



July 25<sup>th</sup>, 2012

## Coffee Break: Ambassador Quiñónez



**Alfonso Quiñónez**

**Secretary for External Relations**

*Yesterday, we sat down with Ambassador Quiñónez for a short interview on the 13th version of the MOAS/PC, the challenging topics we will be addressing today and what this experience means to the interns. Here is what he had to say. Enjoy!*

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**Julián Sánchez: What is your take on the OAS simulation program that takes place here three times a year?**

**Alfonso Quiñónez:** I think it is a very important exercise; it is one that we, the Secretariat, take very seriously and we hope the persons that are participating in the exercise also take it the same way. It's a mechanism that al-

lows, in this case the interns, to learn more about how the political process works here in the OAS. Most of the interns do not have the opportunity to be part of the Permanent Council and the meetings of the Permanent Council. So, in order for you to have a well-rounded stay, this gives you an opportunity to see the Secretariat but also the political process of the Organization and that is represented by the Permanent Council.

**Maite Smet: So, as the previous Ambassador of Guatemala to the OAS, what are your recommendations to the delegates or representatives of countries to pursue their agendas whilst collaborating with each other?**

**AQ:** I think something that is very important, since people will not be representing their actual countries, to learn the position the country has of the central topic of the discussion.

Learn about the country; learn about the policies; learn about how this country acts in this forum. And if possible have a conversation with representatives of the mission to the OAS, because that also helps in terms of being able to represent adequately their delegated country.





**JS: Two of the topics that are central of the 13<sup>th</sup> Model are international drug trafficking and criminal organizations in Latin America and the Caribbean. We would like to know what are the most pressing challenges, in your viewpoint, in regards to these issues.**

**AQ:** Well these two issues can even be merged into one, because international organized crime has a component, which is drug trafficking. It is a topic that has been at the forefront of the agenda of the different Member States. All the countries in the hemisphere are having challenges with these topics, some more than others. But all of them have recognized that this is one of the main challenges that is being faced by the Member States. Something that is important is to understand that these topics are multifaceted in nature. They should or could not be addressed from a single standpoint. A lot of people tend to, when they discuss this issue, talk about the punitive part of the equation. Any work or any discussion that takes place on these topics have to take into account other elements related to it: the social aspects to it; the economic aspects to it; and obviously, because we are talking about criminal activities, the punitive part of the equation, but it should not be the only one. So, I think it is important to address the issue from that multifac-

eted standpoint, and therefore it is important for the representatives of the countries to identify what are the issues that are vital for that country.

We have seen lately that there are some countries that are talking about legalization, whilst others are talking about not just the trafficking of drugs but also the issues of weapons. There are other countries that are the producers of the drugs and others that are the consumers, so there are different elements. So, it is important to learn about those standpoints and policies of those different countries.

**MS: So, following this line what would be the most relevant policies that have been put forward by Member States and the OAS to address these issues?**

**AQ:** Let me start by saying that this is a key topic; this is something that is at the forefront of the agenda.

This was more than evident at the last Summit of the Americas, where the Heads of States discussed these issues. So, the Member States have been implementing public policies and laws in order to combat this evil. I think those elements have to be related to the different facets that this issue has.



For instance, when you were talking about combating crime, there is a very wise saying here in the United States that goes “a chain is only as strong as its weakest link”, so, if you want to combat trafficking or organized crime you cannot only strengthen the Police. You also have to look into strengthening the Attorney General’s Office, the judicial system and also work with the prisons because they are part of that chain. Health policies are important as well because they are also a health problem. Financial regulations are important because what drives this process is profits and that is something that cannot be taken out of the equation. So, it is a multiple number of elements that have to be put in place in order to be affected when addressing this challenge.

**JS: Back to the Model. What would be some of the lessons and experiences that delegates will be taking back to their homes once this internship ends?**

**AQ:** I think that it is crucial to understand how the political process here at the OAS works. So, the fact that interns are participating in a Model of the Permanent Council allows them to have that experience and not just working at the Secretariat which is only one part of what we do here. Actually, the Secretariat responds to the decisions that are adopted by the Member States. So, that element



is important in itself, having that rounded stay here.

That takes you to the next level, which is having the opportunity to learn about a different country from the country of origin of the delegate, learning about the policies and learning about different cultures which may be, in certain cases, very different to the beliefs that one may have. So, by doing so, you also learn and understand some of the positions that are adopted by certain countries.

Also, an exercise of this nature, which involves consensus building, allows the interns to engage in dialogue and engage in that process of trying to achieve consensus and common grounds.



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**MS: One final question to wrap up this interview. Do you have any advice or recommendations to the delegates in regards to either MOAS or this summer internship?**

**AQ:** I think the experience that you are having here is one that any person should really treasure and take advantage of. We receive at the Secretariat many applications and very few candidates are selected. So, that is something that indicates there is interest from our part in you and, therefore, there is a responsibility for the interns that have been selected to really perform. Perform not just because we want, as a Secretariat, to really have some benefit of your participation here – in the good sense of the word –

but also because we want you to realize how this can be very beneficial to the delegates taking part in it. And not just through learning in the assigned internship areas, but also in that interaction that you are having with persons from different nationalities and different cultures. Take advantage of making friendships, getting connected and learning more. These are the elements that can really help you for the rest of your lives. And who knows, perhaps after you go back home and finish your studies, you may apply to a job position here at the OAS. So, having had this experience here will benefit that process as well.

Credits: Maite Smet & Julián Sánchez