



# **Manual for Civil Society Participation in the Organization of American States and in the Summits of the Americas Process**

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## **Preface**

The Manual for Civil Society Participation in the Organization of American States and in the Summits of the Americas Process was prepared by the Summits of the Americas Secretariat to increase and improve participation by civil society organizations (CSOs) in initiatives agreed upon by the OAS General Assembly and its policymaking bodies and by the Heads of State and Government in the Summits process.

Its purpose is to explain in a straightforward manner the means by which CSOs can participate in and be connected to OAS activities. The Manual is intended to encourage civil society participation in the inter-American agenda and foster awareness of the opportunity to contribute to policymaking in OAS activities and in the Summits of the Americas process.

The Manual provides a summary of the structure and work areas of the Organization. It then presents the guiding principles for CSO participation in OAS activities and the Summits process. Lastly, it explains, briefly and simply, the mechanisms and procedures in place at the Organization for CSO participation in its activities.

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## **1. The Organization of American States and Civil Society**

The Organization of American States (OAS) is the foremost political forum in the Hemisphere for multilateral dialogue and establishment of the inter-American agenda. The OAS plays a fundamental role in promoting peace, democracy, justice, and solidarity, strengthening cooperation, and defending the sovereignty, territorial integrity, and independence of its member states. The Organization's vision is based on consensus, dialogue, and cooperation for the economic, social, and political development of the region.

The First International Conference of American States, held on April 14, 1890, in Washington, D.C., founded the International Union of American Republics and its Commercial Bureau, which served as Secretariat of the Union until 1910, when it became the Pan American Union. For half a century, the Pan American Union was the forum in which agreements and conventions were concluded to institutionalize legal, economic, social, and cultural cooperation at the inter-American level.

At the Ninth International Conference of American States, held in Bogotá on April 30, 1948, 21 nations of the Hemisphere adopted the Charter that transformed the Pan American Union into the Organization of American States. That conference confirmed support for the Organization's common principles and respect for the sovereignty of each member state. Since that time, the OAS has expanded to include Canada and the nations of the Caribbean.

The OAS Charter has been amended several times. The Protocol of Buenos Aires was signed in 1967 and took effect in 1970. The Protocol of Cartagena de Indias was signed in 1985 and took effect in 1988. The Protocol of Buenos Aires established the Organization's present structure. The Protocol of Cartagena de Indias strengthened its political role in the Hemisphere. Later, additional amendments were introduced. The 1992 Protocol of Washington provides that one of the essential aims of the OAS is to promote, through cooperative action, the economic, social, and cultural development of the member states and help to eradicate extreme poverty in the region. Lastly, the 1993 Protocol of Managua established the Inter-American Council for Integral Development (CIDI); it went into effect in 1996 upon its ratification by two thirds of the member states.

### **1.1. The policymaking bodies of the OAS**

The OAS accomplishes its tasks by way of the General Assembly; the Meeting of Consultation of Ministers of Foreign Affairs; the Councils (the Permanent Council and the Inter-American Council for Integral Development); the Inter-American Juridical Committee; the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights; the General Secretariat; the specialized conferences; the specialized organizations; and other entities established by its governing bodies.

#### **1.1.1. The General Assembly**

The General Assembly is the supreme organ of the Organization. It gathers the member states each year in a regular session, and also holds special sessions under particular circumstances. All member states of the Organization are represented in the General Assembly. Each state has the right to one vote.

The General Assembly decides upon the general action and policy of the Organization, determines the structure and functions of its organs, adopts its program-budget, fixes the quotas of the member states, and considers any matter relating to friendly relations among the American states. The office of president of the Assembly is exercised provisionally by the head of the delegation indicated by the order of precedence previously established by the Preparatory Committee of the General Assembly until the General Assembly elects its president at the first plenary session. Elections are conducted by the vote of a majority of the member states. The heads of delegation are vice presidents ex officio of the Assembly and replace the president in the event of his or her disability, in accordance with the order of precedence.

### **1.1.2. The Councils of the OAS**

The OAS has a Permanent Council and an Inter-American Council for Integral Development (CIDI), which are directly subordinate to the General Assembly. Each Council has the authority granted to it in the Charter and other inter-American instruments, as well as the functions assigned to it by the General Assembly and the Meeting of Consultation of Ministers of Foreign Affairs.

The Permanent Council is composed of one representative of each member state, especially appointed, with the rank of ambassador. The purpose of the Permanent Council is to consider matters entrusted to it by the General Assembly or the Meeting of Consultation of Ministers of Foreign Affairs. It also sees to the maintenance of relations between the member states and assists them in the peaceful settlement of disputes. In addition, it serves as the Preparatory Committee of the General Assembly.

In the exercise of its functions, the Permanent Council has established permanent committees, which include: the General Committee, the Committee on Juridical and Political Affairs, the Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Affairs, the Committee on Hemispheric Security, and the Committee on Inter-American Summits Management and Civil Society Participation in OAS Activities. If need be, it also establishes ad hoc and special committees, as well as working groups, such as the one responsible for preparing the Annual Report and Special Reports for the General Assembly.

The Inter-American Council for Integral Development (CIDI) was established in 1996 by a protocol of amendment to the OAS Charter, known as the Protocol of Managua. Its principal purpose is to promote integral and sustainable development in the Americas, and its mandates are linked to the technical capacity of the General Secretariat.

