



Organization of American States

# Caribbean Meeting of Inter-American Forum on Political Parties



Montego Bay, Jamaica, April 27-29, 2005

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Executive Summary	<b>3</b>
Key Conclusions	<b>4</b>
Challenges to Political Parties in Developing Policy in an Integrated and Globalized Economy	<b>6</b>
Political Parties Curbing Poverty, Violence, and Unemployment	<b>8</b>
Governing Under Pressure: the Role of Political Parties in Free Trade Agreements and Regional Integration Processes	<b>10</b>
The Challenges and Opportunities for Political Parties in Haiti	<b>12</b>
Constitutional Reform and Political Parties in the Caribbean: National Case Studies	<b>13</b>
Political Party and Campaign Funding	<b>17</b>
Public Financing: For and Against	<b>18</b>
Promoting Greater Citizen Participation in Political Parties	<b>20</b>
Developing Closer Ties with Civil Society	<b>21</b>
Closing Remarks by PJ Patterson, Prime Minister of Jamaica	<b>23</b>
Final Thoughts and Next Steps	<b>24</b>

## Table of contents

Views expressed in this publication do not necessarily represent the views  
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# Executive Summary

Strong political parties are essential elements of effective governance, yet political parties are facing ever more daunting challenges in the quest to govern in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The Caribbean Meeting of the Inter-American Forum on Political Parties of the Organization of American States brought together leading politicians, academics, and members of civil society from the English-speaking Caribbean, Suriname, and Haiti, to discuss these challenges and how they can best be addressed and overcome.

The Inter-American Forum on Political Parties, an initiative of the Department of Democratic and Political Affairs of the General Secretariat of the Organization of American States, was founded in 2001. The Forum, responding to the Summit of Americas Action Plans and the Inter-American Democratic Charter, acts to encourage and support political party reform and to strengthen parties in their democratic work throughout the hemisphere.

The Montego Bay meeting discussed vital themes including: constitutional reform in the Caribbean; challenges to political parties in developing policy in an integrated and globalized economy, with special reference to the Caribbean single market and economy; and promoting greater citizen participation in political parties, with a particular emphasis on gender. The meeting was honoured by keynote addresses from Baldwin Spencer, the Prime Minister of Antigua and Barbuda and by P.J. Patterson, the Prime Minister of Jamaica. Additionally, the OAS presented the results of its 34-country comparative analysis on campaign and political party finance, which led to dialogue on public versus private party funding, disclosure and enforcement regimes, and the effects of campaign finance on the political participation of women.

Prime Ministers P.J. Patterson of Jamaica and Baldwin Spencer of Antigua and Barbuda delivered keynote speeches at the Caribbean Meeting of the Inter-American Forum on Political Parties.



A fierce storm on the first day of the meeting held up some participants on the roads and led others to arrive heroically carrying their shoes and socks in one hand and their speaking notes in the other. While it delayed proceedings slightly, the storm also had positive effects: delegates bonded quickly, finding common ground and sharing umbrellas, while all present were reminded of the natural disasters and global pressures to which the region is subject and the need that these emphasize for common purpose and sharing solutions.

# Key Conclusions

Caribbean countries enjoy a long and illustrious tradition of democracy. In most of the countries represented at the meeting, timely and orderly elections take place at regular intervals, the media are largely independent and are active in reporting political affairs, and well-established parties form functioning governments. This strong foundation compares favorably to that of other countries within the hemisphere.

Yet all participants agreed that the region was also experiencing challenges that threatened democratic governance and rendered it vital that parties urgently review aspects both of their internal workings and their external relations to each other, the people they represent, and ongoing regional and international processes of change. One of the most significant challenges is that of globalization and the pressures of a regionalized free market economy on jobs, labour migration, economic and hence political stability. A related challenge is the influence of “dirty” money on politics and the corruption, violence, and intimidation that can result where power becomes vested in individuals and operations funded by illegal trade, especially in drugs.

Voter turnout in many Caribbean countries, as in other countries of the Western hemisphere, is in decline and electorates report growing distrust in and apathy towards politics. Increasing and broadening participation in politics and building trust in the capacity of political processes to orchestrate positive and meaningful change is thus a central challenge. The very age and institutionalization of certain political systems and habits in countries with long-established democracies can cause stagnation and complacency. Participants shared the view that broadening participation and fostering renewed trust and public investment in politics would involve strengthening and reinvigorating parties and thinking beyond outmoded systems and practices.

Conclusions and recommendations that emerged from the forum included the following:

A For too long, parties in the region have served merely as “electoral machines”, whose chief or only purpose was to win and maintain governmental power. Parties

need to embrace an active, permanent identity in the community and pursue vital ongoing roles in research, training, and policy-development, communication and linkage between communities and government.

- B In turn, governments need to recognize, require and assist parties to become more professional entities, supporting them in research, training, and meeting appropriate standards of transparency and accountability. They should regard their own and opposition parties as valued and continuous partners in governance rather than servants or opponents of the elected leadership.
- C Parties exist in a “judicial vacuum”. Most participants agreed that parties were public not private organizations and thus should be subject to minimum regulatory requirements in the same manner as nongovernmental organizations or trade unions. For instance, parties might be made to register, which could include, among other things, providing party bylaws, listing officers, member and major donors and making accounts routinely available for public inspection. A juridical definition of a political party would necessitate regulation regarding the financing of political parties, virtually nonexistent in the Caribbean today.
- D At present, party and campaign funding in the Caribbean is overwhelmingly private. Caribbean countries might consider, where it does not exist, limited public financing of parties and electoral campaigns, including the use of free media airtime. This would seek, to some degree, to “level the playing field” between competing parties and competing candidates. It would confer rights in exchange for greater public responsibilities for parties in terms of transparency, accountability, and professionalism.
- E Governments should adopt and parties must obey stricter and more strictly observed legislation on party and campaign financing. This should mandate the production of detailed, accurate, and regular accounts, which will be independently audited, that disclose income, major funding sources, amounts spent, and what the money is spent on. Limits on individual donations, donations from overseas sources, and campaign spending limits should be actively considered. Enforcement needs to be vigorously

# Caribbean Meeting of Inter-American Forum on Political Parties

Montego Bay, Jamaica, April 27-29, 2005

pursued, and penalties sufficient to ensure compliance.

