

REGIONAL FORUM

“CIVIL SOCIETY IN THE PROCESS OF HEMISPHERIC INTEGRATION WITHIN THE FRAMEWORK OF THE SPECIAL SUMMIT OF THE AMERICAS (SSA)”

Mexico City, November 24-25, 2003

Introduction

The Summits of the Americas Secretariat of the Organization of American States (OAS), in a combined effort with the Mexican government and regional civil society organizations and networks, have organized a forum to exchange experiences and to search for a consensus regarding the problems and challenges facing the Hemisphere.

The Summits of the Americas Secretariat along with the Government of Mexico, Corporación Participa, Alianza Cívica, Partners of the Americas and the U.S. Agency for International Development, Red Interamericana para la Democracia (RID), Coordinadora Regional de Investigaciones Económicas y Sociales (CRIES), the Canadian Foundation for the Americas (FOCAL), and Asociación Latinoamericana de Organizaciones de Promoción (ALOP), are organizing the forum “Civil Society in the Process of Hemispheric Integration within the framework of the Special Summit of the Americas.” This event will take place on November 24-25, 2003 in Mexico City, in the Conference Area of the Foreign Affairs Secretariat, Ricardo Flores Magnón No. 1, Tlatelolco.

The forum's purpose is to offer an opportunity for civil society organizations who work for peace, economic and social development, and democratic governance to engage in a dialogue and formulate their contributions for the Special Summit of the Americas. The Special Summit will be held in Monterrey, Mexico from January 12 - 13, 2004, will be attended by the thirty-four Heads of State and Government.

The forum is designed to promote the participation of civil society organizations, opinion leaders and academics in the region, with the purpose of allowing them to present their findings and conclusions before the National Coordinators of the Summit Process at the next meeting of the Summit Implementation Review Group (SIRG) that will be held on December 8 - 11, 2003 at the OAS in Washington, DC.

This document provides background information on the forum, objectives and results that hopefully will be achieved, as well as the format, operatives, and logistics of the meeting.



Background

The XXXIII OAS General Assembly, assembled in Santiago, Chile, in June 2003, served as a framework for the XXX meeting of the Summit Implementation Review Group (SIRG) at a Ministerial level. On this occasion, the Ministers of Foreign Affairs agreed to hold the Special Summit of the Americas (SSA) in Mexico, with the objective of reaching a consensus on how to overcome the economic, social and political challenges of the region.

This meeting of the Heads of State and Government of the Americas is important as the region has experienced various situations that have affected its course, such as threats to democratic governance, severe financial crises, dubious policies adopted during the process of deregulation and market liberalization, the deficiencies of public services, the need to strengthen institutions, and the gap between the rich and the poor. All these factors bring forward the necessity of rethinking the direction of the region and of contributing to the construction of a hemispheric consensus which defines the future of the Americas and looks for solutions to the most urgent issues. Also, around one-third of the hemisphere's leaders have been appointed since the Third Summit of the Americas in Quebec City in April 2001, and it was agreed that it is important to renew vows of cooperation.

Additionally, the Americas face other challenges, including carrying out a strategy for the implementation of the agreements reached at *The International Conference on Financing for Development* (Monterrey, Mexico March 18-22, 2002), the *World Summit on Sustainable Development* (Johannesburg, the South Africa, August 26 – September 4, 2002), and the Millennium Development Goals.

Objectives

The agenda of the Special Summit of the Americas will focus on three central themes: economic growth with equity, social development and democratic governance. The political dialogue among the Heads of State and Government will be directed at identifying national and regional actions that should be considered in order to solve the critical problems that affect the Hemisphere, in particular, the disenchantment brought by the limited results that democracy has generated in terms of economic and social benefits and the upsurge of poverty and inequality.

The forum “Civil Society in the Process of Hemispheric Integration within the framework of the Special Summit of the Americas” offers a unique opportunity for civil society perspectives and accumulated experiences in their work areas to be heard and taken into consideration. Finally, all of the recommendations will be compiled into a document that will be transmitted to the XXXIII SIRG meeting.