CIDI is composed of representatives of ministerial rank appointed by the member states in light of the topics addressed by the Council. The supporting structure for CIDI is to be found in the General Secretariat and revolves mainly around policy formulation and design, experience-sharing, and the setting up of cooperation networks and partnerships with other institutions to craft and execute development projects.

### **1.1.3. General Secretariat**

The General Secretariat of the OAS is the permanent organ of the Organization. It executes the programs and policies adopted by the General Assembly and the other policymaking bodies. It is headquartered in Washington, D.C. and has national offices in most member states. The Secretary General and Assistant Secretary General are responsible for supervising the staff of the General Secretariat.

The Secretary General is elected by the General Assembly for a five-year term. He may not be re-elected more than once, nor be succeeded by a person of the same nationality. He is the legal representative of the General Secretariat and participates, without the right to vote, in all the meetings of the Organization.

The Secretary General may bring to the attention of the General Assembly or the Permanent Council any matter which in his opinion might threaten the peace and security of the Hemisphere or the development of the member states.

### **1.2. Fields in which the OAS is active**

Structurally, the OAS is made up of the General Assembly, the Permanent Council, and the Inter-American Council for Integral Development (CIDI), the Inter-American Juridical Committee (CJI), the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR), the special conferences, specialized agencies, and the General Secretariat, which coordinates the work of the secretariats, departments, and technical offices, which support the development of the Organization and of the inter-American system.

Through these dependencies, the Organization conducts a range of activities that facilitate consensus-building and cooperation among member states and different international organizations, inter-American agencies, and civil society organizations (CSOs), the private sector, and other players in the following fields:

- Legal cooperation and international law
- Educational, social, scientific, and cultural development, and employment generation
- The sustainable development of tourism and small enterprises
- Sustainable development and the environment
- Strengthening of democratic institutions
- Gender equality
- Children
- Economic integration, trade liberalization, and market access
- Combating corruption
- The fight against illicit drugs and money laundering
- The fight against terrorism
- Promotion and protection of human rights
- Indigenous peoples
- Ports
- Telecommunications

### **Legal cooperation and international law**

The Inter-American Juridical Committee (CJI) is the Organization's advisory body on legal matters. It fosters the development and codification of international law and studies the legal issues associated with political and economic integration and the development of the countries of the Hemisphere. The Committee has its headquarters in Rio de Janeiro and is composed of eleven jurists, nationals of the member states, who are elected by the General Assembly.

For its part, the Department of Legal Affairs and Services of the General Secretariat provides advice and prepares legal cooperation and assistance mechanisms, channels and coordinates offers of legal cooperation, and acts as the technical secretariat for matters related to the holding and follow-up to the Meetings of Ministers of Justice or of Ministers or Attorneys General (REMJA), the Committee of Experts of the Mechanism for the Implementation of the Inter-American Convention against Corruption, the Consultative Committee of the Inter-American Convention against the Illicit Manufacturing of and Trafficking in Firearms, Ammunition, Explosives, and Other Related Materials (CIFTA), and the Committee on International Humanitarian Law.

It also plays a pivotal role in the harmonization and codification of international law at the hemispheric level, the juridical framework for which comprises conventions, protocols, model laws, and legislative guidelines, as well as other documents and instruments that regulate relations between individuals in an international context.

The principal component in this area of its work is the Inter-American Specialized Conference on Private International Law (CIDIP), which is convened by the OAS every four to six years. CIDIP has produced 26 widely used international instruments, including the conventions, protocols, and model laws that shape inter-American public and private law.

### **Educational, social, scientific, and cultural development, and employment generation**

The General Secretariat of the OAS enjoys technical support from the Office of Education, Science, and Technology of the Executive Secretariat for Integral Development (SEDI), which assists member states through ministerial and inter-American commission meetings on subjects related to educational, social, and cultural development and employment generation. This helps foster horizontal cooperation among the institutions responsible for implementing policies and promoting dialogue among the leading players in civil society, government entities, and the international agencies committed to the economic and social development of the Hemisphere.

In addition, the Office channels the supply and demand for services and technological information in the region, promoting hemispheric cooperation in the design and execution of partnership for development policies that help strengthen and boost the competitive capacity of enterprises producing goods and services for the development of member states. The Office is in charge of the scientific and technological activities needed to take the Organization down new paths by establishing networks and promoting technical excellence programs in the Americas.

The OAS works through the Inter-American Agency for Cooperation and Development (IACD), the executive organ of CIDI, to promote partnership for development with member states and to improve work with the private sector and civil society. That work takes the form of technical cooperation projects, training scholarships, employment generations, special funds for horizontal cooperation, and through the Trust for the Americas, a not-for-profit organization affiliated to the OAS, which facilitates private and public sector support for social development programs.