- F Opposition parties are vital partners in democratic governance. Parties need to abandon the “negative politics” associated with destructively adversarial campaigning and seek formalised, regular dialogue and sustained partnership in governance with opposition parties. The National Economic and Social Council in Antigua and Barbuda is one example of government creating such a permanent “place at the table” for opposition and civil society groups. Organizations such as CARICOM could also include Opposition members and views in their debates.
- G Parties should seek better communication on policy with the electorate, particularly regarding regionalization and trade agreements, and offer better assistance to communities preparing for the economic consequences they bring. As trade agreements can be complex and difficult to adhere to, there is a great need for linkages and cooperation to make these agreements work. Parties can take the initiative in forging these linkages. Small countries can benefit in regional/ international negotiations by combining forces and negotiating as a bloc. Again, parties can take a lead in preparing the ground for communal decision-making by involving other parties and civil society groups well in advance and looking outward in formulating policy, to develop shared positions and strategies with other CARICOM members prior to negotiations.
- H While constitutional reform is being considered or implemented in most of the CARICOM countries, political parties have been largely absent from the process. The reform efforts, which include the economic, social and political domain, have been initiated by civil society, temporarily embraced by candidates during election time and eventually relegated to inter-sectoral commissions that provide reports with recommendations that are seldom enacted. The only vehicle by which constitutional reform will be made a reality is the political parties and their members in parliament.
- I In Haiti, facing the challenge of mounting free and fair elections in 2005, it is vital that parties abandon the “low level war” that has hampered their interaction, that they commit to national dialogue and reconciliation, and engage in forming alliances

and coalitions that will enable viable electoral groups to be formed. Only in this way can democratic governance, security, and development prosper in a country desperately in need of all three.

- J Parties need to make greater and more sustained efforts to promote female political participation and electoral candidacy. Initiatives should include training, mentoring, and financial support, and might also involve affirmative action policies.
- K Education for young people that informs and encourages their civic commitment and political participation should be central to the curriculum.
- L Parties should endorse a “new era of collaboration between civil society and government”, where civil society groups are no longer undervalued and marginalized as “troublemakers”, consulted in a reluctant and ad hoc fashion, but are kept continuously informed and invited as partners to the negotiating table in a timely and routine fashion. Rather than being seen merely in the role of “advocacy”, civil society groups should be seen as key partners in policy-making, monitoring, and enforcement.

Jacqueline Deslauriers, Director of the OAS Office  
for the Promotion of Democracy confers with  
Prime Minister Baldwin Spencer



# Caribbean Meeting of Inter-American Forum on Political Parties

Montego Bay, Jamaica, April 27-29, 2005

Jacqueline Deslauriers, the Director of the OAS Office for the Promotion of Democracy, summed up the view consistently expressed by participants in the forum that “democracy cannot be regarded as merely an end in itself – to be meaningful it must lead to significant improvement in citizens’ quality of life”. All agreed that to be effective, initiatives must be implemented with that goal in mind.

Discussions over the course of the three-day forum were given focus by being grouped into sessions on particular topics. The organization of the report below broadly follows that of the sessions, drawing out some of the shared themes and ideas that emerged in each case.

## Challenges to Political Parties in Developing Policy in an Integrated and Globalized Economy

“We ought to develop a paradigm for good governance with integrity and citizen access to information at its core, and with professional law enforcement agencies, an independent and courageous judiciary, and independent media, all steadfastly and vigorously keeping governments in line. With these things in place, political investors will come to recognize that society’s interests, and their own self-interests, will best be served by administrations that unreservedly embrace strong tenets of good governance. If we are lucky, we will, over the course of this meeting, fashion a new paradigm for governance that will be to the enduring benefit of the people whose interests we serve.” Baldwin Spencer, Prime Minister of Antigua and Barbuda

Colin Granderson, Assistant Secretary-General of CARICOM, inaugurated the meeting by stressing the proud heritage of democratic systems, ideas, and values in CARICOM countries. Yet, he stressed, the need for strengthening, reforming, and revitalizing political parties and political systems in the sub-region is urgent and pressing. Public disillusionment has dangerously eroded the credibility, legitimacy, and hence efficacy of political parties. He outlined three challenges to progress in reform, which became a recurrent theme in subsequent discussion:

- 1 An adversarial political culture, often grounded in two-party, first-past-the-post electoral contests, has led to negative politics. Parties and candidates frequently focus their energies on ousting and discrediting one another, rather than on developing policies beneficial to all citizens. In order to meet global challenges and respond to regional pressures, parties need to develop outward-looking and

forward-looking policies together with partners in governance including Opposition and civil society groups.

- 2 The culture of democracy within parties is as vital as the culture of democracy in society as a whole. Too often governing parties do not reform themselves. They need to accept and meet the challenge of putting their own house in order.
- 3 Institutional reform often concentrates on the police, the judiciary, and other state functionaries. Political institutions are the “poor cousins”, which are passed over. Good political management, transparency, and accountability ought to be at the heart of institutional reform processes.

Colin Granderson, Assistant Secretary General of the CARICOM Secretariat inaugurated the Caribbean Meeting of the Inter-American Forum on Political Parties.



Baldwin Spencer, Prime Minister of Antigua and Barbuda also emphasized the need for an end to negatively adversarial politics, which excluded Opposition and civil society groups from policy formulation and decision-making processes, and which had in Antigua and Barbuda historically led to the interests of one island being pitted against those of the other. He proposed that:

- 1 A place should be made at the CARICOM table for Opposition leaders. Indeed, Prime Minister P.J. Patterson of Jamaica, in his concluding remarks proposed a high level meeting between ruling and Opposition political parties, “to examine in more depth issues such as political party registration, access of political parties to funding and to the media, campaign financing, and relations of political parties with other sectors of society”.
- 2 Opposition parties should receive enough public money and airtime to enable them to mount campaigns. Professor Selwyn Ryan noted in his chapter of the OAS comparative analysis on political party and campaign financing in the Caribbean, that few countries currently provide direct or indirect public support for political parties. This is due to fact that “on the one hand, parties are viewed as too corrupt to merit funding from scarce resources. On the other, the state is perceived as too weak (vis a vis the parties) to ensure equitable distribution and disclosure of these funds.” Professor Ryan also declared his support for limited public funding of political parties.
- 3 Other countries should consider establishing a means of permanent consultation among government, other parties, and civil society groups to advise the government on policy and to act as a mechanism for building national consensus. (In Antigua and Barbuda, such a mechanism already exists in the form of a National Economic and Social Council.) Hazlyn Francis, of the United Progressive Party, Antigua and Barbuda, observed that, particularly in small states, an opposition party can “represent nearly half of an already depleted national resource. For communal decision-making, especially trade agreement signing with foreign governments and business, civil society and other parties need to be involved in advance.” Albert Ramdin, Ambassador at Large, of Suriname, pointed out that where platforms for Opposition and governing

parliamentarians to discuss regional matters do exist, as they do in Suriname, they are often under-used, and suggested that participation should be mandatory: “where we have mechanisms: let’s use them”.