The objectives of the forum are:

1. Share information on the Summits of the Americas process between government representatives, civil society organizations and the Summits of the Americas Secretariat.

2. Create a space for CSO participation within the framework of the preparations for the Special Summit of the Americas and develop the role of civil society in the hemispheric integration processes.
3. Produce recommendations to be presented to the National Coordinators, within the framework of the SIRG, so they can be considered during the negotiations of the Monterrey Declaration in January 2004.
4. Move forward in the creation of a permanent space for dialogue with civil society within the framework of the Summit Process.

In the area of economic growth with equity, the Forum will analyze the following issues, among others:

- Participation of the private sector in economic growth.
- Creation of working and employment opportunities for all and better income distribution
- Development of adequate economic, fiscal, and monetary policies, and solid management of public resources.
- Implementation of cooperation and integration instruments for development: financing and management of external debt and access to international markets.

In terms of social development, the Forum will discuss the following issues, among others:

- Policies to guarantee development and social inclusion: reducing poverty, hunger and social exclusion.
- Attention to all sectors of the population, placing emphasis on the most vulnerable groups, through access to nutrition, health, education and housing.
- Promotion of credit and financial services, systems of property registry, alliances between the public sector and the private sector; generation of employment opportunities; securing the productive use of science and technology, including reducing the digital divide; and establishing systems of social protection in times of crisis

In reference to democratic governance, the Forum will center its discussions on the following issues, among others:

- The interrelation between democratic, economic and social development. Strengthening social cohesion and governance. Defining public policies with a social orientation.
- Strengthening democratic systems, with respect to the rule of law. Greater transparency and public submission of the accounts of government institutions, fight against corruption and access to information.
- Innovative financial mechanisms for democratic governance.
- Hemispheric Security and prevention of conflicts.

Expected Results

The Forum is a space for dialogue and the exchange of information among civil society organizations with the purpose of contributing to the design and implementation of policies that

would improve the quality of life of the region. It is expected that contributions from civil society will assist in achieving the proposed goals from the Heads of State and Government under the framework of the Summits of the Americas. The forum expects to obtain the following results:

1. Presentation of recommendations from civil society regarding the themes of economic growth with equity, social development, and democratic governance to the Summit National Coordinators at the XXXIII SIRG meeting to be held on December 8-11, 2003 in Washington, DC.
2. Presentation of suggestions to the Summit National Coordinators concerning mechanisms to strengthen civil society participation in the Summits of the Americas process.
3. Proposals for a permanent dialogue mechanism.

Organizers

The *Summits of the Americas Secretariat*, of the Organization of American States, acts as the institutional memory and technical Secretariat to the Summit process, supports the countries in Summit follow up and preparation for future Summits, coordinates the support of the OAS in the implementation of Summit mandates, and chairs the Joint Summit Working Group, which brings together international and Inter-American agencies.

The *Mexican Foreign Affairs Secretariat's Unidad de Atención a Organizaciones Sociales* and the Coordinación de Organizaciones No Gubernamentales of the Mexican Coordinating Committee, design the work plan for civil society organizations participating in the Special Summit of the Americas, which will take place in Monterrey, México.

The *Red Interamericana para la Democracia (RID)*, established on September 1995, brings together roughly 250 civil society organizations from all over the Americas and orients its actions towards the consolidation of democracy in the countries of the region, and to the strengthening of its citizens. The Executive Secretariat of the RID has its headquarters in Buenos Aires, Argentina.

The *Asociación Latinoamérica de Organizaciones de Participación (ALOP)* is a non-governmental development association, composed of organizations from Latin America and the Caribbean. It was created in 1979 and constitutes one of the most durable integration efforts between NGO's of the region. Its objectives include the exchange of experiences and the development of proposals at the national, regional and national level; the promotion of integral projects; the strengthening of the disseminations capacity of ALOP and the level and quality of its associates.