### **The sustainable development of tourism and small enterprises**

The Tourism and Small Enterprise Division of the Office of Trade, Growth, and Competitiveness of the General Secretariat supports the development of tourism as a strategic sector for economic growth and the improvement of living standards in the region. Its functions include the exchange of information and promotion of cooperation between the public and the private sectors with regard to tourism and its relation to trade; research and analysis of the tourism sector and its relation to trade; support for the Inter-American Travel Congresses, in order to facilitate the formulation of hemispheric policies; the crafting, evaluation, and execution of cooperation activities and projects; support for other areas of the General Secretariat involved in activities related to the sustainable development of tourism; cooperation with international, regional, and subregional organs, and with nongovernmental organizations and the private sector, in the tourism sector; and identifying and promoting best practices in the use of information and communication technologies and Internet-based resources in order to improve the competitive performance of small and medium-sized enterprises.

The General Secretariat performs this function with a view to strengthening programs that support the formulation of policies and plans of action for developing the sector and, in addition, to providing training and education for civil society as a tool for enhancing human capital skills in the region.

### **Sustainable development and the environment**

Following the Summit of the Americas on Sustainable Development, held in Santa Cruz de la Sierra, Bolivia, in 1996, the General Secretariat established the then Unit (now Office) of Sustainable Development and Environment, under SEDI. The objective of this Office is to foster the economic development of member states, without harm to the environment; to lend technical and administrative support to the Organization's efforts to become the foremost inter-American forum for the formulation of regional sustainable development and environmental policies. Those functions are exercised by: Assisting with the identification of collective environmental problems; the formulation of solutions to those problems, the analysis of their political, economic, and social repercussions; the establishment of possible priorities for preventive action and the development and consolidation for technical cooperation projects; exchanges of information between governments and civil society organizations; the transfer of environmentally sound technologies, and promotion of environmental education.

The aforementioned Office develops the inter-American strategy for the promotion of public participation in decision-making for sustainable development established in the Plan of Action

of the Summit in Santa Cruz de la Sierra and its purpose is to promote and facilitate mechanisms for civil society participation in the formulation and design of public policies, in decision-making for sustainable development, and in regional environmental management.

### **Strengthening of democratic institutions**

The Department of Democratic and Political Affairs of the General Secretariat is in charge of activities designed to support the consolidation of democracy in member states.

This Department assists member states with the modernization and strengthening of their democratic institutions and processes. Other objectives include information exchange among institutions and experts on democracy in the region; electoral observation and technical assistance to governments; support for national reconciliation processes and conflict resolution; and implementation of the program to reduce and eliminate antipersonnel mines in the region. In addition, the Department has established cooperation ties with numerous academic institutions and nongovernmental organizations, as well as with other regional organizations and the United Nations.

### **Gender equality**

The Inter-American Commission of Women (CIM) is a specialized organization of the OAS, established in 1928 for the purpose of ensuring recognition of women's civil and political rights. As such, it has played a core role in incorporating the participation and support of women as a legitimate and indispensable ingredient of governance and international consensus building.

Through its delegates in each member state, the CIM provides support and recognition for national women's movements in the government sphere, for nongovernmental organizations, and grass-roots organizations. The CIM supports feminist movements in the Americas and helps grass-roots communities to promote inter-American cooperation in gender equality.

### **Children**

The purpose of the OAS's Inter-American Children's Institute (IIN) is to improve the health and living standards of children and their families. The IIN serves as a social action center and conducts programs in the areas of health, education, social legislation, social services, and information.

The Institute provides technical assistance to governmental and nongovernmental organizations that serve at-risk children and their families. Its advisory services focus on the development, monitoring, and evaluation of programs and projects designed to improve management in homes that care for children and in national agencies that coordinate such homes. The IIN provides technical assistance to organizations working on children's issues and helps with the policy formulation and planning needed for proper multisectoral assistance to children and their families.

### **Economic integration, trade liberalization, and market access**

The General Secretariat has an Office of Trade, Growth, and Competitiveness to provide technical advice to member states, especially those with small economies, on improving trade practices, establishing strategic alliances with the various business, production, labor, environmental, and academic sectors, and facilitating the negotiation of the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA).

The Office of Trade, Growth, and Competitiveness provides technical and analytical support to nine of the 12 FTAA working groups, sharing this responsibility with the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) and the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC). The Office also provides information to the general public by way of lectures, presentations, publications, and training courses, and publishes extensive information on regional integration and the FTAA process through its Foreign Trade Information System (SICE). It also fosters regional and hemispheric dialogue on trade matters, including the relationship between trade, development, growth, and competitiveness, trade and the environment, trade and labor, trade and governance, and trade and security, and on other matters addressed under the various trade integration agreements in the Hemisphere.

### **Combating corruption**

The OAS established the Inter-American Program for Cooperation and the Follow-up Mechanism for the Implementation of the Inter-American Convention against Corruption (MESICIC), coordinated by the Office of Inter-American Law and Programs, as a means of strengthening national law, supporting institutions that fight corruption, and enabling civil society and international organizations to follow up on, evaluate, and report corruption in the region. This program is a response to the mandate to strengthen cooperation against corruption in the Hemisphere, established after the Inter-American Convention against Corruption was signed in 1996.

The OAS cooperates with member states in efforts to prevent corruption through information campaigns promoting the countries' signature of and accession to the Convention.

### **Fight against illicit drugs and the laundering of assets**

The Inter-American Drug Abuse Control Commission (CICAD) was established by the General Assembly in 1986 to promote cooperation among member states in controlling the trafficking, production, and abuse of controlled substances, in keeping with the 1986 Inter-American Program of Action of Rio de Janeiro.

