Welcome to Our New Bulletin!

News Bulletin
Citizen Participation in the Summits:
From Santiago to Quebec
Initiatives and activities conducted by ESQUEL GROUP Foundation, FOCAL and PARTICIPA in promoting citizen participation toward the Canada Summit.

February 2000

This news bulletin seeks to provide up-to-date information on the initiatives, projects and activities undertaken by the ESQUEL GROUP Foundation, FOCAL and PARTICIPA in an effort to disseminate the Summit process and provide more organized, better-articulated citizen participation in the upcoming Summit in Canada.

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ESQUEL-FOCAL & PARTICIPA ALLIANCE
These three organizations have established an alliance within the context of the Canada Summit in an effort to:
(i) Bolster the flow of information about the Summit process among governmental and non-governmental sectors in nations around the hemisphere.
(ii) Promote constructive dialogue and collaboration between governmental and non-governmental sectors in each country to facilitate the implementation of Summit Agreements, and
(iii) Foster the exchange of information between civil society and governmental agencies responsible for the Summit at the hemispheric level to promote effective civil society participation in the process leading to the Canada Summit.

Some activities implemented by these organizations

FOCAL
The North South Institute in Ottawa is preparing a research study entitled "Worthier than Thou? Nongovernmental Voices in Multilateral Organizations". The study will be international in scope. FOCAL and the International Center for Human Rights and Democratic Development (ICHRDD) funded the first section of the study dedicated to the Americas. The section, called "Engaging With Civil Society: Lessons from the OAS, FTAA, and Summits of the Americas" is now ready for print and distribution in English and Spanish.

The Americas study was carried out by researcher Yasmine Shamsie over a period of three months between September and December 1999. Following a review of secondary research material and official documents, interviews were carried out in both Washington and Ottawa. Officials who actively participated in the planning of the summits; representatives from various departments of the OAS; government officials; and numerous civil society organizations from a variety of sectors were interviewed. A distribution list for the Americas study is now being prepared, please contact FOCAL (focal@focal.ca) for more information.

ESQUEL
Esquel Group Foundation’s Civil Society Task Force meets on a monthly basis in Washington, DC to discuss developments related to the Summit of the Americas. During January and February, its Working Group on the Organization of American States has been discussing a strategy vis a vis the recently approved Guidelines for the Participation of Civil Society Organizations in OAS Activities...
approved by the Permanent Council on 15 December 1999 as CP/RES. 759). The Working Group has agreed to coordinate member efforts with three purposes in mind: (1) promote, within the diverse networks represented, the accreditation process as an important step for the participation of civil society in the region and provide the necessary information to enable their application; (2) seek a balanced process, promoting the application by organizations with varied thematic interests and from several countries across the region; and (3) explore the weaknesses of the current guidelines so as to submit suggestions for its improvement. So far, a number of organizations from Latin America and the Caribbean have expressed their interest in applying for accreditation and the Working Group is confident that a broad spectrum of organizations, in both thematic and geographic terms, will be submitting applications within the next couple of months.

EGF has been collaborating with the International Center for Human Rights and Democratic Development in the definition of an agenda for the conference “Hemispheric Integration and Democracy in the Americas,” to be held in conjunction with the meeting of General Assembly of the OAS in Windsor in June 2000. The conference, co-sponsored by the Unit for the Promotion of Democracy of the OAS, will focus on three overarching themes: (a) integration and human rights; (b) governance and transparency; and (c) citizenship and participation.

EGF, FOCAL and PARTICIPA will continue to work closely with the Center, particularly in defining the session to promote collaboration of existing civil society networks around Summit Issues.

PARTICIPA

In the context of promoting citizen participation for the Summit process, on January 31, PARTICIPA carried out a training workshop on “National Consultation Processes for the Canada Summit” in Guatemala City. This workshop was provided for 43 representatives of civil society organizations from 17 countries of the Americas, which are members of the Inter-American Democracy Network. The objective of the workshop was to motivate, commit and train these organizations so that they can organize a consultation process in their countries. The workshop also served to present the civil society web site that is being developed under this initiative, showing the various informational and interactive sections of the site and ways of participating in them. The methodology of the workshop consisted of an exposition and the formation of working groups of participants based on the country of origin. The working groups analyzed the key factors for success in their countries and later designed an action plan for each country. They agreed to begin seeking financing for these initiatives and discussed the importance of carrying out the work as members of the Inter-American Democracy Network. Participants congratulated PARTICIPA for the content of the workshop and for sharing information related to the Summit Process. It is important to note that this initiative generated tremendous motivation among the participants.

