

INTRODUCTION

In fulfillment of the mandate set forth in Articles 91 and 112 of the Charter of the Organization of American States (OAS), I am pleased to present a report on the activities of the Organization and its financial situation for the period from March 1, 2005, to February 28, 2006. This report has been prepared pursuant to the guidelines contained in resolution AG/RES. 331, of 1978.

At the same time, this session of the Assembly also coincides with my first anniversary as Secretary General of the Organization. Therefore, in presenting this first report, I would like to offer some reflections on the changes that have occurred in the region and in the OAS during that period; our successes, shortcomings, and priorities; and the challenges that lie ahead. I shall restrict these reflections to the three core areas of the work of the Organization: democracy and human rights, integral development, and multidimensional security, adding only in conclusion a few comments about internal organizational and financial matters, since that issue will be covered in depth in a later address.

The Political Year

Our overall evaluation of the political year is highly positive. When we gathered in Fort Lauderdale a year ago we faced crises that were already fully under way or were looming in several countries of the region. A few days after my election, the Permanent Council had to take a position on the conflict among the branches of government in Ecuador that had led to the replacement of the President then in office. During that session of the Assembly, the resignation of the President of Bolivia was announced, and the OAS Secretary General was asked to take urgent action to defuse a conflict in Nicaragua that could also have culminated in a disruption of institutional order. At the same time, the electoral process in Haiti was experiencing serious delays, one of the main causes of which was the voter registration process, which was the direct responsibility of the OAS

A look at the situation as we gather for this session of the Assembly shows clear progress. The crises in the four countries mentioned above were dealt with democratically, and no similar cases of instability have arisen in the region.

We cooperated with the authorities in Ecuador in the appointment of a new Supreme Court of Justice, which is fully operational, along with another group of authorities whose situation depended on that appointment. We have thus helped to normalize a process that must, before year's end, lead to a presidential election under the terms laid out in the Constitution.

The voter registration process in Haiti was successful beyond all expectations, with the registration of more than 3.5 million voters. We cooperated with the Government, the Provisional Electoral Council, and the United Nations in an election unrivalled in the country's history in terms of turnout and transparency, and we expect to continue the work of our Special Mission even more decisively under the new government.

We were present with an electoral observation mission in Bolivia to monitor a completely normal process that led to the election of a president by an absolute majority, something that has not occurred in recent times in that sister nation. We have developed a work plan with the new government that includes our electoral observation of the Constituent Assembly elections and our technical assistance for that process.

For several months we maintained a high-level mission in Nicaragua, which persevered in the search for a seemingly impossible agreement. Finally, the stability and continuity of the democratic process were possible thanks to the positive attitude of all concerned, and Nicaragua is moving toward a decisive election at the end of this year. We hope that all the representative forces of the country will be able to participate fully in those elections, in a framework of tranquility and mutual trust.

None of these achievements is complete and, in each case, there are new challenges to overcome. But today we come to this session of this Assembly with no ongoing crises and with an encouraging assessment of the part played by the OAS in each of the countries where they occurred. This is good to see and fills us with optimism for the future.

The soundness of democratic development in the region is being put to the test this year in a succession of electoral processes unprecedented in our recent history. In the last six months seven presidential elections have taken place (two with a second round), two general elections in countries with parliamentary systems of government, and a large number of congressional and municipal elections. Between January 2005 and January 2006, a total of 13 presidential elections took place, more than ever before in a single year in the region.

The normality of these elections is a testament to how well rooted good electoral practices have become in our Hemisphere. In a few short years we have managed to consolidate systems in which political debate is broad, options are real, the process is peaceful, voter turnout massive, the count clean, and the results respected. This is no small thing for a region that until a couple of decades ago was still beset by several dictatorships and unrepresentative elections.

During this period we had been invited to observe numerous electoral processes in member countries. The OAS has been present with large contingents of observers at six of the seven presidential elections, at local and municipal elections, and even, for the first time, at primary elections. This is a task that the Organization performs with ever greater efficiency and credibility. The OAS seal of approval on an election is valued and we are proud of that. Over the rest of the year we expect to provide observation coverage for most of the six remaining presidential elections.