CICAD's objectives include promoting multilateral cooperation on drug control, conducting programs to strengthen drug abuse prevention and treatment in member states, fighting money laundering and the production and trafficking of illicit drugs, and promoting research, information-sharing, specialized training, and technical assistance to fight this scourge.

In 1999, the Multilateral Evaluation Mechanism (MEM) was established to assess the anti-drug activities of the 34 member states of CICAD throughout the Hemisphere. CICAD conceived this instrument in response to a mandate of the Second Summit of the Americas. Its

four major focuses are anti-drug strategies, demand reduction, supply reduction, and control measures. The MEM is not only an evaluation mechanism but also a means of cooperation among countries, with long-term continuity. The instrument is available to the public for information on the current drug situation, on positive and negative developments, and on areas in which work is needed or specific activities need to be reinforced.

### **The fight against terrorism**

The Inter-American Committee against Terrorism (CICTE) serves as the preeminent organization within the inter-American system for the coordination of efforts to protect the citizens of the member states from terrorism.

CICTE's objectives include improving information exchange among competent national authorities, creating and updating an inter-American database on terrorism matters, formulating a proposal to help member states draft appropriate antiterrorism legislation, and compiling bilateral, subregional, and multilateral treaties and agreements signed by the member states on this subject. CICTE also works to promote universal accession to international antiterrorism conventions, to increase cooperation in border areas and security measures related to travel documents, and to implement training and crisis management activities.

### **Promotion and protection of human rights**

The OAS works to promote and protect human rights through its Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR). This advisory body was created in 1959 to promote the observance and defense of human rights in the Hemisphere. The IACHR is an autonomous OAS body composed of seven independent members elected by the General Assembly.

The Commission holds conferences, seminars, and meetings with representatives of governments, academic institutions, and civil society organizations to impart information and raise awareness of human rights protection issues in the region. It receives complaints of violations of the human rights recognized in the American Convention on Human Rights, the American Declaration of the Rights and Duties of Man, and other legal instruments, according to regulations and procedures established in its Statute. Civil society organizations and natural persons legally recognized in one or more OAS member states can present petitions to the IACHR.

### **Indigenous peoples**

The Organization supports efforts to negotiate the American Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, which has been debated within the OAS since 1997. Topics addressed in the deliberations include the self-determination of indigenous peoples, traditional forms of cultural preservation, and land and territorial rights. These have been conducted in the framework of the Working Group to Prepare the Draft American Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, established by the OAS Permanent Council. The OAS Summits of the Americas Secretariat, together with other dependencies of the General Secretariat, provides logistical and administrative support in the preparation of the Draft Declaration at the various negotiation meetings.

The OAS also has the Inter-American Indian Institute (III), which coordinates the necessary research for better understanding of the region's indigenous peoples and helps to resolve their economic and social challenges. The Institute's purpose is to provide technical assistance in the establishment of indigenous community development programs and scientific information on the present situation of indigenous persons in the Americas.

### **Ports**

The OAS has been involved in port matters for over five decades, through the Inter-American Port Conference, created by the member states as a specialized organization to deal with port sector development matters and related problems and solutions and to strengthen cooperation among ports of the Hemisphere. The Inter-American Committee on Ports (CIP) was created in 1998, as a hemispheric governmental forum for dialogue on ports, with a view to promoting development and paving the way for regional cooperation in this area.

### **Telecommunications**

The Inter-American Telecommunication Commission (CITEL) was established by the OAS General Assembly in 1993, as the region's principal forum in which representatives of member states and the private sector meet to coordinate ongoing telecommunications development in the Hemisphere.

CITEL has permanent consultative committees (PCC), composed of all the member states and of associate members representing private enterprises and organizations in the telecommunications sector, permanent observers, and regional and international organizations.

### **1.3. Summits of the Americas**

The Summits of the Americas process is the intergovernmental forum in which the Heads of State and Government of the 34 democratic countries of the Hemisphere define and discuss the inter-American agenda. Presiding over this process is the government of the country that is to host the next Summit. The process is guided by shared values and by commonly established institutional mechanisms.

The Summits determined that these mechanisms should include the American countries that had democratically elected governments and free market economies. It also determined that the mechanisms would conduct multilateral international negotiations on an egalitarian basis and take decisions by consensus. The institutional mechanisms are charged with leading the process, decision-making, and implementation and follow-up of Summit mandates.

At the Summit of the Americas in Quebec, the Heads of State and Government recognized the central role the OAS plays in supporting the Summits process, as its technical secretariat and institutional memory. The Summits of the Americas Secretariat was established to give formal shape to that function.

The Secretariat coordinates follow-up on OAS implementation of Summit mandates. It supports the Summit Implementation Review Group (SIRG), the SIRG's Steering Committee and Executive Council, the ministerial and sectoral meetings, and the OAS Permanent

Council's Committee on Inter-American Summits Management and Civil Society Participation in OAS Activities (CISC). It also coordinates with the host country on preparations for upcoming Summits of the Americas and for participation in the Summit process by civil society, the private sector, the academic sector, and the press. It is presided by the Joint Summit Working Group (JSWG), a group of international and inter-American bodies that coordinate follow-up on Summit mandates.