The design of the website for the information dissemination strategy of the Summit Process is in its final stage. The principal objectives of the website are to:

(i) Disseminate the Summit Process among Civil Society Organizations (CSO) of the Region, and

(ii) Promote a constructive dialogue between CSO in the countries and networks so that they may contribute with proposals and recommendations.

According the information available at this time, the Government of Canada will use the concept of “citizen security” as the main guideline of the next Summit. The definition of “citizen security” is that established by the United Nations Development Program (UNDP). In this way, the web page is intended to be a regional forum that will allow CSOs to formulate proposals on the issues of: civil society, women, corruption, education, sustainable development, human rights, indigenous communities and micro enterprises.

As we stated earlier, the design of the web page is in its final stage as well as the construction of its tools: a Public Forum open to all the civil society organizations of the region which will present information and discussions on the different mandates from the Santiago Summit regarding civil society, a Billboard with
space to publish news, opinion articles, and a calendar of activities; an Organization Search Engine, that currently has a database of more than 2000 civil society organizations, which will periodically be updated. The internal test phase of the page will begin on Monday, February 21 and we hope to officially inaugurate the page during the first days of March.

With regard to the Consultation Process for the Canada Summit. This process intends to carry out national meetings and a hemispheric encounter to allow citizens to formulate recommendations to governments on the topics slated for discussion at the next Summit of the Americas. At this date, FORD Foundation has given support for this initiative in Argentina, Chile, Colombia and Peru. And FORD Foundation - Mexico will finance this initiative in this country.

Related Activities

For over a year, EGF has been in conversations with networks of organizations in the areas of Human Rights, Indigenous Peoples and Labor to encourage their involvement in the Summit Process. The February 18 meeting of Summit Management Committee (SMC) of the OAS provided a critical opportunity for these networks to see the connection between their ongoing work and the Summit. There was ample and very constructive participation by civil society organizations during the meeting relating to Democracy and Human Rights, Indigenous Populations, and Migrant Workers. As the SMC and SIRG move from a focus on reviewing implementation of Santiago Summit initiatives to developing proposals for the next Quebec City Summit, the participation of these established networks will become increasingly important. EGF will continue to work closely with these and other thematic networks as well as to collaborate with the Office of Summit Follow-up to disseminate the meetings and identify potential participants.

A number of NGOs in the Dominican Republic have formally established a National Working Group on the Summit of the Americas. Members include a wide array of organizations, among them:

- Centro de Investigación para la Investigación Femenina (CIPAF)
- COPADEBA
- Proyecto de Fortalecimiento de la Sociedad Civil/intec.
- Central General de Trabajadores
- Centro de Investigación Económica para el Caribe (CIECA)
- Alianza Ong
- Centro Padre Juan Montalvo, and
- Participación Ciudadana.

The group, which has been in conversations with EGF since early 1999, sent a representative to the training session coordinated by Corporación PARTICIPA under the auspices of the Inter-American Democracy Network mentioned above. Their immediate agenda includes establishing contacts with local authorities in charge of the Summit and formulating an action plan for the local consultation process. They will also be discussing the possibility of a Caribbean-wide consultation process and applications for accreditation at the OAS under the new guidelines. EGF and Corporación PARTICIPA will continue to work closely with the group to ensure their insertion in the regional Summit Process by providing access to critical information and technical assistance.

PARTICIPA has contacted Stephen King, Executive Director of the International Council of Social Welfare (ICSW). ICSW carried out preparatory activities for the World Summit for Social Development that was held in Copenhagen in 1995 and has since implemented follow-up projects in relation to the accords signed at that Summit. Currently, ICSW is making plans in preparation for the third Summit of the Americas.

In the interest of coordinating efforts, ICSW and PARTICIPA are in contact to prepare a proposal for the implementation of a regional meeting in May. The objective of this meeting would be to organize a dialogue that allows NGOs to formulate proposals that soon the governments would receive before the OAS General Assembly.

ICSW and PARTICIPA are still in conversations about this initiative.

Send your news or comments to Andrea Sanhueza or Maria Eugenia Brockmann at PARTICIPA.

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