Shaping the Agenda

Since our first edition of this joint publication highlighting developments in the Summit of the Americas process, we have received much positive feedback on this joint initiative of the Summit of the Americas Center (SOAC) of Florida International University and the Canadian Foundation for the Americas (FOCAL). Our aim remains to provide neutral and informative updates on the vast range of work being undertaken by civil society, multilateral institutions, and national governments on all aspects of integration in the Americas.

This second edition spotlights results of key meetings and discussions on Summit issues—most often held under the aegis of the Organization of American States. The November 1999 Trade Ministerial in Toronto resulted in continued commitment to finalizing the Free Trade Area of the Americas agreement by 2005. The Toronto meetings afforded a rare chance for a direct exchange between civil society organizations and Trade Ministers—an initiative of Canada. FTAA negotiating groups will continue to do their work throughout 2000 leading to the next Trade Ministerial in Buenos Aires in April 2001.

Canada has now formally taken over the Chair of the Summit Implementation Review Group (SIRG) as host of the next Summit, April 20-22, in Quebec City. A new Summit “sherpa” has been named by the Canadian Prime Minister—Ambassador Marc Lortie who will now chair all SIRG meetings. Another Canadian initiative has been to open the OAS Special Committee on Summit Management to active participation by civil society groups. Two such meetings have now been held, to review the implementation and progress on Santiago Summit action items. This Committee is chaired by Canada’s Ambassador to the OAS, and National Coordinator for the Summit, Peter Boehm.

The pace is picking up now on agenda definition for the new Summit. The search is on for the Canadian “brand,” i.e. the key theme of the Summit, similar to education being chosen for the Santiago Summit. There is no question that the Summit will continue to focus on the larger questions of democracy and economic integration. However, the packaging of the initiatives and the crafting of an over-arching theme poses challenges for the Canadian host. Canada will be trying to balance the needs of the 34 leaders with its own domestic agenda of highlighting Canadian priorities or successes.

Speculation abounds on the Canadian “brand”: will it be the “human security” Summit? Can Canada promote its own policy of “connecting Canadians” to something like “connecting the Americas”? Should “justice” be the focus? How can the unending social problems of the hemisphere be captured in a catchy theme?

One clue was the recent speech by Canadian Foreign Minister Lloyd Axworthy at the OAS. Axworthy emphasized inclusion, governance and strengthening of institutions as priorities for the foreign ministers’ dialogue at the OAS General Assembly in June. This meeting—in Windsor, Canada—should

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Channels for Civil Society Access

In December 1999, the OAS approved the Guidelines for the Participation of Civil Society Organizations in OAS Activities. Such organizations are now allowed to register as participants in meetings of the political bodies, agencies and units of the OAS. Thanks to these guidelines, civil society organizations now have a number of ways to access hemispheric multilateral processes. Civil society groups can also seek separate accreditation as observers to the OAS General Assembly.

The Inter-American Strategy for Public Participation (ISP) provides a basis for civil society access to decision making on the environment and sustainable development. The ISP’s policy framework sets out the principles under which civil society consultation should take place, including inclusiveness, responsibility, comprehensiveness, access to information and transparency. The document’s recommendations for action cite the need for legal frameworks, better communication mechanisms and funding for participation.

A Committee of Government Representatives on the Participation of Civil Society within the FTAA negotiating structure was established in 1998. However, this venue was closed to active participation by civil society organizations. The committee developed a “mailbox” whereby civil society organizations were invited to send written submissions to Trade Ministers outlining their concerns about the FTAA negotiations. The government report on these submissions was presented at the Toronto Trade Ministerial last November. Currently, civil society organizations concerned about hemispheric free trade have no other access other than through national consultation processes, a difficult proposition considering that some governments are not open to civil society views on trade. To date, no official mechanism exists for civil society participation in Summit of the Americas discussions and negotiations. One line of thinking is that the OAS Guidelines and the ISP will facilitate such participation. In addition, the OAS Special Committee of Inter-American Summits Management works to encourage civil society involvement in the Summit process. The committee began holding open meetings in 1999 to hear the views of interested experts, academics and civil society organizations.