#### **1.4. Summit follow-up mechanisms**

The Summit Implementation Review Group (SIRG) was established in 1995 and initially chaired by the United States, as host country of the First Summit of the Americas. Chile became chair of the SIRG in 1997, as host of the Second Summit. Canada was the next chair, as host of the Third Summit. Argentina, as host of the upcoming Fourth Summit of the Americas, scheduled for November 2005, became chair in June 2003.

The SIRG is composed of the 34 democratically elected governments of the Hemisphere, represented by their national coordinators—usually the deputy foreign minister or person in charge of Western Hemisphere affairs at the foreign ministry. The SIRG is responsible for monitoring progress on fulfilling the mandates issued in the plans of action of the various Summits and negotiating the declaration and plan of action of each future Summit. The SIRG meets roughly three times a year. At least one of its meetings is at the foreign ministry level, in conjunction with the OAS General Assembly session.

The SIRG Executive Council was created in the Quebec City Plan of Action (2001) as a regionally representative group of member countries whose role is to support the work of the SIRG and assess and strengthen the follow-up of Summit initiatives and preparations for future Summits. The members of the Executive Committee include the United States, Chile, Canada, Mexico, and Argentina (future Summit), as host countries; Brazil; one country representing CARICOM; one country representing the Andean Community; one country representing Central America; and one country representing the Rio Group. On April 2, 2003, the SIRG meeting was opened for the first time to CSO participation, the aim being to share information on the Summits of the Americas in general and to discuss topics of education, hemispheric security, and governance addressed at that time.

Another focus of the SIRG Executive Council is to deepen partnerships and coordination between the Summit process and its partner institutions, which are members of the Joint Summit Working Group (JSWG): the OAS, the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO), the Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA), the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), the World Bank, the Andean Development Foundation (CAF), the Central American Bank for Economic Integration (CABEI), the Caribbean Development Bank (CDB), the International Organization for Migration (IOM), the International Labour Organization (ILO), and the Institute for Connectivity in the Americas (ICA).

The SIRG's Steering Committee is composed of the future and past Summit hosts. Its function is to assist the chair of the Summit process in preparing for meetings of the SIRG Executive Council.

## **2. Principles governing participation by civil society organizations in OAS activities and the Summits of the Americas process**

The OAS has taken a special interest in the potential contributions of civil society organizations to the activities of its organs, agencies, and entities. The Organization's 1948 Charter establishes as a function of the Permanent Council the possibility of concluding agreements or making special arrangements with "other American agencies of recognized international standing." Throughout these 50 years, the various organs, agencies, and entities of the Organization have developed, in the context of their institutional objectives, various types of linkages with national and international institutions. The richness of this process, which has given rise to especially important innovations in the intergovernmental organization arena, has also pointed to the need to channel inputs from those institutions and organizations by developing appropriate rules.

Civil society is important, as both ally and critic, in the implementation of programs of cooperation between governments and regional and international organizations. Resolution CP/RES. 759 (1217/99) of the OAS Permanent Council, "Guidelines for the Participation of Civil Society Organizations in OAS Activities," defines these organizations as any national or international institution, organization, or entity made up of natural or juridical persons of a nongovernmental nature.

The OAS had made great strides in terms of civil society participation. It has arranged opportunities for dialogue. It has developed mechanisms for civil society participation in political forums, project execution, horizontal cooperation and partnership program development, and the sharing of experience and information, making public policy formulation responsive to needs and realities in American societies.

Wishing to increase civil society participation in its activities, the Organization, through its dependencies, has adopted a number of initiatives and resolutions enlarging the CSO role at the OAS. Salient among them are:

- [CP/RES. 759, "Guidelines for the Participation of Civil Society Organizations in OAS Activities"](#)
- [CP/RES. 840, "Strategies for Increasing and Strengthening Participation by Civil Society Organizations in OAS Activities"](#)
- [CP/RES. 864, "Specific Fund to Support the Participation of Civil Society Organizations in OAS Activities and in the Summits of the Americas Process"](#)

### **2.1. Civil society participation in OAS activities**

Civil society participation at the OAS is fundamental to the development of the American Hemisphere. CSO inputs aid in the design of policies consistent with the needs of communities in the member states. These organizations have the option of developing and strengthening the exchange of information and knowledge with the public and private sectors at the regional and international levels and promoting and implementing a culture of democratic participation through training and the formation of strategic associations to support, monitor, and evaluate government policymaking, for the benefit of society in the American Hemisphere.

This interaction was promoted by resolution CP/RES. 759 (1217/99), “Guidelines for the Participation of Civil Society Organizations in OAS Activities,” which defined the process by which CSOs could apply to participate. In the Guidelines we find:

- A standard procedure by which CSOs can apply to participate in OAS activities;
- Procedures and criteria for CSO registry with the OAS;
- Responsibilities of CSOs once they are registered in the Organization’s system.

