Summit of the Americas, to take place in Monterrey Mexico on the 12th and 13th of January 2004.***

Of the mandates evaluated we consider three areas the most salient given the focus of the Special Summit of the Americas and would like to briefly highlight them here.

- 1) Access to Information
- 2) Freedom of Expression
- 3) Strengthening of Civil Society

The proposals generated for all five mandates are presented in the complete project document that is being circulated to all in attendance.

PROPOSALS

I. ACCESS TO INFORMATION

- 1.1 Ensure the creation of laws that guarantee access to information in those countries where they do not exist. In countries where such laws exist, perfect their application so that citizens have effective and convenient access to information. Ensuring standardize exceptions for access to information, the creation of an autonomous oversight agency that assure compliance and the establishment effective sanctions for officials that do not comply with the regulations.

II. FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

- 2.1 Ensure that national legislation concerning freedom of expression is in line with international standards. Specifically, eliminate all forms of censorship, respecting the mandates established by the Inter-American Human Rights Commission.
- 2.2 Promote reform of the legal structure to limit media monopolies, ensuring that media ownership is not concentrated in the hands of a few.

III. STRENGTHENING CIVIL SOCIETY

- 3.1 Establish a legal framework that responds to the diverse characteristics of civil society organizations and guarantees the existence of different spaces for participation at the local, national, and international levels.
- 3.2 Insist on the establishment of resources to support the organization and participation of civil society, for which there should be standardized mechanisms to receive and transfer resources.

PARTICIPATION OF CIVIL SOCIETY IN HEMISPHERIC PROCESSES

Via this project participants have gained insight into the process of citizen participation in the Summit process. As such, acknowledging the advances made by civil society organizations (CSOs) participating in regional processes and mechanisms - such as in the Summit Process, the OAS, and FTAA - we propose the following next steps, which aim to further strengthen civil society participation in the inter-American system.

- Create a permanent Consultative Commission, composed of CSOs accredited by the OAS, with the goal of having an ongoing dialogue and exchange with the governments during the process of preparation and implementation of Summit mandates.
- Institutionalize a permanent space for dialogue between foreign ministers and CSOs on the official Summit agenda.