“Where we have mechanisms, let’s use them.” Ambassador Albert Ramdin of Suriname with Jacqui Quinn-Leandro, Minister of Labour, Public Administration, and Empowerment in Antigua and Barbuda.

- 4 Parties should establish and respect a “Code of Ethics” and work, in government, to pass and honour legislation enshrining Integrity in Public Life, Prevention of Corruption, and Freedom of Information. Trevor Monroe of the People’s National Party of Jamaica, was among many who supported this assertion. He noted positive developments in Jamaica, such as the establishment of a Code of Conduct for pending Party Presidential elections, but warned that parties must respond vigorously to the “clear and present danger of party and state capture by criminal and commercial big money”.
- 5 Term limits might be useful in placing bounds on individuals’ period in office, increasing, as Prime Minister Spencer put it, “opportunities for upward mobility in political organizations”, the prospect of which “would increase citizen participation in the political process”.

# Caribbean Meeting of Inter-American Forum on Political Parties

Montego Bay, Jamaica, April 27-29, 2005

6 The independent media play a vital role in Caribbean politics, particularly in exposing corruption to public scrutiny and censure; their independence must be respected and protected. The “paradigm for good governance” has transparency and freedom of information at its core. Roodal Moonilal of the

United National Congress of Trinidad and Tobago commented that laying legislative foundations outlawing discrimination and establishing freedom of information were key tasks for those Caribbean countries currently engaged in constitutional reform.

## Political Parties Curbing Poverty, Violence, and Unemployment

While not as acute as in Latin American countries, poverty remains a persistent challenge for the CARICOM countries. Exogenous factors have put pressure on traditional economic sectors and unemployment is a persistent spectre. Anger, desperation, and the perception that profitable alternatives are absent can lead to crime and violence. This session examined the possibilities for addressing this growing concern at government, party, and citizen level.

All participants agreed that socio-economic factors lay at the root of the increasing problem of criminality and violence in the region. Anselm DeBourgh of the New National Party, Grenada, argued that macroeconomic structural adjustment programs have led to a weakening of the state. He suggested that, in order to combat the disadvantages that Caribbean countries face in a globalized marketplace, they need to forge a “new social partnership between business and labour”, whose goals will be to improve efficiency and to meet essential social and economic needs, including housing, health care, day care, and transportation. Such a social compact could not only improve lives but represent a competitive advantage to the Caribbean economy.

Magna William-Smith, of the People’s National Movement of Trinidad and Tobago, praised the major investment represented by her country’s National Social Intervention Program and emphasized that combating poverty and the negative cycles it generated meant establishing policies that identified short-term, medium-term, and long-term forms of support. Short-term relief, in the form of aid, restores basic human dignity. Long-term relief includes education and engendering mechanisms for self-help, creating sustainable employment and increased equity ownership, and working with the penal system to promote rehabilitation and reduce recidivism.

Among the educative programs that can help young people form a bridge between school and employment is the military apprenticeship program, where young people conduct community service. Oscar Clarke, of the Guyana People’s National Congress, agreed that forms of national/community service were potentially fruitful in engaging young people with socio-political needs and harnessing their contribution in meeting them. William Duguid of the Barbados Labour Party stressed the importance of investment in education generally, to provide opportunities and to instill respect and strong moral and civic values.

Participants agreed that one of the main ways in which parties could assist in combating poverty, violence, and unemployment was by reforming and strengthening themselves and redefining their mission:

“The Caribbean needs to forge a new social partnership between business and labour,” asserted Anselm DeBourgh of the New National Party of Grenada. Also pictured are Magna William-Smith of the People’s National Movement of Trinidad and Tobago and Steven Griner of the OAS.





# Caribbean Meeting of Inter-American Forum on Political Parties

Montego Bay, Jamaica, April 27-29, 2005

- 1 Parties need to see themselves in the context of continuous social movements, rather than occasional electoral contests. Whether in power or out of it, they need to “get out on the streets and talk to people, identify problems, and work on solutions to them”. Research, training, policy development, and forging strong cross-party networks that routinize discussion with government, communities, and NGOs should be a constant part of their remit. Rather than merely responding to a charismatic head, parties should support a multi-actor, policy-led approach to politics.
- 2 Parties need to set an unimpeachable example in the fight against crime by cleaning up their own act: setting standards of professionalism, transparency, and accountability. They should also set high standards in respecting the professionalism and autonomy of other institutions, such as the police. And they should be more inclusive and less adversarial in their approach to responding to and working with the whole electorate, not privileging party donors or party-affiliated organizations.

Roodal Moonilal, of the United National Congress, Trinidad and Tobago, commented that at times, political parties themselves promote violence during elections and embrace criminal elements or “minor thugs.” This is a one-way street. Once a party begins to use violence for electoral or political ends, it cannot turn back. He suggested that parties should link with NGOs to promote development. In Trinidad, his party has created its own NGO, which links to the state. Cecilia Babb, of the Caribbean Policy Development Center, Barbados, however, took issue with the Trinidadian example of a political party-sponsored NGO, expressing the view that organic links between particular NGOs and parties can be problematic, as their aims and methods are often not the same.



Cecilia Babb of the Caribbean Policy Development Center, Barbados.



“Once a party begins to use violence for electoral or political ends, it cannot turn back.” Roodal Moonilal of the United National Congress with Nafeesa Mohammed of the People’s National Movement, both from Trinidad and Tobago.

International organizations have sometimes been guilty of preferring to work with NGOs rather than with parties; they should widen their participative strategy, but this will only come about if parties cease to be perceived by some as “failed institutions” and instead live up to the full potential of their role as valuable and trusted partners in democratic governance. Nafeesa Mohammed of the People’s National Movement, Trinidad and Tobago, commented that forums like the one delegates were presently attending offered a valuable “neutral space” for cross-party and international discussion and hoped that the forum would convene in the Caribbean more regularly.

# Governing Under Pressure: the Role of Political Parties in Free Trade Agreements and Regional Integration Processes

Free trade agreements and regional integration processes make difficult demands on small states, particularly where certain sectors have previously enjoyed protection and subsidy. Political parties can play a vital role in negotiating changes and in preparing and assisting citizens to adapt to them.