To conclude, based on our wealth of institutional experience we can reaffirm that the quality of elections in our countries has progressed notably. Of course there is always room for improvement. The independence of electoral tribunals must be increased and a huge effort made to have more and more reliable electoral rolls and to register increasing numbers of voters. However, overall, we have not detected any measures or activities that could be described as factors that might render an electoral process null and void.

A second tier of problems concerns the level of registration. The fact that a significant number of citizens in many countries are not registered can be due to a variety of reasons. On one hand, there is a purely political phenomenon: there are citizens who wish neither to register nor participate because they are not interested in politics or because the registration process is too cumbersome.

On the other hand in Latin America and the Caribbean there are millions of women and men who have never been registered, not even at birth. As a result, they are excluded not only from political and economic participation but also from programs to improve their situation and protect their security, and to prevent them from being easy prey to abuse by employers, discrimination, and

trafficking in persons. Keeping a modern, comprehensive, and reliable registry of all the country's inhabitants, or at least all its citizens, is an important democratic objective.

In this regard, I should like once again to draw attention to the work of the Organization in Haiti. There we helped create one of the most modern voter registries in the Americas. Furthermore, it was designed with the expectation that it would serve as a basis for a civil registry of the entire Haitian population. We expect to complete this task in cooperation with the new government and also to make our expertise available to other countries in the Caribbean and Latin America.

We have a long-term commitment to Haiti, which goes hand in hand with the direct commitment made by many member states taking part in MINUSTAH or other forms of cooperation. Over the weeks ahead we expect to complete the design of a new OAS work program in Haiti, coordinated with the government, regional agencies, and international organizations, in particular the United Nations. Our experience in Haiti shows that international agencies must and can coordinate their activities to accomplish better results. We hope to continue to work with everyone and to carry out the duties incumbent on us under a joint plan of action. That is how it should be in all critical situations in which several international agencies are involved.

In Colombia we face a huge challenge whose success demands hemispheric solidarity. The attempts of the Government of Colombia to achieve peace, bring major criminals to justice, and reincorporate combatants into society, are hampered by persistent violence connected with drug trafficking, kidnapping, and extortion. We have sought to support the Government of Colombia in its efforts to combat that violence and, at the same time, move forward in the peace process with the *Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia* (AUC, paramilitaries) and with the National Liberation Army (ELN) and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC). Achieving that peace would quite simply mean putting an end to the Americas' longest-standing conflict, which has dragged on for nearly 50 years. We are pleased with the progress made with the first two above-mentioned organizations and hope that further headway with those processes will be possible during President Alvaro Uribe's second term.

Our Organization is involved in part of that peace program: it has the twofold task of monitoring the disarmament and demobilization of the AUC and ensuring observance of national and international standards in the area of human rights. As demobilization occurs, we are also required to support combatant reintegration efforts.

It is not an easy task because there are always setbacks, difficulties, and shortcomings, and the objective of ensuring full justice seems to come into conflict with the desire for rapid pacification. However, the progress made is undeniable: violence has declined and demobilization has taken place, in spite of the persistence of certain armed groups of criminals.

The growing conviction of the international community concerning the need for peace in Colombia has enabled the OAS to expand its presence there. A few months ago the presidents of South America asked the OAS to coordinate efforts to increase regional and international support for the peace process in Colombia. In the first quarter of this year, 34 new national and international observers were added to the Mission to Support the Peace Process in Colombia (MAPP/OAS). Accordingly there are now 80 people working for the Mission, which has an office in Bogotá, six regional offices, and a mobile team for those areas where we do not have a permanent presence. We

have improved verification of the pre-demobilization, demobilization, and post-demobilization stages of the illegal armed groups taking part in the peace process

Our increased presence has been possible thanks to fresh support provided by the Governments of The Bahamas, Brazil, Canada, Colombia, Ireland, Korea, the Netherlands, Mexico, Sweden, and the United States. The Governments of Chile, Guatemala, Norway, Spain, and Thailand have announced that they will provide cooperation in the near future. I should mention that contributions were also obtained for the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights to enable it to strengthen the work assigned to it by the Assembly last year.