In resolution CP/RES. 840 (1361/03), “Strategies for Increasing and Strengthening Participation by Civil Society Organizations in OAS Activities,” the Organization established strategies that legitimize the opportunities for civil society participation, including:

- Having knowledge of and access to activities on the hemispheric agenda in the subject areas defined by the member states;
- Developing and executing projects with the OAS General Secretariat to formulate public policy promoting society’s economic, social, and cultural development in the Americas;
- Forming strategic alliances between civil society, the OAS, and private-sector enterprises for implementation of the various activities in the subject areas entrusted to the General Secretariat and its technical bodies, so as to provide technical assistance, training, and reciprocal services for better practices;
- Establishing organized, legitimate, and strong participation by CSOs in the region and the inter-American system;
- Devising proposals for the design and execution of public policy to benefit the community in the Americas;
- Institutionalizing direct dialogue with governments and various organizations and bodies of the inter-American and international system, with ample opportunity for all actors in the inter-American system to express their opinions and offer their input;
- Participating in virtual consultations, through the Internet, with government agencies and CSOs, to identify challenges and initiatives in the various areas of endeavor of the OAS.

Resolution CP/RES. 864 (1413/04) established the Specific Fund to Support the Participation of Civil Society Organizations in OAS Activities and in the Summits of the Americas Process. The Fund will provide financial support to facilitate participation by registered civil society organizations in the activities of the Organization’s policymaking bodies, such as the General Assembly and the Permanent Council, the special meetings of the Committee on Inter-American Summits Management and Civil Society Participation in OAS Activities (CISC), the Summit Implementation Review Group (SIRG), appropriate ministerial meetings, and other OAS activities. The Fund may also promote CSO participation in the Summits of the Americas process.

## **2.2. Summits of the Americas and civil society**

The Summits of the Americas process has determined that CSO participation is a valuable and significant means of including social actors in efforts to bring about economic and social development, strengthen democratic institutions, and attain good governance. As a result,

opportunities have been created for interaction between civil society and member state governments.

CSOs are critical for monitoring and implementing Summit process initiatives. In that connection, regional CSO networks have executed projects, including joint projects with the OAS, to provide technical support for, and exchange information on, political process follow-up, thus establishing a forum for participation in the decision-making of member state governments.

Within the OAS, the Committee on Inter-American Summits Management and Civil Society Participation in OAS Activities (CISC) was set up to establish procedures to ensure that the interaction between CSOs and the Organization's political bodies was clear, modern, and transparent. Such participation empowers and propels CSOs as stakeholders and supervisors of their own development.

In 2004, the Summit of the Americas celebrated its 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary. In a decade, three Summits of the Americas, a Summit on Sustainable Development, and a Special Summit of the Americas have demonstrated the member states' capacity to engage in discussion and find common solutions to the problems that maintain the Hemisphere's status as a developing region—solutions that promote prosperity and peace.

### **2.2.1. First Summit of the Americas – Miami, Florida, United States**

At the First Summit of the Americas, held in Miami in 1994, the Heads of State and Government expressed an interest in the consolidation and diversification of democracies in the Hemisphere in such a way as to ensure their sustainability. It was primarily for that reason that they underscored the importance of participation by individuals, labor unions, political parties, academics, the private sector, and CSOs in public affairs and recognized that public participation was pivotal to the success of any democracy in a context of accountability and transparency.

### **2.2.2. Summit on Sustainable Development – Santa Cruz, Bolivia**

At the Summit of the Americas on Sustainable Development, held in Santa Cruz de la Sierra, Bolivia, in 1996, the Heads of State and Government decided to promote increased opportunities for groups, organizations, businesses, and individuals to express ideas and exchange information on sustainable development. In that connection, they decided to take into account the recommendations of the Inter-American Seminar on Public Participation, held in Montevideo in 1996, and entrusted the OAS with assigning priority to the formulation of the Inter-American Strategy for the Promotion of Public Participation in Decision-making. The strategy was intended to promote the exchange of experiences and information among governments and civil society groups on the formulation, implementation, and improvement of sustainable development programs and policies and in high-level meetings.

### **2.2.3. Second Summit of the Americas – Santiago, Chile**

At the Second Summit of the Americas, held in Santiago, Chile, in 1998, the Heads of State and Government recognized that education was “the determining factor for the political, social, cultural, and economic development of our peoples,” and highlighted the need to encourage civil society to participate in developing education. The Second Summit also reaffirmed the importance of increasing active participation by civil society. The Plan of Action of Santiago called upon member state governments and CSOs to promote the development of principles and recommendations for institutional frameworks to stimulate the formation of responsible and transparent democratic organizations, and to encourage public sector-civil society dialogue and partnerships in which the Organization might serve as a forum for the exchange of experiences and information.

### **2.2.4. Third Summit of the Americas – Quebec City, Canada**

At the Third Summit of the Americas, held in Quebec City, Canada, in April 2001, the Heads of State and Government expressed appreciation for civil society’s contributions to the Quebec City Plan of Action and recognized civil society’s important role in the consolidation of democracy and its participation in government programs, as one of the vital elements for the success of development policies.

The Heads of State and Government entrusted the OAS and other multilateral organizations and development banks with developing strategies to enable civil society to participate more fully in the inter-American system. Said measures have increased the institutional capacity of the member state governments to receive, absorb, and act on CSO input and advocacy.

The Heads of State and Government promoted the role of CSOs—together with technical and educational professionals—in the development and implementation of disaster management policies at both the national and community levels. Moreover, they recognized the contributions made by CSOs to the promotion of national strategies for the sustainable development of agriculture and the improvement of living standards in rural areas.