Arsene James, of the St. Lucia United Workers' Party, pointed out that two major challenges presented by free trade agreements in Caribbean states were a) improving the level of competitiveness and integration of capital markets and b) gaining commitment to the integration process. Participants agreed that one important way in which political parties could gain commitment was by providing better education on the long-term benefits of free trade agreements and regionalisation and better information about how to prepare for and adapt to new economic conditions. Many said that the CSME and its consequences had been presented 'as a fait accompli' to electorates, without adequate discussion and dissemination of information, creating misunderstanding and heightening resentment and resistance.

Mr James added that, given that the small size of Caribbean states made it difficult for them to compete with larger neighbours on quantity, it was important to concentrate on quality goods and to promote their production. One way of doing this would be to create local "bureaus of standards". These bureaus of standards would monitor the quality of local products and offer economic incentives for maintaining high standards.

As trade agreements can be complex and difficult to adhere to, there is a great need for linkages and cooperation between region, nation, party, the public and private sectors, to make these agreements work. Parties can take the initiative in forging these linkages. Moreover, small countries can benefit in regional/ international negotiations by combining forces and negotiating as a bloc. Rupert Roopneraine of the Guyana Action Party—Working People's Alliance argued that it can be "a recipe for disaster" when individual countries "wander off" to form agreements without regional backing, whereas collective negotiation is often a recipe for success. Again, parties can take a lead in preparing the ground for communal decision-making by

- a) involving other parties and civil society groups well in advance, before the signing of trade agreements with foreign governments and businesses; and
- b) looking outward in formulating policy, to develop shared positions and strategies with other CARICOM members prior to negotiations.

David Estwick, of the Democratic Labour Party of Barbados, stressed the need for parties to think ahead when negotiating agreements and planning to deal with their effects, to remember that economic and social conditions are subject to change, and that regional agreements must not be allowed to compromise a country's ability to deal with its national affairs. He emphasized the importance of managing the unequal distribution of the benefits

# Caribbean Meeting of Inter-American Forum on Political Parties

Montego Bay, Jamaica, April 27-29, 2005

Bajuns David Estiwick of the Democratic Labour Party and William Duguid of the Barbados Labour Party discuss regional integration.



of the CSME, and of creating mechanisms to ensure that the most vulnerable countries and citizens are protected from potential exploitation and marginalization. Several participants spoke of the necessity for forethought and pre-planning in making free trade/ regional agreements. Elements of this include negotiating realistic provisions that can and will be implemented and considering in advance existing obligations, such as those to international covenants on human rights, when signing agreements.

William Riviere of the Dominica Labour Party suggested that the need for parties to play a more pivotal role in regional agreements was one manifestation of a wider need — for parties to become more than mere “electoral machines” and take an active, permanent, and central role in policy-making and keeping open the channel of communication between a government and citizens’ needs, aspirations, and ideas throughout its period in office. In the past, parties too often have been assigned only two roles — to mobilize support for their leaders in the run up to an election, and to provide “damage control” during a term of office where government figures and policies prove unpopular. After an election the party “is thought to have outlived for a time its main purpose” and the leadership disconnects from it, isolating itself from grassroots opinion and collective decision-making, and creating disillusionment and disengagement amongst those citizens who seek ongoing political involvement. In the future, parties should be much more actively involved in the formulation of policy and legislation; in feeding back to government on the effects of its policies; in communicating citizens’ views to government, and in educating, mobilizing, and offering political experience to citizens, in the effort to inculcate and support a culture of political engagement and full participation.

# The Challenges and Opportunities for Political Parties in Haiti

Haiti has been in a political deadlock since the contested legislative elections of 2000, when the international community, led by the OAS, disputed the vote count. In 2004, under pressure from opposition movements and the threat of armed rebellion, discredited President Aristide departed Haiti for exile abroad. Temporarily filling the institutional void, the head of Haiti's Supreme Court has been acting as provisional president with the aid of a Council of Eminent Persons, representing key sectors. The Interim Government has appointed a Provisional Electoral Council charged with organizing general elections between October and December 2005, where more than 10,000 posts are to be filled, from President to local rural officials.

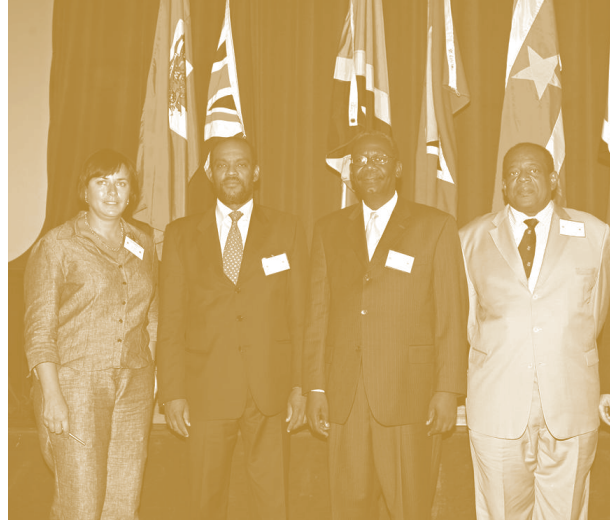
Haiti's political parties — there are more than 90 — now face the task of mobilizing, finding qualified candidates, and forming coalitions in a situation of great insecurity. They also face the difficulty of winning the support of an electorate that is largely illiterate, impoverished, and disillusioned with a political process that to date has done little to improve its lot. This session invited Haitian politicians to discuss the challenges confronting them and opportunities for progress.

Luc Mesadieu of the Christian Movement for a New Haiti outlined the crisis that has deepened in the last few years. Haiti has long suffered from deep, structural inequalities in the distribution of wealth: a small elite lives in luxury amid endemic poverty. Of Haiti's 8 million inhabitants, 60% live in rural areas. 65% live below the poverty line. 50% have no access to potable water. The illiteracy rate is around 68%. HIV/AIDS is a growing problem among a predominantly young population, and life expectancy is only 53. GNP did not rise between 2000-2003 and the turmoil of 2004 has exacerbated negative money flows and fiscal deficit. Of those people who have not fled, many have lost their entire savings.

Lionel Desgranges of the RDNP emphasized that history and geography had created barriers to establishing a modern political culture in Haiti. Historical isolation meant that the state was slow to modernize. A largely unskilled population has tended to group behind messianic single leaders rather than policy-led party groups. The multiplicity of parties makes recruiting skilled staff difficult and economic pressures mean that parties cannot easily win financial support, but are rather expected to distribute money. Political corruption has been rife. Poor road/transport networks, illiteracy, and an absence of telecommunications make communicating with a widespread electorate difficult, while a mass rural exodus to cities ill-equipped to support its scale has caused persistent clashes, frustrating both rural and urban development.