Inter-American Democratic Charter

In accordance with the mandates of the last session of the General Assembly, the political activities of the General Secretariat are being organized around the Inter-American Democratic Charter. At our last Assembly session, follow-up on the commitments adopted in the Democratic Charter gave rise to intense discussions, which culminated in a mandate to the Secretary General to “[c]oordinate the activities and programs of the various offices of the General Secretariat relating to the promotion of democracy, in accordance with the Inter-American Democratic Charter.”

I have already referred to the aspects relating to the democratic generation of government authorities as well as to the crises that threaten to end or at least seriously impair the functioning of democracy. While origin and crisis are hugely important, the Inter-American Democratic Charter also refers broadly to the exercise of democracy, and all three must be evaluated as core elements in the light of the Charter.

There are two ways to perform that evaluation. The first would be through reports that a specialized unit could prepare on an annual basis on the progress of democracy in each country. In all honesty, I doubt if any member of our Organization would be willing to undergo a comprehensive examination of the status of its democracy.

The issue was discussed at last year’s General Assembly session and examined some months ago by the Council, where I gave a presentation pursuant to the mandate from the General Assembly in Fort Lauderdale. The reluctance to a kind of general evaluation is evident. From a broader perspective, therefore, the only option open to consideration is for those countries that are so inclined to voluntarily submit reports on the progress of democracy in their countries based on a common methodology.

Nevertheless, at those Council meetings we also concurred that the Inter-American Democratic Charter comes to our aid in this respect. The Charter, as I have often said, does not contain a definition of democracy but, rather, a taxonomy--a description of its fundamental characteristics. The democratic exercise of power includes respect for human rights, rejection of all forms of discrimination, full observance of the rule of law, freedom of expression, political pluralism, the separation of powers and independence of the branches of government, probity, and transparency in government activities.

What we propose is simple: just as we work to evaluate respect for and observance of some of these characteristics (human rights, transparency, freedom of expression, elections), so we could annually submit reports on each of these areas of the political work of the Organization that coincide with the

description in the Charter. If it is not possible to evaluate democracy as a whole, then let us do so by parts.

The foregoing becomes clearer still if we examine the different areas and the possibility of evaluating their current status and future prospects.

Human Rights

As with electoral observation and crisis management, over the years the OAS has consolidated its prestige in the protection of human rights, including, more recently, its permanent monitoring of freedom of expression. The Inter-American Commission on Human Rights is a source of pride for the Organization, and we all want to maintain its validity and independence.

Strengthening our human rights system requires the pursuit of three lines of action.

First, to ensure universalization of the system. All OAS member countries are members of the Inter-American Commission. However, the same cannot be said with regard to the signing of the American Convention or the acceptance of the contentious jurisdiction of the Inter-American Court of Human Rights. We must spare no effort to consolidate this system, and to that end we will continue to work with all countries that have not signed the Convention, with the flexibility necessary to accommodate their concerns, so that the entire Hemisphere is governed by the same standards in this area.

Second, we must seek to broaden the activities of our system in the promotion of human rights, not only through the decisions and rulings issued by its organs on individual cases, but also by disseminating and publicizing more widely their national reports and their rapporteurship system.

Third, it is essential to increase observance of the decisions of the Court and the Commission. The level of observance is high, but some countries still fail to abide by those decisions. For the system to continue to be successful, formal compliance with decisions is not sufficient; rather, they must be implemented in full.

Finally, preserving and strengthening our system for the protection of human rights depends quite substantially on continued respect for its full independence. We may very often disagree with the decisions of the Court or the Commission or with their reports. However, what is important is that we recognize that the possibility of issuing them independently and without pressure is an inherent characteristic of the prestige and validity of the system. (That independence also depends on the availability of adequate financing for the Commission, but I will come to that later).

Transparency

The peoples of the Americas have a right to know about the activities of their authorities, and governments have an obligation to conduct their activities in a framework of transparency. Lack of transparency encourages corruption, which erodes the faith of citizens in democratic institutions. Without solid and reliable institutions, it is very difficult to resolve people's problems and to generate the public satisfaction necessary for effective and sustainable democratic governments.

The General Assembly session in Fort Lauderdale declared 2006 as the “Inter-American Year of the Fight against Corruption.” The results of the Follow-Up Mechanism for the Inter-American Convention against Corruption, in particular of its Committee of Experts, which will be presented to us at this session of the Assembly, are the outcome of the first effort in hemispheric follow-up on this Convention, which is the first of its kind in the world.

