The Democracy Summit?

With the Quebec City Summit now nine months away, the Summit of the Americas Center (SOAC) and the Canadian Foundation for the Americas (FOCAL) are pleased to continue providing policy-relevant information on important hemispheric developments. This third edition of our joint newsletter focuses attention on key outcomes of the 30th General Assembly of the Organization of American States (OAS), held in Windsor on June 4-6, 2000, as well as other decisive meetings and discussions that are slowly shaping the agenda for the Quebec City Summit. Thus far, “Strengthening Democracy,” “Creating Prosperity” and “Realizing Human Potential” have emerged as the three “baskets” of the Summit Plan of Action. Human security and connectivity also promise to be major themes; however, democracy appears to be the issue that will dominate the Summit.

As the OAS Windsor meeting and recent events in the Americas have shown, consensus is fraying around basic democratic values. Peru and Venezuela have been entangled in constitutional and electoral crises. Colombia is widely considered to be on the brink of collapse and threatens to drag down neighboring countries in a spiral of violence. Even peaceful Bolivia and Ecuador have been caught up in political turmoil that prevents both governments from pursuing much needed financial reforms. The Andean countries are not the only ones risking democratic disruption and constitutional disorder. A corruption scandal in Nicaragua, an attempted coup against an unpopular government in Paraguay, and the chaotic election process in Haiti are dramatic examples of the threats to democracy in our hemisphere.

Governments of the region face the difficult task of agreeing on a few specific policy priorities for the “Strengthening Democracy” Summit basket. Will these priorities reflect the many issues raised at the Santiago Summit, including human rights, migrant workers, drug trafficking, corruption and judicial reform? Or will they emphasize other issues, such as the restoration of confidence in parliaments or a renewed focus on the separation of powers? Perhaps the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA) negotiators will even follow the lead of the European Union and MERCOSUR and make democratic rule a condition of accession to the hemispheric agreement. It is also imperative that citizens be actively involved in policy making, for as costly and chaotic as this involvement may be, without it only hollow, undemocratic institutions will remain. Recent protests against the perceived forces of globalization indicate a growing sense of alienation from high-level processes such as the Summit of the Americas on the part of civil society.

A further challenge for governments of the region will be balancing the range of debates presently surrounding the democracy issue. As the Peru case demonstrates, the commitments of hemispheric leaders to protect and promote democracy in their countries may be overshadowed by their insistence upon non-intervention in domestic affairs. Moreover, some countries raise the question of whether democracy would be better addressed at a subregional level. This position has been advocated by Brazil as

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Connecting the Americas

One underlying theme of the Quebec City Summit could come as a surprise for most countries of the hemisphere: “connectivity.” The Canadian government is emphasizing to its hemispheric counterparts and stakeholders the role that new information and communication technologies can play in promoting democratic processes, increasing prosperity and reducing the “knowledge gap” between developed and developing countries.

If connectivity indeed becomes the main theme of the 2001 Summit, it will demonstrate once again the close relationship between the Canadian domestic agenda and its foreign policy initiatives. Making Canada the most connected country in the world has been one of the priorities of the Canadian government, as seen in its SchoolNet program and the prominent place given to connectivity in the Vancouver APEC Summit of 1997.

In comparison to such fundamental issues as education, trade, democracy or poverty, connectivity may appear remote from the hemisphere’s problems. Canadian Summit negotiators are not denying the importance of these priorities; instead, they are stressing the potential of new information technologies to help alleviate the region’s ills. The challenge will be to cut back on window dressing and focus on ways to spread technology to all sectors of society.

Many obstacles complicate this task. In Canada and the United States, for example, free Internet access and falling prices for computers and other devices are bringing the cost of Internet service ever closer to zero. In comparison, by-the-minute local phone charges, lack of competition in the telecommunications sector, and higher computer costs due to tariffs or inefficiencies in the retailing sector make access to the Internet much more expensive in most of Latin America and the Caribbean. Yet, broader use of the new technology could bring important benefits to these countries. Opening up government procurement to online bidders could bring transparency to the process and significantly reduce procurement costs by up to 20%, to take just one example. The money saved could be reinvested in education and development programs.

Even taking these benefits into account, it may be difficult to justify an emphasis on connectivity at the Quebec City Summit given the persistence of immediate human crises such as poverty and hunger. The idea of street children sitting in front of computers donated by rich countries may make image-conscious governments feel better, but it may invite skepticism as well as divert attention from continuing basic human needs.

Pierre Bouchard
Senior Analyst, Trade and Economic Policy, FOCAL

Justice Studies Center

The newly established Justice Studies Center of the Americas held its third board meeting on the FIU campus in mid-July. SOAC hosted the meeting, whose objective was to choose a new director for the center. The board selected a candidate, but the director’s name was not revealed pending approval by the OAS Permanent Council.

