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DRAFT DEMOCRATIC CHARTER READY FOR FOREIGN MINISTERS

The countries of the Americas took another step toward the adoption of the Inter-American Democratic Charter, a landmark document intended to reinforce the ability of the Organization of American States (OAS) to defend and promote democracy.

The OAS Permanent Council today approved by acclamation the draft that will be debated by the hemisphere's foreign ministers, who will meet next Monday and Tuesday in Lima, Peru, for a special session of the OAS General Assembly.

The draft Democratic Charter opens with a simple, clear declaration: "The peoples of the Americas have a right to democracy and their governments have an obligation to promote and defend it." It reaffirms the commitment of OAS member states to a series of democratic principles and establishes procedures to take when democracy is at risk in an OAS member country.

Colombian Ambassador Humberto de la Calle, who led a working group that edited the text, said the document is intended to be "a guide for hemispheric political action by showing that the effective exercise of representative democracy -- invigorated by citizen participation -- is essential for the social, political and economic development of the people of the Americas."

The creation of the Inter-American Democratic Charter responds to a mandate from the 34 presidents and prime ministers who gathered in April of this year in Quebec City, Canada, for the Summit of the Americas. Citing the need to enhance the hemisphere's ability to respond when democracy is threatened, they instructed their foreign ministers to prepare a Democratic Charter "to reinforce OAS instruments for the active defense of representative democracy."

The OAS General Assembly approved a preliminary draft in June, in Costa Rica, and since then the Permanent Council working group has been expanding and strengthening the text. Today the full Council, chaired by Costa Rica's Ambassador to the OAS, Hernán R. Castro, approved the draft by acclamation.

During the process of deliberations, the OAS invited citizens from around the Americas to contribute their ideas and opinions on the proposed Democratic Charter.