The countries of the Americas have been aware of the need to join forces to confront this problem, which makes no distinction between ideologies or geographic borders and very often relies on the latter to conceal the proceeds of corruption. That is why this international instrument has already been signed by the 34 active OAS member states and ratified by 33 of them.

At the same time, 28 of the states parties have entrusted the Follow-Up Mechanism for the Inter-American Convention against Corruption (MESICIC) and its Committee of Experts with the responsibility of conducting a technical review of the provisions of the Convention and offering recommendations to help them to meet the commitments they have made to deal effectively with this scourge.

The first round of review examined the implementation of those provisions of the Convention selected for that round. I will not refer to the contents of the recommendations, as the agenda for this Assembly session provides for a presentation in that respect, but I would like to draw attention to the fact that they were adopted by consensus by the anti-corruption experts of the 28 countries that comprise the MESICIC after a careful analysis in which the countries under review had the opportunity to present their points of view.

The OAS General Secretariat also hopes to contribute to the implementation of this Convention and, therefore, has implemented a cooperation program, with financial cooperation generously provided by Canada, to support countries that wish to improve their transparency and control mechanisms.

This cooperation should aim to improve the legal and institutional systems that the countries have in place for: preventing conflicts of interest; conserving public resources; reporting acts of corruption; detecting illicit enrichment by public officials; encouraging civil society participation in efforts to prevent corruption; strengthening and increasing the effectiveness of oversight bodies in this area; and enhancing mutual assistance and mutual technical cooperation among states to tackle corruption by encouraging coordination among their authorities.

Such progress also ought to make it possible to modernize public administration and improve the quality of government. The shortcomings that we often see in the design and management of public policies cannot always be blamed on a lack of probity but, more often than not, on inefficiency. Technical cooperation in public policy-shaping; professionalization of the civil service in countries; application of knowledge to government management; good government practices; and the use of new technologies, are essential aspects of good governance because citizens also need efficient governments for the solution of their problems.

Rule of Law

The proper functioning of the Court of Justice is one of the most critical factors in the public's assessment of the state of democracy and perhaps one of the most decisive in determining a negative final verdict. Most citizens in the region believe that justice is inequitable, that it is inaccessible to

them, or that it is corrupt. A change in these perceptions will not come about overnight and entails a transformation in the ways that justice is imparted in the Hemisphere.

A few weeks ago, the Ministers of Justice and Ministers or Attorneys General of the Americas met here in Santo Domingo, in the framework of the OAS. At that meeting progress continued to be made, with the assistance of the General Secretariat's Department of International Legal Affairs, regarding such important issues as those related to extradition mechanisms, mutual assistance in criminal matters, the fight against cybercrime, and prison and penitentiary policy. We are certain that this process, which is so necessary, will continue to gain strength and improve concrete mechanisms for legal cooperation among our authorities.

Furthermore we will continue to provide all possible advisory services and technical assistance for the development of private international law. At present, by mandate of the General Assembly, common legal instruments are under consideration in the area of consumer protection, regulation of electronic commerce, and updating and modernization of registries of secure transactions in the Hemisphere, with a view to their adoption in the near future by a specialized conference (or CIDIP, as such conferences are known). These elements also have the effect of increasing legal security in the region.

The Justice Studies Center of the Americas (JSCA) is a unit that was created to support reform processes in the region. It has been operational in Latin America for several years, and our aim is to broaden its activities and scope to include the Caribbean. At the same time, the JSCA could be useful for the purposes of technical evaluation of the state of justice in the different countries, as a core requirement of the Democratic Charter.

Gender Matters

The activities of the Inter-American Commission of Women have grown in importance, and its areas of work involve issues connected with economic, labor, legal, political, and security matters. Nevertheless, our efforts in this area continue fundamentally to center on coordination of ministerial meetings.

We must place the CIM in a position to take greater initiatives with regard to these issues that are critical for the development of democracy. In our region women continue to be victims of discrimination in terms of jobs, wages, and access to public office, as well as victims of abuse, domestic violence, and other offences. While it is a crosscutting issue, in the sense that it is covered in all the programs and departments of the OAS, we believe that the body that deals specifically with the topic of gender, the CIM, needs to be strengthened.