All agreed that establishing a degree of security must be Haiti's immediate priority. Without security, opportunities for public and private investment are foreclosed, skilled persons will continue to emigrate, and money will continue to leave the country. Insecurity also directly affects the ability of parties and candidates to campaign and assume elected office. Ariel Henry of PANPRA remarked that under current circumstances "to be a member of a party is dangerous. Your property is subject to threat; your person is subject to threat; your private investment is at risk".

- 1 Participants stressed that, in an atmosphere of distrust and insecurity, it was all the more important for parties to build bridges: seeking reconciliation, national dialogue, and unity. The “low intensity war” between parties needs to end in the interests of all.
- 2 There is an unsustainably large number of parties: only by forging alliances and coalitions and pooling human and other resources will viable electoral groups emerge.
- 3 Parties must oppose themselves steadfastly to corruption and misappropriation and win back public confidence in democratic governance as a means to improving the lives of Haiti’s citizens.



Luc Mesadieu (Christian Movement for a New Haiti), Ariel Henry (PANPRA) and Lionel Desgranges (RDNP) discuss the future of Haiti. Also pictured is Marry Durand of the OAS Special Mission to Haiti.

All participants saw some reasons for hope in the Haitian situation. Mr Mesadieu pointed to the opportunities presented by future regional integration, by the proximity of the US as a trading partner, and by the possibility of winning increasing support for microenterprises, agribusiness, and tourism. He emphasized the importance of Haiti dealing positively with its neighbours and with the OAS and other organizations.

However, future development crucially depends on Haiti’s ability to mount free and fair elections later this year that lead to the establishment of a democratic government under the rule of law. All political parties’ efforts must now be directed to that goal.

## Constitutional Reform and Political Parties in the Caribbean: National Case Studies

Constitutional reform has been on the agenda of practically every Caribbean country: sometimes driven by crisis and in other cases by realization of the need to move on from arrangements that first accompanied independence. According to the Organization of American States, some eleven of fourteen CARICOM countries are currently engaged in constitutional reform as of January 2002. Constitutional Reform in the Caribbean. Final Report of the OAS/UNDP Conference held in Barbados, January 20-22, 2002, page 4. This session explored three national case studies — Trinidad and Tobago, Guyana, and Suriname — giving rise to reflections both on the nationally specific nature and aims of each constitutional reform process and on common issues where ideas and experience can usefully be shared.

## Trinidad and Tobago

Roodal Moonilal of Trinidad and Tobago's United National Congress suggested that there was "no one blueprint for constitutional reform" and that proportional representation, for example, was not a universal salve. However "the adversarial Westminster model of two party politics has become a systemic problem and may have outlived its usefulness". He argued that all political institutions were overly conflictive in public and that reform needed to look at key institutions and traditions, including the party system, parliamentary bureaucracy, service commissions, and "independent senators", and to recognize the weaknesses inherent in an old system based on outdated prerogatives and models of governance. Mr Moonilal suggested that particularly in small countries, elected local government might be "a duplication of effort and a waste of resources" but it might be possible to adopt a US model of having an elected, full-time representative who can respond to local government problems. The basis for development should be a new inclusiveness that embraces multi-party and multi-actor participation, and a new emphasis on equality: Caribbean countries need to put in place policies and legislation that outlaw discrimination and enshrine integrity in public life.

Nafeesa Mohammed of the People's National Movement of Trinidad and Tobago agreed that reform of the electoral method — some form of "proportionate representation"— and party reform were key goals for constitutional reform in Trinidad and Tobago. The size of the Senate might also be increased to include local government representatives. Tracing the political history in her country since the 1960s of calls for constitutional reform and corresponding manoeuvres to block or stall it, she reported that a Constitutional Reform Committee, inaugurated in 2004, had been enabling in terms of moving discussion forward, but that discussions still "needed to be deeper", with more serious commitment to examining possible new electoral formulae.

## Guyana

Hydar Ally, of the People's Progressive Party of Guyana, stressed that, because in Guyana constitutional reform had historically been used as a political tool to cheat others of power, the major challenge was to build trust, particularly between the two main parties, and lay the basis for incremental change through sustained dialogue. Oscar Clarke, of Guyana's

Hydar Ally of the People's Progressive Party asserts that the major challenge in Guyana is to build trust between the two main parties and lay the basis for incremental change through sustained dialogue.



<sup>1</sup> *Constitutional Reform in Caribbean*. Final Report of the OAS/UNDP Conference held in Barbados, January 20-22, 2002, Page 4.

# Caribbean Meeting of Inter-American Forum on Political Parties

Montego Bay, Jamaica, April 27-29, 2005

People's National Congress, agreed that constitutional reform in Guyana had been a political battleground and that, in a climate of ethnic tension and challenges to economic security, consensus on this issue could act as a "basis for new unity". Rupert Roopneraine of the Guyana Action Party—Working People's Alliance reported that constitutional reform efforts had been ongoing in Guyana since the 1960s, furthered by the establishment in the 1990s of a Joint Select Committee tasked with this issue, but that the most recent interventions had been precipitated by post-election violence and political crisis and had at their core the aim of reducing the overweening powers of the executive president and transferring many of them to the National Assembly. Among the "lessons learned" in this process, he highlighted the importance of:

establishing realistic and enforceable timelines for effecting change;

monitoring progress – in Guyana's case through the establishment of a Standing Committee to keep the constitution under perpetual review, with power to co-opt experts not members of parliament, effectively giving them political powers;

and devolving power from the centre to create a more inclusionary democracy that draws on the historic strengths of local actors in governance in the Caribbean.

Mr Roopneraine noted that the difficulty of getting ruling parties to implement constitutional reform that might threaten their grip on power was not merely a Caribbean phenomenon, but had affected many countries including the UK. Reform, however, was urgent because "the Westminster winner-takes-all system has led in Guyana to discouragement and underdevelopment. We want to see it go".

The difficulty of getting ruling parties to implement constitutional reform that might threaten their grip on power is not merely a Caribbean phenomenon asserts Rubert Roopneraine of the Working People's Alliance. Also pictured is Oscar Clarke of the People's National Congress.



