

Promoting and Defending
DEMOCRACY



Unit for the
Promotion of
Democracy

General
Secretariat
Organization of
American States





The UPD's structure consists of a central administrative and coordination office, the Office of the Executive Coordinator, and several program areas. The latter include: Strategic Programs for Democratic Strengthening; Strengthening Electoral Processes and Systems; Information and Dialogue on Democracy; Comprehensive Action against Antipersonnel Mines (AICMA); and Special Programs.

Office of the Executive Coordinator (OEC)

In addition to the task of coordinating and linking the UPD's different program areas and activities, the OEC leads and directs the advisory and support services on democracy-related topics that are provided by the Unit to the Secretary General and the political bodies of the Organization. One of the main objectives of the OEC is to lead the "Inter-American Forum on Political Parties," which links the efforts of the various UPD programs and those of other, external institutions working in the area of political party modernization. The Forum is a unique body within the hemisphere to provide a space to discuss and promote an agenda for the reform of political parties and party systems.

Strategic Programs for Democratic Strengthening

This program area works in three strategic areas related to processes, institutions, and key players forming part of democratic systems. These are:

- Strengthening legislative institutions
- Support for decentralization processes and citizen participation
- Promotion of democratic leadership and citizenship



Democratic Forum, Local Governance in Small States 2003

Strengthening Electoral Processes and Systems

In this program area, the UPD supports the efforts of member states to strengthen their electoral processes and systems, in particular, in the areas of electoral and civil registries, the development of effective policies for civic electoral education and promotion of citizen participation in electoral processes, and legislative drafting and implementation of reform to election laws. The programs in this area are:

- Strengthening electoral institutions
- Promotion of citizen participation and civic electoral education
- Modernization and strengthening of civil registries
- Support for legislative drafting and reform to election laws

Information and Dialogue on Democracy

The objective of this area is to meet the information needs of member states and, other interested parties, related to democracy and governance in the hemisphere. The area has responsibility for the following specific tasks:

- Providing information on the Unit's activities and replying to requests for information from member states and the OAS political bodies
- Compiling and disseminating information on democratic development in the region and on the work of the UPD through publications, databases, a web site, and other electronic media
- Organizing and holding meetings and seminars to promote dialogue and an exchange of ideas on the challenges now facing the democracies of the Hemisphere



Comprehensive Action against Antipersonnel Mines (AICMA)

This area addresses the mandate received by the Unit in the area of support for national reconstruction and peace-building processes. This area supports the purposes of the Ottawa Treaty by supporting antipersonnel mine-clearing efforts and working to counteract their destructive effects. AICMA carries out activities in the following five areas:

- Mine-clearing assistance and support for a total ban on antipersonnel mines in the Hemisphere
- Support for minefield surveying, mapping, marking, and clearance
- Mine risk awareness education for the civilian population
- Support for rehabilitation of victims and socioeconomic recovery
- Database on activities directed against antipersonnel mines

Special Programs

The Special Programs area of the UPD has responsibility for projects in the field developed to address the needs of member states, which do not come under the other program areas of the Unit. Such activities are divided into three main categories:

- Electoral Observation Missions
- Special National Programs
- Special Program for the Promotion of Dialogue and Conflict Resolution

Since its inception, the Unit has implemented various activities that have contributed to improving, preserving, and consolidating democratic systems, sometimes through its involvement in major political events and sometimes through important structural activities. Some of the UPD's most important achievements are:

Electoral Observation Missions

The UPD, through electoral observation missions, has contributed on over 70 occasions to the transparency of electoral processes, in over half of the member states of the Organization. Such missions are carried out at the invitation of the governments concerned, which have found them useful instruments to guarantee to the citizenry and the international community the trust and credibility elections require. In organizing and conducting such missions, the Unit has acquired great experience and recognized prestige in this area and continues to improve its observation methods and techniques. In that connection, it has promoted and has been invited to participate in international activities that seek to identify "successful practices" in this area.

Strengthening Legislative Institutions

This Unit has addressed the profound need to construct political systems with more checks and balances through activities to strengthen and modernize legislative institutions. It has developed theoretical and practical knowledge for the promotion of legislative modernization in numerous countries of the region. Activities to promote seminars and parliamentary exchanges carried out by the Unit led to the establishment of the Inter-American Parliamentary Forum, which is now the principal instrument for hemispheric parliamentary action.

Decentralization

Decentralization processes constitute a major opportunity for the consolidation of democracy and for fostering greater citizen participation. The Unit serves as the technical secretariat for a hemispheric network of ministers and authorities responsible for these policies, whose purpose is to facilitate exchange among governments, thereby enhancing the design and implementation of decentralization and citizen participation policies.

Political leadership

Challenges to democracy in the hemisphere mean that constant efforts must be made to train new political leaders who promote the changes demanded by society based on firm commitment to democratic values and institutions. The Unit, through different training programs, has given young leaders of political parties and of other sectors of society better tools to develop their leadership and greater commitment to democracy as a fundamental value.