The Ministers of Justice of the 34 democratic nations in the hemisphere created the Justice Studies Center of the Americas in 1999 under the aegis of the OAS General Assembly. The center is an autonomous, intergovernmental entity whose objectives are to facilitate the training of justice sector personnel, including judges; the exchange of information and other forms of technical cooperation; and support for the reform and modernization of justice systems in the region.

The center’s board is comprised of prominent individuals involved in the judicial process across the Americas. It is chaired by Mónica Nagel, minister of justice of Costa Rica, with Douglass Cassel, director of the Center for International Human Rights at Northwestern University School of Law, as vice chair. The other members are: Maria Soledad Alvear, foreign minister of Chile; Federico Callizo, a member of the Council of the Judiciary of Paraguay; Luis Ovalle, former deputy attorney general of Mexico; Karl Hudson-Phillips, Q.C., former attorney general of Trinidad & Tobago; and Carl Rattray, a retired justice of the Supreme Court of Jamaica.

The initiative to create the center was suggested at the Santiago Summit, and it remains based in Chile. However, Miami has emerged as a convenient meeting point for the widely dispersed board members. Adding to Miami’s appeal is FIU’s recently approved College of Law, which is expected to have a strong inter-American focus.

“Our program will emphasize international and Latin American law, so there is a natural interplay there,” stated Prof. John F. Stack, Jr., director of FIU’s Jack D. Gordon Institute for Public Policy and Citizenship Studies.

Nagel, the board’s chair, stressed the significance of the center’s mission to provide the countries of the Americas with judicial study, training and research, as well as comparative law and legal reform projects. “We have begun to set the Justice Studies Center in motion and will continue to strengthen it through the support of the OAS member countries,” she vowed.

Patricia Hidalgo, Coordinador, SOAC
The 30th OAS General Assembly

The OAS as a Forum for Debate and Exchange. The more flexible structure of this General Assembly, with more informal and dynamic proceedings than in the past, demonstrated that annual OAS meetings can foster high-level debate and exchange on significant hemispheric policy issues, including democracy and sovereignty.

Summit of the Americas. A private dialogue session of foreign ministers discussed broad Summit themes for Quebec City. It was generally agreed that although the OAS will likely be designated as the Summit Secretariat in the future, at present the organization lacks the resources to fulfill its existing Summit mandates. The foreign ministers agreed that more focus must be placed on restructuring the OAS and making it a more effective institution before giving it any additional Summit-related responsibility.

Human Security. A foreign ministers’ dialogue session on human security demonstrated general support for Canada’s foreign policy approach. Some ministers expressed concern that human security, while itself a useful concept, could distract the Summit’s focus from the principal threats to stability in the region, such as poverty, inequality, public insecurity and crime. We can expect human security to continue to underpin Canadian Summit planning.

Peru. Faltering democracies are fueling a nationalistic backlash in the Americas. This situation has the potential to complicate hemispheric cooperation in the months before Quebec City. A lack of consensus between “activist member states” (Canada, the United States, Costa Rica, Argentina and Uruguay) and “non-interventionist” member states (Brazil, Venezuela and Mexico) caused the OAS to stop short of questioning the results of Peru’s presidential election or imposing economic sanctions. Instead, it resolved to send a high-level mission to Peru, led by Canadian Foreign Minister Lloyd Axworthy and OAS Secretary General César Gaviria, to make recommendations aimed at strengthening democracy in Peru.

Strengthening Democracy - Special Fund. The General Assembly approved the creation of a special fund to be administered by the Secretary General. It will respond to requests for assistance from member states affected by internal situations that could lead to an interruption of the democratic process or legitimate exercise of power by a democratically elected government. This sort of resolution could have helped in Ecuador in January 2000.

Fund for Peace - Peaceful Settlement of Territorial Disputes. This resolution establishes a permanent fund to assist member states experiencing problems in defraying the cost of proceedings to resolve territorial disputes in a peaceful manner.

Civil Society. The new spirit of openness and accountability in the OAS was demonstrated by the presence of more than 40 civil society organizations as “special guests” at Windsor. Canadian ministers, the OAS Secretary General and directors of the OAS Secretariat met with the groups to hear their views on hemispheric policy issues.

A New Assistant Secretary General. Ambassador Luigi Einaudi was elected Assistant Secretary General of the OAS. From 1995 to 1998, Einaudi acted as the US special envoy in the peace talks that led to a comprehensive settlement of the Peru-Ecuador border dispute. Earlier this year, serving as the special representative of the OAS Secretary General, he brokered an agreement between Honduras and Nicaragua for the separation of military forces pending the resolution of the two nations’ contentious maritime dispute by the International Criminal Court. Einaudi is expected to be a proponent of OAS-Summit convergence.

Corruption. Canada ratified the Inter-American Convention Against Corruption and urged other member states to follow suit. To date, the convention has been signed by 26 member states and ratified by 19. The ratification means that Canada stands by its commitment to the OAS and will introduce changes to its own criminal code to enforce the standards of the convention.

