

THIRD GENERAL MEETING
ASSOCIATION OF CARIBBEAN ELECTORAL ORGANIZATIONS
KINGSTON, JAMAICA, NOVEMBER 7 & 8, 2008
TERMS OF REFERENCE

Guidelines

The structure of the Third General Meeting of the Association of Caribbean Electoral Organizations (ACEO) contemplates working sessions on substantive issues as well as discussions related to the organization of the ACEO. Each working session will last approximately 90 minutes and will include three or four short, ten-minute presentations to initiate dialogue. Emphasis has been given to the roundtable format and participants are encouraged to actively participate, but at the same time, requested to limit each of their comments to no more than three minutes, to afford greater opportunities for discussion.

Is the Caribbean Heading Towards the Implementation of Effective Mechanisms to Control Political Party and Campaign Financing?

Political party and campaign financing has assumed greater prominence in the political debates of the Caribbean. In many countries, parliaments are considering regulation regarding increased disclosure of costs and campaigns and charge the electoral authorities with the responsibility of enforcement of this legislation.

In compliance with the Inter-American Democratic Charter, which states “special attention should be paid to the problems associated with the high cost of election campaigns and the establishment of a balanced and transparent system for their financing”¹, the Organization of American States has addressed this issue in a number of its Member States and has emphasized, in particular, the importance of enforcement agencies endowed with adequate resources, authority and “know how” to fulfill their mandates. Throughout the world, mandates among enforcement vary widely, including facilitating public disclosure of information, enforcing contribution and/or expense limits and distributing public funds to parties or campaigns. Norms and regulations of political financing can reinforce the public trust, but only if they are fairly and effectively enforced.

The panelists are asked to consider the following questions during this discussion. Are there financial disclosure laws pertaining to public officials in your country? Who enforces them? Is your country’s parliament considering legislations regulating political party or campaign financing? What does the proposed (or existing) legislation entail (i.e. limits, public financing, etc.)? Should the electoral authority be mandated to enforce this legislation, what would it need to accomplish its task?

The Use of Electoral Technologies in the Caribbean to Improve the Voter Registry

New technologies are being tested and utilized at every stage of the electoral process, from the use of basic office automation tools to more sophisticated data processing instruments. These new technologies can assist the electoral management bodies in various tasks, saving time and ensuring accuracy. Technology in voter registration, for instance, has facilitated the flow of information from the civil registry to the electoral registry, identifying duplicates, omissions and inclusion of deceased persons. Electoral technology, however, should not only improve efficiency, but also promote public confidence. In many countries of the world, for instance, voters have rejected electronic voting, alleging that the lack of a paper trail does not adequately ensure against fraud.

The panelists are asked to consider the following questions during this discussion. What types of technologies are utilized in the electoral process in your country? Are the benefits commensurate with the costs? Does your electoral authority have adequate in-house capability to address problems with this technology? What are the advantages and disadvantages of this technology?

¹ Organization of American States, *Interamerican Democratic Charter*. September 11, 2001, Article 5.



Stakeholders in the Electoral Process: the Role of Civil Society, Political Parties and the Media to Support Electoral Management Bodies

The relationship between the electoral authorities and other stakeholders -- including political parties, civil society and the media -- is complex and often contentious. The distinct functions and disparate interests contribute to tensions, especially as Election Day approaches. Nevertheless, all stakeholders play a crucial role in the electoral process. Political parties possess the indelegable function of competing for legitimate power through elections and, if successful, governing. The media serves as an important medium through which candidates and parties transmit their message to the electorate. At the same time, media can assume a watchdog function, particularly between election cycles. Electoral authorities facilitate voting, ensuring confidentiality and guarding against intimidation and/or bias. In all phases of the electoral process, the electoral authorities arbitrate disputes. Perhaps the most difficult role to define is that of civil society. It too, often plays a watchdog role, but can also represent narrow interests often articulated through political structures. The ambiguous authority and often amorphous role of civil society in elections often puts their credibility to the test.

The panelists are asked to consider the following questions during this discussion. What is the role of civil society in the electoral process of your country? Does legislation permit national observers as well as international observers? Are their institutionalized mechanisms to facilitate dialogue among electoral authorities, political parties, media and civil society organizations? How would you characterize the relationship of the electoral authorities with each of these other stakeholders?

Past Activities of the ACEO and General Reflections on the Usefulness of a Caribbean Electoral Association and ACEO: Future Priorities and Activities

The ACEO was founded in 1998 to address the challenges that the electoral management bodies faced in the Caribbean. This subregional association has the potential to provide a forum of discussion specific to the Caribbean and to promote cooperation among electoral authorities facing similar challenges and contexts. However, ten years later, this need has not been translated into an active ACEO. Indeed, the last General Meeting was held eight years ago.

Do you believe that an association of Caribbean electoral authorities would be useful? What should be the short- and long-term priorities of the association? What types of activities should the ACEO engage in? Would you consider serving on the Executive Board or even as Chairperson? How should the existing dues be spent? Will the electoral management body of your country consider paying dues in the future? Would your electoral authority consider hosting the next Meeting of the ACEO? What other ideas do you have to promote "ownership" of this association?