The *Coordinadora Regional de Investigaciones Económicas y Sociales (CRIES)*, established in 1982, is a network of investigation centers, non-governmental organizations and foundations that promote economic investigations in the Caribbean with the purpose of strengthening civil society participation in the regional integration process and in the formulation and implementation of public policies.

Format

The forum of two days will have an inauguration session and four (4) panels, each with a moderator and a civil society rapporteur. The panels will be composed of civil society representatives regionally distributed, followed by a question and answer period. The rapporteur will be in charge of presenting and summarizing the ideas presented in the panel so that they can be included in the final report.

Venue

The Conference Area of the Foreign Affairs Secretariat, Ricardo Flores Magón, No. 1, Tlatelolco, Mexico City.

Languages

English and Spanish

Hotel

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Information

In order to participate in this event, please complete the enclosed registration form and send it to the Summits of the Americas Secretariat, to Jorge Sanin via e-mail at summitcso@oas.org, or fax at 202-458-3665. For additional information, please contact this Secretariat at 202-458-3127.

ANNEX

Civil Society Participation in the Summit Process



First Summit of the Americas – Miami, Florida, United States

At the Summit of Miami, in December 1994, the Heads of State and Government recognized for the first time that civil society participation was essential for strengthening democracies. The leaders highlighted the importance of fostering participation of individuals, political parties, academics, the private sector, civil society organizations (CSO) in public matters, and furthermore, recognized that public participation is crucial for the success of any responsible and transparent democracy.

The governments brought forth the revision of the normative framework for nongovernmental actors which would emphasize the management and supervision of resources, as well as the transparency and responsibility of these actors before society. On the other hand, measures were taken to improve participation from traditionally marginalized groups in social activities and initiatives.



Summit of the Americas on Sustainable Development – Santa Cruz de la Sierra, Bolivia

In December 1996, the Summit of the Americas on Sustainable Development, held in Santa Cruz, Bolivia, marked an important step in the follow-up of the Miami Summit initiative to implement civil society participation. The Heads of State and Government supported “greater participation of civil society in the decision-making process, including policies and programs, and their design, implementation, and evaluation.” The leaders decided to promote better opportunities to express ideas and exchange information regarding sustainable development between groups, organizations, businesses, and individuals. In this context, the leaders decided to take into account recommendations from the International Seminar on Public Participation held in Montevideo in 1996, and instructed the OAS to give priority to the formation of the Inter-American Strategy for the Promotion of Public Participation in the Decision-Making Process. The Strategy would promote the exchange of experiences and information between governments and civil society groups with respect to the formulation, implementation, and improvement of programs and politics of sustainable development, and of the high-level meetings organized by the OAS. The recommendations also included the establishment of regional consultation processes and the integration and strengthening of the National Councils of Sustainable Development.

It is important to emphasize that in the negotiation process for the Summit of Santa Cruz, a consultation session with governments and representatives of civil society from all over the Hemisphere was created. This session was carried out in the scope of the OAS and marked an important occasion in the evolution of civil society participation in the Summit Process—since, for the first time, the opinions of representatives from non-governmental organizations were listened and taken into account. Their voice contributed to the creation of documents that were later signed by the Heads of State and Government of the Hemisphere. Also, it is worthy to note that in the

negotiation process of the Declaration and Plan of Action of Santa Cruz, some countries included representatives from civil society in their delegations.



Second Summit of the Americas – Santiago, Chile

During the Second Summit of the Americas, held in Santiago, Chile in 1998, the Heads of State and Government recognized that education is "the determining factor for political, social, cultural and economic development of our people", and emphasized the need to promote civil society participation in educative development. In addition, the Second Summit reiterated the importance of strengthening more active civil society participation. The Plan of Action of Santiago summoned Member States and civil society organizations to promote the development of principles and recommendations for institutional frameworks that stimulate the formation of responsible and transparent democratic organizations, and foster dialogues and alliances with governments, in which the Organization of the American States (OAS) can serve as forum for the exchange of experiences and information.