Lastly, bearing in mind the Inter-American Democratic Charter, the Heads of State and Government asked the CSOs for contributions to promote the principles and practices that strengthen democratic culture in the Hemisphere. The Quebec City Plan of Action recognized that democracy is a way of life based on freedom and on improved economic, social, and cultural conditions for the people of the Americas in a context of good governance, management, and values, taking into account the inputs of CSOs.

### **2.2.5. Special Summit of the Americas – Monterrey, Mexico**

At the Special Summit of the Americas, held in Monterrey, Nuevo León, Mexico, in January 2004, the Heads of State and Government agreed that, through citizen participation, civil society organizations should contribute to the design,

implementation, and evaluation of public policies adopted by different orders or levels of government.

They also recognized the role of civil society and its contribution to sound public administration and reaffirmed the importance of continuing to forge new partnerships that would enable constructive ties to be built between governments, nongovernmental organizations, international organizations, and the diverse sectors of civil society in order to work in favor of development and democracy. Likewise, they pledged to encourage civil society participation in the Summits of the Americas process and to institutionalize meetings with civil society and with the academic and private sectors.

### **3. Means of CSO participation**

#### **3.1 Mechanisms for civil society participation in the Summits of the Americas**

The OAS, through the Committee on Inter-American Summits Management and Civil Society Participation in OAS Activities (CISC), the General Secretariat, and the Summits of the Americas Secretariat, has developed a number of initiatives to create opportunities for participation and discussion and to report on Summit policy developments in the inter-American system. For example:

- Regional forums/discussions organized by CSOs, with technical support from the OAS Summits of the Americas Secretariat, to afford opportunities for policy-making and for implementation and follow-up to the Summit mandates.
- Presentation of proposals and recommendations resulting from a series of national and regional consultations held by CSOs on topics on the hemispheric agenda, covering social, political, economic, and cultural issues.
- Establishment of strategic networks of CSOs, governments, and inter-American and international organizations to exchange information and provide feedback on implementation and follow-up of the Summit mandates.
- Institutionalization of discussions between CSOs and high-ranking national officials from ministries of foreign affairs to exchange views on policy design and fulfillment of mandates.
- Holding of special meetings with civil society during meetings of the Summit Implementation Review Group (SIRG) to exchange information on the Summit process.

#### **3.2 Mechanisms for civil society participation in OAS activities**

The OAS performs its functions through its organs, entities, units, and specialized organizations, in whose different programs and projects the CSOs can participate. The Organization has established three mechanisms to facilitate CSO participation in its activities. The principal one is registration, the other two being special invitations and cooperation agreements.

### **3.2.1. Registration of civil society organizations with the OAS**

Registration, as set out in Permanent Council resolution CP/RES. 759 (1217/99), “Guidelines for the Participation of Civil Society Organizations in OAS Activities,” provides CSOs with an opportunity to be part of the hemispheric network of organizations working in the various thematic areas of interest to the member states and to have access to information on political, economic, and social processes under way in the OAS, which are part of the inter-American agenda.

Moreover, registration—a cost-free process—facilitates the exchange of information and experiences that contribute to public policy design by means of organized participation and dialogue among CSOs, governments, and inter-American and international organizations.

#### **a. Requirements for CSO registration**

To ensure equal and transparent treatment for all CSOs wishing to participate in OAS activities, resolution CP/RES. 759 (1217/99) sets out the following conditions for eligibility:

- The civil society organization shall be of recognized standing within its particular field of competence and shall be of a representative nature.
- The civil society organization shall have an institutional structure that includes appropriate mechanisms for holding its officers accountable and subject to its members. It shall also have a legal representative and an executive officer, as well as established headquarters.
- The CSO must have an institutional structure that is transparent and affords it a degree of independence in managing the financial resources obtained from its affiliates or individual members.
- The CSO must conduct its activities in one of the OAS member countries.

The Committee shall not consider CSOs that have their headquarters in any territory over which there exists a sovereignty dispute between an OAS member state and a state outside the Hemisphere.

#### **b. Benefits of registration**

Resolutions CP/RES. 759 (1217/99), CP/RES. 840 (1361/03), and CP/RES. 864 (1413/04) establish the following benefits of CSO registration:

- Participation, through a representative of the organization, in public meetings of the Permanent Council, the Inter-American Council for Integral Development (CIDI), and their subsidiary bodies.
- Receipt of the schedule and order of business of the Organization’s public meetings.

- Input by means of written documents on questions that appear on the agenda or order of business of meetings of the Permanent Council or CIDI; the documents shall preferably not exceed 2,000 words (texts exceeding 2,000 words must be accompanied by executive summaries, which the General Secretariat shall distribute). Likewise, the CSO may give a presentation at the beginning of the deliberations, with prior approval from the pertinent committee of the Permanent Council or CIDI.
- Access to draft resolutions and/or resolutions adopted by the General Assembly and authorization to comment on them.
- Receipt of special identification for participation in the Organization's public meetings and in General Assembly sessions.
- Receipt of the resolutions adopted by the OAS General Assembly at its annual regular session.
- With the Chair's authorization, admission to closed meetings of the Permanent Council and CIDI and their political bodies.
- Receipt of documents in advance of the meetings of the working groups or specialized groups of the Permanent Council or CIDI. With prior authorization, the CSO may make a statement and have it distributed to member states.
- Authorization to apply for funding from the Specific Fund to Support the Participation of Civil Society Organizations in OAS Activities and in the Summits of the Americas Process.