# Caribbean Meeting of Inter-American Forum on Political Parties

Montego Bay, Jamaica, April 27-29, 2005

## Suriname

With respect to its political system, Suriname offers an interesting model, different from that of other countries in the region. There are more than 25 political parties reflecting the country's varied cultural and ethnic make-up, which compete, generally in combination, in an election based on proportionate representation. Government is always formed by a coalition. After a coup in 1975 which led to suspension of its first constitution, which was similar to that of the Netherlands, Suriname adopted a new constitution in 1987 on the basis of consensus and following a referendum in which 72% voted for a National Proportionate System of election and 84% for an executive (rather than ceremonial) president. Despite the relative success of the resulting system, however, constitutional reform continues. Some decentralisation and an increase in the powers of local government were effected in 1987, but the budget for local government is still to be fixed and much important legislation prescribed by the new constitution has yet to be put in place.

While all the Surinamese delegates lauded the inherent pluralism of their system and asserted that parties, as Sonny Kertoidjo (KTPI) explained, "worked together on Election Day, whatever has gone before", they reported that complexities and areas of disagreement remained concerning the relationship between votes and seats in areas with extremely varied population density, and concerning the role of president. Strengths of the Surinamese "constellation of parties" included a less adversarial approach to government and more balanced representation of different groups. But weaknesses included the possibility that coalitions might collapse and that, since decision-making required delicate power balances, difficult and far-reaching decisions might be postponed or evaded.

All participants agreed that constitutional reform was of great importance to them. As the moderator remarked, the tone of the discussion was "passionate", indicating the enthusiasm of many present for change. But most felt that progress on constitutional reform was hampered by a variety of factors including:



The Surinamese delegation confers  
with Anselm James of Grenada.



- genuine anxiety about the effects of change — particularly the possibility of political fragmentation where established party and electoral systems were overhauled;
- “village politics”, where infighting about detail, and individual backyards, prevented large issues being firmly resolved;
- constitutional reform being used and perceived as a political tool, whereby parties sought to control their rivals and suppress, rather than enhance, democratic rights;

To make positive steps forward, delegates agreed that:

- 1 The basis for reform must be greater inclusivity in governance. Parties should engage with civil society initiatives and enshrine a role for local actors, especially local government where it exists, when designing new constitutional models.
- 2 Legislation outlawing discrimination on the basis of gender, ethnicity, or disability and enshrining integrity in public life and prevention of corruption should be at the heart of reform processes.
- 3 Parties must avoid using constitutional reform as a tactical ploy to gain or maintain power, but must work to maintain genuine dialogue and realize consensus.
- 4 Although there is no model that will suit all, and reform is never static, countries should actively consider a degree of collaboration and harmonization on this issue, in order to facilitate future regional goals, especially the possible creation of a Caribbean Court of Justice.

## Political Party and Campaign Funding

Steven Griner, of the Organization for American States, presented the results of *From Grassroots to Airwaves: Paying for Political Parties and Campaigns in the Caribbean*, the OAS’s comparative study on political party and campaign financing in the Caribbean, which was distributed to delegates. *From the Grassroots to the Airwaves: Paying for Political Parties and Campaigns in the Caribbean*. The Organization of American States and International IDEA, page 56. The purpose of this analysis, the first of its kind, was not only to catalogue the normative frameworks of political financing in the Caribbean, to the extent they exist, but to study how existing legislation is enacted or obviated. The study utilized the expertise of many people with different points of view: political leaders, academics and civil society representatives.

Upon the conclusion of this study it was apparent that political party and campaign financing does not take front-and-centre stage in the Caribbean. In response to the mandates of the Heads of State and Government and the Foreign Ministers in the Summit of the Americas process and the Inter-American Democratic Charter, respectively, the compiling of this information and the presentation of the analysis in the Caribbean Meeting of the Inter-American Forum on Political Parties represents an effort to bring this important issue to the attention of political leaders in the region.

Among the important conclusions reached by this study, which drew on a cross-section of contributors including members of political parties, academics, and civil society groups were:

- 1 Although political leaders in the Caribbean lament the perceived growing costs of campaigns, paradoxically no one could say with certainty how much elections in the region really cost, due to a universal lack of transparency of contributions to and expenditures of political parties.
- 2 Parties are currently in a juridical vacuum and are not required to face registration or regulation. Financial disclosure requirements, where they exist, affect individuals only. To create a meaningful system of financial regulation, this vacuum will have to be filled by appropriate legislation.
- 3 Only four CARICOM countries currently have disclosure requirements and these are typically not enforced. The creation of strictly enforced rules for party and campaign financing, with significant penalties for malpractice, requires parties to agree to legislative, cultural, and practical change.
- 4 Political parties and campaigns in the region are privately financed and there is widespread resistance to the idea of public funding on the basis that parties are too corrupt to merit it and the State is too weak vis a vis the parties to ensure equity and transparency. Four countries do, however, provide some public airtime for parties during an electoral campaign: this number might be expanded.
- 5 Political parties have little incentive to invest in female candidates, who are perceived as generating less funding. Although the evidence is mixed, this is a likely contributory factor to women's continuing exclusion from office.
- 6 Although traditional grassroots, "rum and roti" campaigning remains important, evidence suggests growing "Americanisation" of campaigns and increasing campaign budgets. In this context, lack of political party and campaign finance regulation and enforcement encourages cheating and makes a "level playing field" for all candidates harder to create.

## Public Financing: For and Against

Selwyn Ryan, of the University of the West Indies, examined the arguments for and against public financing of parties in the Caribbean. On the positive side, public financing can:

- 1 create a degree of equity between incumbents and challengers;
  - 2 perhaps avert the influence of single large donors and "dirty money";
  - 3 create leverage to improve the professionalism of political parties, providing a "carrot and stick" to ensure greater transparency and accountability.
- On the negative side, public financing of parties:
- 1 might merely supplement parties' private funding without achieving any change in their comparative status or habits;
  - 2 might exacerbate "cartelisation" of political parties (parties working together, via unofficial agreements, to restrict competition);
  - 3 might lead to "break off" groups establishing themselves merely in the cynical pursuit of a grant;

<sup>2</sup>From the Grassroots to the Airwaves: Paying for Political Parties and Campaigns in the Caribbean. The Organization of American States and International IDEA, page 56.