Stacey Wilson-Forsberg and Martin Roy Policy Analysts, FOCAL

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it prepares to host the South American Democracy Summit in late August. Finally, it is crucial for governments to balance the Summit baskets themselves, making clear links between threats to democracy, the creation of prosperity and the realization of human potential. Given the deep inequities that exist in the region, many citizens appear willing to give up some measure of democracy and accept authoritarian-styled governments that they hope will lift them out of poverty.

Crafting action items for the “Strengthening Democracy” basket will undoubtedly be the most formidable undertaking facing the 34 hemispheric leaders when they meet in April 2001. Having said this, we believe that a real opportunity exists for Canada to continue to play a leadership role on this issue. Serious consideration should be given to a Canadian legacy to the Summit process; if Miami was the “Trade” Summit and Santiago the “Education” Summit, Quebec City could be remembered as the “Democracy” Summit, if Canada succeeds in building consensus for making action items on democracy a real priority.

Stacey Wilson-Forsberg and Martin Roy, Policy Analysts, FOCAL
Agenda: Women’s Issues

The Ministers Responsible for the Advancement of Women in the Americas met for the first time on April 27-28, 2000 in Washington, D.C. Convened by the OAS General Assembly and organized by the Inter-American Commission of Women (CIM), the meeting provided an opportunity for ministers (or the highest-ranking authorities sent from each participating country) to report on the progress made toward fulfilling past Summit of the Americas commitments, as well as to exchange ideas on proposals for the Quebec City Summit. This group will meet regularly henceforth.

According to reports prepared by the CIM, the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) and the United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), women in the region now enjoy greater recognition of their rights. However, they are still subject to various forms of exclusion and discrimination and play a limited role in public decision making. Women study and participate actively in the workforce in most countries of the region, yet continue to earn less than men and shoul-
der most of the responsibility for performing unpaid household labor. Poverty hits women the hardest, and in far too many instances public policies relating to women are founded upon a short-term, welfare-based approach, placing priority on their roles as mothers and wives.

The officials at the Washington meeting urged the governments of the hemisphere to include a gender perspective in the Declaration and Plan of Action of the Quebec City Summit and in the follow-up activities of the Summit mandates and ministerial meetings. They called on governments to reaffirm their commitment to gender equity and equality, requesting that the OAS General Assembly designate the necessary resources to the CIM to carry out the implementation of Summit mandates. The ministers also called for the inclusion of a concrete action item on women’s issues in the “Strengthening Democracy” Summit basket.

Stacey Wilson-Forsberg  
Policy Analyst, FOCAL

Calendar of Summit-Related Events

July 17-18, 2000  
1st Board Meeting of the Justice Studies Center of the Americas at Florida International University; Miami, USA

July 20-21, 2000  
4th Regular Meeting of the Executive Committee of the Inter-American Commission of Women (CIM)  
Washington, D.C., USA

July 28, 2000  
Meeting of the Inter-Agency Task Force on Follow-up to the Bolivia Summit  
Washington, D.C., USA

August 16-18, 2000  
4th Hemispheric Congress for the Prevention of Money Laundering  
Panama City, Panama

August 28 – September 8, 2000  
3rd Session of the Inter-American Court on Human Rights; San José, Costa Rica

August 31-September 1, 2000  
1st Summit of Presidents of South America; Brasilia, Brazil

September 6-8, 2000  
6th Meeting of the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA) Trade Negotiations Committee (TNC); Bridgetown, Barbados

September 11-15, 2000  
Meeting of the Governmental Expert Group regarding the Multilateral Evaluation Mechanism (MEM) of the Inter-American Drug Abuse Control Commission (CICAD)  
Washington, D.C., USA

September 25-29, 2000  
Pan-American Health Organization (PAHO) Directing Council Meeting (ministerial level); Washington, D.C., USA

September 30, 2000  
Deadline for civil society submissions to the FTAA Mailbox

Summit-Related Civil Society Websites

http://www.sociedadcivil.org  
Citizen Participation for the Summit of the Americas. An interactive website of civil society activities in preparation for the Quebec City Summit designed and maintained by the Santiago-based Corporación Participa.

http://www.esquel.org  
The Esquel Group Foundation coordinates the Civil Society Task Force, a clearinghouse and forum for debate on issues relevant to the advancement of active citizen participation in the Americas.

http://www.miami.edu/nsc/  
The North-South Center at the University of Miami has generated nongovernmental input for Summit of the Americas agendas since 1994 and has been involved in monitoring implementation of Summit initiatives.

http://www.redinter.org/  
Red Inter-Americana para la Democracia is a network of Latin American civil society organizations that promotes citizen participation to strengthen democracy in the hemisphere.

http://www.cries.org  
Coordinadora Regional de Investigaciones Económicas y Sociales (CRIES) studies and promotes regional integration in the Gran Caribe.