Stacey Wilson-Forsberg
Policy Analyst, FOCAL

Finance Ministers Meet

The different sectoral ministers of the hemisphere continue to meet under the Summit of the Americas rubric to report on the progress of action items from Santiago and Miami and to propose new initiatives for consideration. Meetings of the hemispheric ministers of labor, justice, culture and gender equality are planned for the next few months.

A highly publicized meeting of Finance Ministers was held in Cancun, Mexico on February 3, 2000. The ministers studied the performance of the global and regional economies during 1999, as well as prospects for 2000 and beyond. They discussed the need to improve the governance and transparency of national institutions, agreeing upon a set of initiatives to address corruption, money laundering and tax evasion. Finally, they reviewed progress on initiatives for strengthening the stability of banking systems, as mandated in the Santiago Plan of Action.

Although the Latin American economy is expected to grow by nearly 4% this year, World Bank President James Wolfensohn painted a grim picture of poverty in the region. He argued that Latin America is no better off now than it was more than two decades ago, despite far-reaching economic reforms. The region’s income distribution is the most unequal in the world, with the poorest 20% of the population earning only 4.5% of the wealth. Wolfensohn urged governments to work systematically with civil society organizations to address the root causes of poverty and inequality.

The next meeting of the hemisphere’s Finance Ministers will be held in Canada in 2001, at which time member countries will report their progress on new initiatives.

Stacey Wilson-Forsberg
Policy Analyst, FOCAL

Agenda

see further packaging of Summit agenda items in preparation for the Quebec City Summit.

One cautionary note however: Summit fatigue and Summit skepticism are taking hold, particularly as ordinary citizens of the hemisphere are unable to see a direct impact of these high-level discussions in their own lives. New Summit initiatives will need funding, both at the national and the hemispheric level. The disappointment with the lack of available funding for the Santiago education initiative is felt keenly in the hemisphere. Canada will have to ensure that new Summit action items, and renewed Summit priorities, are realistic, fundable and achievable. After Seattle, leaders of the hemisphere know that people in the street will make sure that the cost of failure will be high indeed.

Nobina Robinson
Executive Director, FOCAL
Inter-American Human Rights Reforms

OAS resolutions and Summit of the Americas declarations emphasize the need to reform the inter-American human rights system. Both the Inter-American Commission for Human Rights and the Inter-American Court for Human Rights are hindered by continuing problems, the most serious being: 1) an endemic shortage of resources; 2) a lack of compliance by OAS member states with the verdicts of the Court and the recommendations of the Commission; and 3) delays and the incapacity of the system's supervisory bodies to process the enormous volume of registered complaints.

Partially in response to Summit priorities for strengthening this system, a recent ministerial dialogue session created an ad hoc working group. The objective is to develop an action plan for approval by the hemispheric foreign ministers at the OAS General Assembly in Windsor this June. To date, the working group has recommended that the OAS substantially increase its allocation of resources to the Commission and Court, contingent upon certain conditions. These include the adoption of reforms; ratification of the Inter-American Convention on Human Rights and other basic human rights treaties by all member states; the implementation of more expeditious procedures by the Commission and Court; technical support for those member states that comply with their international human rights obligations; and human rights education for officials involved in the administration of justice. Meaningful reform will require transparent debate and dialogue involving all actors in the system.

The Windsor OAS General Assembly will most likely produce a number of resolutions on human rights. In addition to reform of the inter-American human rights commission and court, these will probably include the rights of indigenous peoples, children and youths, and gender equality issues. The first step in strengthening the inter-American human rights system should be to address the internal problems in member countries, an effort which implies effective national institutions to protect human rights. To this end, key member states, including Canada, have proposed the creation of an OAS coordinating office of national human rights institutions.

Stacey Wilson-Forsberg
Policy Analyst, FOCAL

Summit-Related Websites

http://www.miami.edu/8080/nsc/summit/summit.htm
Official documents on the summit process and analyses of Summit issues from the Leadership Council for Inter-American Summity.

http://ianic.utexas.edu/~sela/index.htm
The Latin American Economic System (SELA) is an inter-governmental organization of 28 Latin American and Caribbean countries. It publishes books and regular publications on integration in the hemisphere, including Capitulos, SELA Antenna in the United States, Integration Bulletin on Latin America and the Caribbean and Strategic Issues.

http://www.iadb.org/inal/
Institute for the Integration of Latin America and the Caribbean, part of the Integration and Regional Programs Department of the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB). Produces excellent research articles on hemispheric integration and a useful external trade statistics database.