Professor Ryan argued that the efficacy of public financing depended largely on the party configuration, political culture, and institutional environment. Success would depend on whether there was a credible enforcement and punishment regime with investigative capacity, an auditing community with skill and integrity, and an active and empowered civil society to monitor parties. He concluded that, despite the discouraging experience in Latin America, he supported limited public financing within a new legislative framework for parties whereby:

- 1 political parties are necessarily regarded as public, not private institutions. They should be incorporated and made to register with the authorities, and these registers should be continuously updated under strictly enforced rules (not merely as a cosmetic pre-election exercise);
- 2 parties must supply lists of officers and regular, properly audited statements of accounts;
- 3 parties should be required to disclose monies received, including information such as when, from whom, to whom they were given, and how they were spent;
- 4 basic office expenses should be met (as they are in Barbados) and public funds made available for research and training facilities that parties need to operate as professional institutions;
- 5 there must be a “code of ethics” to which all parties are required to subscribe.

Trevor Munroe, of the People’s National Party of Jamaica, reported that the last two years have seen noteworthy advances in Jamaica in creating a regime for regulating political party funding and campaign financing. At present, action is chiefly intra-party, but both major parties are considering the issue and the private sector, trade unions, and government have been converging in their efforts to negotiate a regime. Recent action has been stimulated partly by an increase in criminal violence, particularly illegally-funded gangs, which are displacing party power in politics.

There has also been a dramatic fall-off in political party contributions, especially in kind. Munroe maintained that parties need to clean up the political environment as a matter of self — as well as public— interest. Party

registration, disclosure of contributions above a certain amount, limits on individual contributions, spending limits, and strengthening public funding, are all under consideration.

In Jamaica, Munroe suggested that there may be a need for an interim system of disclosure to a commission, rather than full public disclosure, to guard against victimization, and difficult questions will need to be addressed in deciding how to regulate “foreign” donations, where it is difficult to distinguish between legitimate diaspora contributions and laundered money/bribes.



Trevor Munroe of the People’s National Party and Clive Mullings of the Jamaican Labour Party provide insights to the findings of the OAS comparative study as presented by one of its principal authors, Selwyn Ryan of Trinidad and Tobago.

Clive Mullings of the Jamaican Labour Party noted that “the role of money in politics is a matter of daily debate in old and new democracies alike” and cited a number of regulatory models— from Germany to the US— to consider when creating a Caribbean regime. Importantly, the constitutional framework should be considered when designing legislation. All agreed that the costs of not addressing the issue of party and campaign funding far outweighed the difficulties involved.

# Promoting Greater Citizen Participation in Political Parties

In recent years, women in the Caribbean have made impressive gains in education, business, and politics. In two Caribbean countries, women have occupied the office of the chief executive and women have been elected to parliament and have held ministerial posts in several countries. To date, women outnumber men in the Caribbean university system and they are more present than ever in the private sector. Yet parliaments are still dominated by men and large numbers of female voters have yet to translate into proportionate numbers of female candidates for office. This session shared ideas on breaking the glass ceiling; it also considered the wider question of how citizen participation in politics could be broadened through developing closer ties with civil society.

Sheila Roseau, of the Gender Affairs Division, Government of Antigua and Barbuda, described the work of the Women's Political Participation Project in Antigua and Barbuda, St Kitts and Nevis, and Guyana. This project received three years of financial assistance from the OAS and has received additional support from smaller organizations such as the Guyana Lawyers' Association. Among its achievements have been:

Offering training modules for women to educate and encourage their political participation;

Conducting workshops for young people;

Developing a cadre of skilled women interested in running for political office; and

Creating collaborative networks with other organizations that promote gender equality and mobilizing resources.

Among the challenges that the project faced were: dealing with political interference, particularly around election time; the need for greater and better-assured long term financial support; and mobilizing the Government and Opposition to work together on gender

issues. Roseau suggested that the way forward for promoting women's participation in politics lay in fostering collaboration and partnership between national and international organizations many of which shared the same goals in promoting women's political empowerment. Future activities could involve research, training, mentoring and workshop schemes, and promoting better education in citizenship and participation at school level, to foster a new generation of potential female politicians.



Mandatory education is vital. Hazel Brown of the Network of NGOs for the Advancement of Women in Trinidad and Tobago.

Hazel Brown, of the Network of NGOs for the Advancement of Women, Trinidad and Tobago, agreed that mandatory education on democracy was vital, but added that parties must also address the question of affirmative action and quotas if they are to bring women and other previously marginalized groups into government. Quotas have been successful, in the UK and elsewhere, in bringing a "first generation" of women

into office, who can provide models and mentorship for future female incumbents. Cecilia Babb, of the CPDC, Barbados, concurred that informal mentoring has traditionally existed for men within parties but not for women. Parties need to become engaged in the area of training and promoting leadership for women, not least because their absence of investment in this area is one reason for the damaging disillusionment and disengagement of a large proportion of the electorate — a trend that all parties at the forum have acknowledged as dangerous to their future and that of democratic governance in the region.

## Developing Closer Ties with Civil Society

Jacqui Quinn-Leandro, Minister of Labour, Public Administration, and Empowerment in Antigua and Barbuda, emphasized that governments must create more regular, permanent, formal, and respectful ties with civil society to harness the potential political energies of a broader and more representative cross-section of the communities they serve. Antigua and Barbuda's recently created National Economic and Social Council might serve as a model for the kind of formalized roundtable discussions that governments should have with civil society representatives on a regular basis in order to make decision-making more democratic and transparent and combat the closed "kitchen cabinet" politics of old, whereby politicians made decisions and rubber-stamped them in secret, without consultation.



The recently created National Economic and Social Council of Antigua and Barbuda could combat the closed "kitchen cabinet" politics of old asserts Jacqui Quinn-Leandro, Minister of Labour, Public Administration and Empowerment. Also pictured: Tillman Thomas of the National Democratic Congress of Grenada.

Minister Quinn-Leandro asserted that civil society organizations, ranging from Rotary Clubs to professional associations of women, to talk radio networks can achieve results and reach out to sectors of the population in a way that governments cannot. Their strengths should be recognized and utilised. In Antigua and Barbuda, recent civil society monitoring of the voter-registration process, which replaced inaccurate voter lists dating from 1981 with accurate records, showed the fruitful possibilities of collaboration (here between civil society, CARICOM, and international observers) to achieve democratic progress. Other participants pointed to the example of aid distribution after Hurricane Ivan, where civil society organizations played a key role in distributing relief, as communities trusted them not to discriminate between recipient groups.

Governments can assist by organizing training, by providing funding for civil society organizations and creating opportunities (eg. tax breaks) for them to mobilize funding themselves, and by creating a favorable environment in which civil society can flourish. The independent media deserve government protection. And there is a need for a legal framework that recognizes, supports and sustains civil society and helps it to overcome problems. Problems identified by participants included a limited, chiefly urban base; a small, gender-unequal leadership group; inadequate financial resources; dependence on foreign donors; and a dearth of IT equipment and training.