Inter-American Forum on Political Parties

Aware of the unparalleled role of the OAS in the Americas, the Unit has undertaken the Inter-American Forum on Political Parties as an opportunity for facilitating political reforms demanded by the hemisphere. The region's political dynamics require better party systems to respond to citizen demands and provide leadership for the changes needed. The Forum provides a setting that encourages new ideas in this area to be promoted and discussed by the region's foremost political leaders and the most influential international actors in the area of political party modernization.

Electoral Systems and Processes

The Unit has supported, encouraged, and promoted modernization of the region's electoral systems and bodies to guarantee the citizenry of member states the reliability they demand of their electoral institutions. Activities have included technical assistance in developing greater administrative effectiveness and in promoting reforms that further greater participation by the citizenry in their electoral processes.

Promotion of dialogue and conflict resolution

The Unit has developed a number of techniques, methods, and specialized human resources to support the Organization and its member states in preventing and managing conflict. The work of the Unit in this area has included advisory services and technical support for Secretariat efforts to facilitate agreements in Venezuela and the institutionalization of mechanisms for conflict analysis and management in countries such as Guatemala and Bolivia.

B a c k g r o u n d

The Unit for the Promotion of Democracy (UPD) was established to fulfill the various mandates of the Organization pertaining to support for member states' efforts to preserve and strengthen their democracies. In recent years, such activities have been developed and consolidated, while the role of the OAS in strengthening democracy in the hemisphere has expanded. The best example of the evolving role of the OAS in the democratic strengthening process was the adoption in 2001 of the Inter-American Democratic Charter, whose conceptual content and instruments constitute the clearest democratic course yet guided by the Organization.

Since its establishment in 1990, the Unit has carried out various activities that have had great impact on the hemisphere. In recent years, new mandates emanating from the political bodies of the Organization, the Plans of Action of the Summits of the Americas, and the adoption of the Inter-American Democratic Charter have led the UPD to expand its efforts and provide a broader and more complete range of services to member states.

Since the early 1990s, the UPD has undertaken over 70 electoral observation missions in the hemisphere. It has provided advisory services, training, and cutting-edge technology to strengthen electoral processes. It has played a pioneering part in developing conflict resolution methods and techniques in support of democratic governance in the member countries. It has supported intensive inter-parliamentary cooperation among national legislatures and promoted best practices in the area of legislative modernization. The Unit has led efforts to design better and more appropriate decentralization policies, as well as encouraging increasing citizen participation, in the countries of the Americas. It has trained hundreds of young political leaders in democratic values and practices and has supported education ministry efforts to promote a democratic culture. It has conducted important forums for consideration and discussion of priority topics in the experience and consolidation of democracy.

M a n d a t e s

Objectives

The Unit carries out its activities at the request of member states of the Organization, or with their express involvement. Its main objectives are:

- To support the political organs of the Organization in their deliberations on the strengthening and preservation of democracy
- To provide assistance to member states in improving their democratic institutions and processes
- To provide support to member states for the generation, dissemination, and exchange of information on democratic political systems and democratic values
- To provide technical and substantive support for dialogue and the exchange of experiences, at the highest level, among institutions and experts of the hemisphere in areas related to the promotion of democracy
- To contribute to the transparency of electoral processes in the hemisphere through electoral observation missions
- To support national reconciliation and peace-building processes

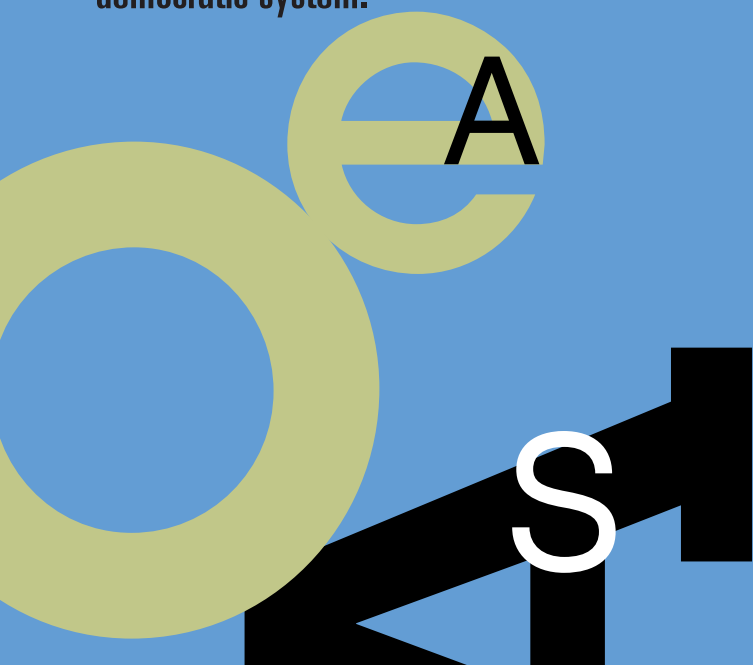


Demining 2003



Regional Course for young leaders on democracy

The Organization of American States (OAS) is the only international organization whose founding charter explicitly lists as one of the essential purposes the promotion and defense of democracy. In a context where democratic consolidation remains a challenge and the threats to democracy grow ever more complex, the need is increasingly evident for collective action by the member states and committed participation by the citizenry of the hemisphere in protecting, consolidating, and strengthening the democratic system.





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