Inter-American System of Legal Information, Organization of American States. This site, entitled The Fight Against Corruption in the Americas, will soon offer a much-awaited hyperlink to the Database of Institutions and Experts in the Fight Against Corruption.

http://www.hrw.org/hrw/spanish/
Home page of the Human Rights Watch Organization: Portada Américas. This site offers a broad view of the status of human rights in Latin America. Most articles are in Spanish.

http://www.derechos.org/
Derechos Human Rights is an international, internet-based human rights organization providing information and opportunities for action on human rights worldwide.
Deterring Corruption in the Americas

At the 1994 Miami Summit of the Americas, the leaders of the hemisphere advocated a united approach to combating corruption. They warned that corruption was undermining economic growth, equitable development and political stability in the region. Since then, many countries in the hemisphere have launched national anti-corruption plans, and these are being reinforced by initiatives at the regional and international levels.

The OAS has developed a regional approach to decrease and deter corruption through the Inter-American Program for Cooperation in the Fight Against Corruption. This program includes recommendations for legislative changes and the creation of consultative mechanisms to foster the exchange of information. Its goal is to involve international organizations, international financial institutions and civil society representatives in ensuring transparency and reducing corruption.

The OAS Working Group on Probit and Public Ethics is supervising the implementation of this agenda, which is largely based on provisions of the 1996 Inter-American Convention Against Corruption. The Convention is the international legal document that serves as the general framework for the commitments assumed by OAS member states on the subject. It requires cross-border cooperation and calls for strengthening national laws, stipulating that countries prohibit and punish transnational bribery subject to their own constitutional and legal systems. In accordance with domestic law, signatories may take into custody individuals whose extradition is sought by another state. The Convention has been signed by 26 of the 34 countries in the hemisphere, although only 17 have actually ratified it. Canada has yet to ratify it.

The need to support the Inter-American Program to Combat Corruption, particularly the adoption of a strategy to achieve prompt ratification of the Convention, was highlighted during the Second Summit of the Americas in April 1998. Other action items included the drafting of codes of conduct for public officials, the study of the laundering of proceeds from corruption, and the adoption of measures to regulate electoral campaign financing to prevent contributions derived from organized crime and drug trafficking.

Corruption is a problem that cuts across all Summit issues: economic integration and free trade, eradication of poverty and discrimination, and education. Recent debate on hemispheric corruption has given rise to the call for a monitoring mechanism to secure effective compliance with the Convention.

Floresca Jusin
Policy Analyst, FOCAL

Calendar of Summit-Related Events

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<td>February 24-25, 2000</td>
<td>Meeting of Hemispheric Ministers of Labor</td>
<td>Washington, D.C.</td>
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<tr>
<td>March 1-3, 2000</td>
<td>Meeting of Hemispheric Ministers of Justice</td>
<td>San José, Costa Rica</td>
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<td>March 2000</td>
<td>Meeting of Hemispheric Ministers of Culture</td>
<td>To be confirmed</td>
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<td>March 2000</td>
<td>Session of the Inter-American Juridical Committee</td>
<td>Rio de Janeiro, Brazil</td>
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<td>March 21-22, 2000</td>
<td>FTAA: Committee of Government Representatives on Civil Society</td>
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<td>March 27-31, 2000</td>
<td>Model General Assembly of the OAS</td>
<td>Edmonton, Alberta</td>
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<td>April 7, 2000</td>
<td>Meeting of the Summit Implementation Review Group (SIRG)</td>
<td>Washington, D.C.</td>
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<td>April 27-28, 2000</td>
<td>Meeting of Hemispheric Ministers on Women's Issues</td>
<td>Washington, D.C.</td>
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<td>June 3-5, 2000</td>
<td>&quot;Hemispheric Integration and Democracy in the Americas: Citizenship, Participation and Accountability&quot;</td>
<td>Windsor, Canada</td>
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<td>June 4-6, 2000</td>
<td>30th General Assembly of the OAS</td>
<td>Windsor, Canada</td>
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