**c. Registration procedures**

The guidelines for participation by CSOs in the activities of OAS organs, agencies, and entities set the following registration requirements:

- i. Direct an application to the Secretary General, with a copy to the Summits of the Americas Secretariat:

Secretary General  
General Secretariat of the OAS  
MNB – 20  
17th Street and Constitution Avenue, N.W.  
Washington, D.C. 20006  
U.S.A.

A copy of the application must be sent to the Summits of the Americas Secretariat.

- ii. Present a document with the following information:

- Official name, address, and date of establishment of the organization and the name(s) of its directors and legal representative(s).

- Its primary areas of activity and their relationship to the activities of the OAS organs, agencies, and entities in which it wishes to participate.
  - Reasons why it believes its proposed contributions to OAS activities would be of interest to the Organization.
  - Identification of the OAS work areas in which it proposes to support ongoing activities or to make recommendations on the best way to achieve OAS objectives.
- iii. Moreover, the application shall be accompanied by copies of the following documents:
- Charter or Constitution and Statutes of the CSO.
  - Most recent annual report.
  - Institutional mission statement.
  - Financial statements for the previous fiscal year, including reference to any sources of financing, whether public, private, or from its members or donations.

### **3.2.2. Special invitations to participate in OAS activities**

The second mechanism for participation is a special invitation to a meeting, special conference, or ministerial-level meeting. Under this option, the CSO would send a letter indicating that it wished to participate in a meeting or special conference. Should its request be approved, the organization in question would be granted observer status and be classified as a special guest.

Meetings held under OAS auspices may be: public, or closed, or private (restricted to member state representatives). Likewise, it should be noted that each political body, specialized organization, or committee of the OAS establishes specific standards for civil society participation in its activities.

Consequently, to participate in an OAS meeting or activity, a CSO must transmit, 30 days prior to the event, a letter of request to the OAS Secretary General, taking the following into consideration:

- *If the CSO is registered*, it need only send a letter expressing its interest in participating, its name, the title of the meeting in which it wishes to participate, and the name of the representative who will attend.
- *If the CSO is not registered*, the following documents must be attached to the letter of request:
  - Official name and date of establishment of the organization, and the names of its directors and legal representative.
  - Its primary areas of activity and their relationship to the activities of the OAS organs, agencies, and entities in which it wishes to participate.

- Reasons why it believes its proposed contributions to OAS activities would be of interest to the Organization.
- Identification of the OAS work areas in which the CSO will be able to provide support and assistance and make contributions.
- Statutes and Charter or Constitution.
- Institutional mission statement.
- Most recent annual report and financial statements for the previous fiscal year.

In the case of a CSO that is not registered, once it has sent a letter of request together with the corresponding documents, and the request has been approved by the Permanent Council, the organization will receive identification giving it access to the meeting as a special guest.

### **3.2.3. Cooperation agreements**

Cooperation agreements were established by resolution AG/RES. 57 (I/O-71), “Standards on Cooperative Relations between the Organization of American States and the United Nations, Its Specialized Agencies, and Other National and International Organizations.” The OAS, through its General Secretariat and its departments, offices, and technical secretariats, concludes cooperation agreements on the development and implementation of activities in all work areas of the Organization. Cooperation agreements with the OAS may be classified as follows:

- **General cooperation agreements:** Those intended to provide advisory services to the OAS organs, agencies, and entities and disseminate information on its activities and programs.
- **Special cooperation agreements:** These may be divided into three categories:
  - Agreements on the development of technical, administrative, or financial programs in order to conduct specific programs in OAS areas of activity.
  - Agreements relating to inter-American specialized organizations and coordinated through the OAS.
  - Agreements established directly by the Secretary General.

### **3.2.4. Procedures for cooperation agreements between CSOs and the OAS**

A CSO wishing to establish a cooperation agreement with the OAS must first identify the department or office of the General Secretariat that handles the thematic area in question. Second, the organization must submit a proposal with clearly defined objectives and determine the type of agreement it would like to conclude (whether general or specific). The CSO must also realize that, under a cooperation agreement with the OAS, it is required to have the economic resources and sufficient staff to fulfill and follow up as necessary on the obligations and stipulations set forth in the agreement. If it meets the aforementioned requirements, the CSO may proceed with its request and transmit copies of the following documentation to the Organization:

- Charter or Constitution and those documents certifying it as a CSO.
- The names of its directors and officers during the previous three years.
- The names of its major contributors (provided that this is not in violation of any confidentiality agreements).

If, after submission of the documents, a preliminary agreement is reached between the General Secretariat and the organization, an agreement will be drawn up with the assistance of the Department of Legal Services for the Secretary General's approval and signature.

For further information, please contact:



Summits of the Americas Secretariat  
Organization of American States  
1889 F St. N.W., Washington, D.C. 20006  
E-mail address: [summitcso@oas.org](mailto:summitcso@oas.org)  
Telephone: 202-458-3127  
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