Tillman Thomas, of the National Democratic Congress of Grenada, argued, however, that civil society groups should not be dependent on the whims of changing governments and should therefore ideally maintain independent sources of funding. Nigel Carty, of the St

# Caribbean Meeting of Inter-American Forum on Political Parties

Montego Bay, Jamaica, April 27-29, 2005

Kitts Labour Party, urged that ties between Civil Society Organisations (CSOs), parties, and government need to be depoliticised and strengthened. St Kitts and Nevis is a country with a historically deep rift between its two major parties and interaction with CSOs, radio stations, etc. has traditionally been along party lines, each party having an affiliation with a particular organization. Mr Carty suggested that forging more inclusive collaborations that shared ideas to move the country forward would need a fresh, freer approach to the relationship between party and civil society. The National Youth Council was an example of a positive cross-party initiative, while the precedent of the Chamber of Commerce brokering a powersharing deal between the parties where there was political deadlock illustrated one of many ways in which civil society groups can help to keep parties talking and bolster democratic functions.

“Shared ideas to move the country forward need a fresh, freer approach to the relationship between parties and civil society,” emphasizes Nigel Carty of the St. Kitts Labour Party.



Participants agreed that it was time for “a new era of collaboration between civil society and government”, where civil society groups were no longer undervalued and marginalized as “troublemakers”, consulted in a reluctant and ad hoc fashion, but were kept continuously informed and invited as partners to the negotiating table in a timely and routine fashion. Rather than being seen merely in the role of “advocacy”, civil society groups should be seen as key partners in policy-making, monitoring, and enforcement. Civil society can act as a “memory bank” on political issues (“governments come and go, but we go on forever”); by providing continuity and expertise it can contribute to stability, regional integration, and thus to the attainment of development goals. Parties inside and outside government can forge ties with civil society by developing participation in cross-party and non-partisan networks that bring people together at local levels.

## Closing Remarks by PJ Patterson, Prime Minister of Jamaica

Prime Minister Patterson noted that the last year had been a challenging one for the hemisphere. Hurricanes, tropical storms, and floods had highlighted the region's vulnerability to natural disasters. They had also, however, demonstrated the necessity and positive potential of collaborating across party and national lines, and with hemispheric partners, guided by collective responsibility.



Prime Minister P.J. Patterson closes the  
Caribbean Meeting of the Inter-  
American Forum on Political Parties.

The Prime Minister commended the Charter of Civil Society, which commits CARICOM governments to upholding the right of people to make political choices and to creating a truly participatory political environment in the Community, and called for it to be elevated from a statement of intent to a legally enforceable document. He noted with pleasure that many CARICOM countries, including Jamaica, had already initiated processes to ensure more collaborative and inclusive democratic governance, including the implementation of policies for promoting social partnerships, the adoption of anti-corruption measures, and legislative reforms aimed at enhancing transparency and accountability. He urged continued effort and cooperation in this area.

# Caribbean Meeting of Inter-American Forum on Political Parties

Montego Bay, Jamaica, April 27-29, 2005

Prime Minister Patterson expressed concern about the continuing insecurity, volatility, and political polarization in Haiti and in particular the continuing detention of leaders and activists of a major political party in that country. He stressed that the Inter-American Democratic Charter provided an appropriate instrument for a review of the situation, adding that CARICOM would make good on its pledges of aid and of technical assistance for the electoral process.

Finally, the Prime Minister urged Caribbean countries to continue to share best practices and technologies to increase citizen participation in electoral processes, and to modernize voter education, registration, and the voting and counting process. Democratic change must come from within; but while recognizing the diversity of their resources and cultures, the shared values and interests of Caribbean nations made it vital to sustain discussion and cooperation on how best to strengthen and reinvigorate political parties in the region.

## Final Thoughts and Next Steps

The following points reflect the more salient conclusions of the two-day workshop and can serve to orient future action by political parties, civil society and the international community.



Participants from 12 countries and 22 parties urge continued engagement  
by the international community.



1. Despite their poor public image, political parties are vital to democracy. Their role cannot be delegated or replaced. Fulfilling their role as essential actors in democratic governance will mean embracing their remit as permanent, professional, public organizations that, whether in or out of office, work continuously to serve their communities through maintaining dialogue with constituents; developing policy; being active in research, civic education and training; and establishing appropriate linkages at national, regional, and international level.
2. Urgent party reform is needed, beginning with the manner in which political parties and campaigns are financed. Measures should also be enacted to make political parties more inclusive and representative, and more openly responsive and responsible to public scrutiny.
3. With regard to political financing, the Caribbean is one of the least transparent regions in the world. Political party and campaign financing should be made a priority and the comparative analysis of the OAS serves as an important step. The international community and civil society should continue to advocate for greater transparency and political parties should take up the challenge to pass meaningful and enforceable legislation.
4. The international community, primarily the OAS and CARICOM – as the principle political forums of the region – should remain engaged in the strengthening and modernization of political parties. Specifically, the international community should promote horizontal cooperation and an exchange of information among Caribbean countries. As one participant noted, there are few opportunities inside one's own country to meet with political competitors in a neutral setting and conduct meaningful, constructive debate.
5. Political parties should have a more organic relationship with the constitutional reform process of the region since it is they who will eventually pass (or reject) these reforms. While the participants did not evaluate constitutional reforms proposed in individual countries, the changing nature of the world economy and the transnational nature of many social problems necessitate important constitutional reforms for the countries of the Caribbean.
6. Civil society has assumed an important role in democratic governance. This role must be strengthened, but at the same time it should complement and not replace the work of political parties. Parties should draw on the expertise of civil society by establishing regular, timely forums for consultation and a permanent dialogue that includes all partners in governance.

# Caribbean Meeting of Inter-American Forum on Political Parties

Montego Bay, Jamaica, April 27-29, 2005

7. Despite important progress by women in the Caribbean, they are dramatically underrepresented in political party leadership positions and parliaments. Every effort should be made, through legislation, training and the provision of financial resources, to recruit, encourage, and support more women to run for office.
8. The transnational nature of poverty and violence makes it necessary for political parties, whether in or out of office, to establish permanent institutional relationships with civil society and the international community. A purely adversarial conception of the nature of relationships between parties is damaging: frustrating local unity, and national and regional development goals. Shared challenges — from globalized markets to voter apathy — necessitate a new era of political cooperation, where parties develop outward-looking strategies and work with their partners in governance on a continuous basis to resolve problems for the greater good of the communities they serve.