Parallel to the Second Summit of the Americas, held in Santiago, Chile, civil society organized two hemispheric meetings that included the participation of CSO representatives, governmental and multilateral agencies from 34 countries. These two meetings created proposals on the issues of education, strengthening civil society, the role of women in eradicating poverty and discrimination, and the fight against corruption. These meetings were not necessarily tied to the official process. Nevertheless, several proposals were incorporated to the plan of action of Santiago.



Third Summit of the Americas – Quebec City, Canada

In the Third Summit of the Americas, held in Quebec City in April 2001, the Heads of State and Government gave value to the contributions of civil society to the Plan of Action of Quebec and made a call for all citizens of the Americas to contribute to the Summit process. Also, they recognized the important role that civil society plays in the consolidation of democracy and its participation in government programs as one of the most important resources for the success of development policies. The Heads of State and Government instructed the OAS, other multilateral organizations, and development banks to create strategies to increase civil society participation in the inter-American system. At the same time, these measures have increased the institutional capacity of Member State governments to receive, appreciate and act on the contributions and support of civil society organizations.

Civil Society Participation in the Third Summit of the Americas

Corporación Participa (Chile) coordinated, in alliance with the Esquel Foundation (United States), the Canadian Foundation for the Americas FOCAL (Canada), and the project "Citizen Participation: From the Summit of Santiago to the Summit of Canada," which had the objective to promote an active and constructive participation of civil society organizations of all the Hemisphere in the preparation and celebration of the Third Summit of the Americas.

This project consisted in executing a consultation processes of 900 civil society organizations in 17 countries of the Americas, which formulated 243 proposals to the Quebec Summit, 114 in the theme of "the strengthening of democracy;" 80 proposals in the theme "creating prosperity;" and 49 proposals in the theme of "development of the human potential". These proposals were presented to the Summit Implementation Review Group (SIRG) for their consideration in the elaboration of the Quebec Plan of Action. The Summits of the Americas Secretariat of the OAS had an important role in facilitating the dialogue and presentation of the final report to the governments. This process allowed the incorporation of more than half of the 243 proposals to the final Plan of Action.

After the Summit, Corporación Participes, along with La Coordinación Regional e Investigaciones Económicas y Sociales (CRIES), the Department of Political Science of the University of the Andes of Colombia (UNIANDES), *FOCAL* of Canada, The ESQUEL Foundation of the United States and FLACSO-Chile, implemented an evaluation of the consultation process. From the lessons and the results obtained arose the necessity to generate a strategy to give continuity to the process of civil society participation in the Summit processes.

In a combined-work effort from these organizations, the "Strategy of Follow-Up of the Civil Society to the Implementation of the Quebec City Plan of Action" was produced. This strategy consists in the design and implementation of mechanisms that allow for follow-up to confirm advances, and support the implementation of the Plan of Action in themes related to the strengthening of democracy, specifically: 1) access to information; 2) freedom of expression; 3) local government and decentralization; 4) strengthening civil society; and 5) reform of judicial power and access to justice.

In the dialogue with civil society occurring within the framework of the XXXIII General Assembly of the OAS, in June 2003 the Government of Canada announced its support to the project through the *Canadian Agency for International Development (CAID)*. Also, the *Inter-American Development Bank (IDB)*, the *Organization of American States (OAS)*, the *United States Agency of International Development (USAID)* and the *Inter-American Democracy Network (IDN)* support this initiative

At the moment, civil society organizations from 20 countries are implementing this follow-up strategy, whose results will be known by the end of 2003 and 2004. These results will be greatly disseminated to incorporate recommendations into the final document of the Special Summit of the Americas to be held in Mexico in 2004 and to the Summit of the Americas in Buenos Aires in 2005.