In this context, we could harness the capacities offered by the Inter-American Program on the Promotion of Women's Human Rights and Gender Equity and Equality (IAP) to upgrade the evaluation and implementation of public policies in this area.

Fight against Discrimination

The task we face over the coming period is the conclusion and implementation of three important legal instruments on discrimination.

The first concerns indigenous peoples in the Americas. In this context it is important to thank the Governments of Guatemala and Brazil for having hosted meetings of indigenous peoples, to reaffirm the commitment of the Organization of American States to the adoption of the American Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, and to underscore the importance of the full and effective participation of these peoples in drafting the aforesaid Declaration.

No longer can we continue to delay the conclusion of the negotiations on this Declaration, which is indispensable as a guide for the countries of the Americas that do not yet have modern legislation that recognizes the rights of indigenous peoples and governs the means to preserve their culture.

The second challenge is to move forward toward the adoption of an inter-American convention against discrimination, intended as a broad instrument that encompasses all forms of discrimination in the Americas, including ethnic, religious, racial, and sexual discrimination. At the conference that we will hold this year in Brazil, we expect to define the general terms of this important initiative.

In third place, in the Plan of Action of the Fourth Summit of the Americas (Mar del Plata, November 5, 2005), the Heads of State and Government instructed the OAS “[t]o consider at the next OAS period of regular sessions of the General Assembly to be held in the Dominican Republic, a Declaration on the Decade of the Americas for Persons with Disabilities (2006-2016), together with a program of action.” This initiative is based in particular on the Inter-American Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Persons with Disabilities, which we must put into effect, given that the period following ratification of the Convention by the minimum number of states required has long been exceeded. We hope that this session of the Assembly will adopt a resolution in that regard and that we can finally implement the provisions contained in this important Convention.

With these three documents fully in force, our follow-up of discrimination issues will be much more precise and objective.

In addition to these areas of work, we should also mention our programs on political parties and parliaments, which now include Central America and the Andean region; our activities in the area of decentralization, which received a boost from the Third RIAD Conference in Brazil; and the increasing strengthening of our efforts with civil society, which are not restricted simply to dialogue at our summits and assemblies, but seek also a more direct relationship with civil society in the activities of the General Secretariat.

Given all of these activities that the Organization already carries out, it is possible to perform an evaluation of how the Democratic Charter functions in connection with each of their main components. My proposal, therefore, is to carry out yearly evaluations on the situation of human rights, transparency, gender relations, discrimination, and the state of justice in the Americas. Over the coming years, we can add to these five reports three additional ones: on the separation and balance of powers, political pluralism (political party system), and civil society participation.

With these reports under permanent consideration by the Council and the Assembly, we shall be covering the areas that, in our opinion, are the most sensitive for the purposes of evaluating democracy. Whatever the case, expanding their scope and depth presupposes the willingness of countries to allow access to the necessary information and, at the same time, the countries’ own evaluations of the issues under review. Ultimately, all evaluation systems on democratic

development are highly sensitive to the amount of information and degree of interest that member countries are prepared to provide. Knowledge of strengths and weaknesses in each of these general characteristics of our democracy helps us to strengthen one another and to define the Organization's programs more clearly.

At the end of the day, the functioning of the mechanisms suggested for carrying out the mandate contained in resolution AG/RES. 2154 requires a political will based on cooperation and not on the logic of supervision, criticism, or sanctions. There are valuable experiences that we can draw on for this cooperative approach in CICAD's Multilateral Evaluation Mechanism and, more recently, in the Evaluation Mechanism for the Convention against Corruption. The idea is to adopt a positive attitude toward the possibility of cooperating to consolidate democracy and contribute effectively to generating better conditions for good governance.

Some Problems

Despite our positive evaluation of political developments in the region, I believe it necessary to mention as well a number of problems that have recently arisen in the region, which, in my view, do not contribute to necessary hemispheric unity.

I should make it clear at the outset that I shall not refer here to the issue that is in vogue in the international press, regarding the "leftward shift" of Latin America. The OAS is not an organization of right-wing, left-wing, or middle-of-the-road governments, but of democratic states. The OAS member states practice democracy in the framework of our founding Charter and of the Inter-American Democratic Charter. The economic and public-policy decisions that they adopt are within the purview of those governments; the decisions of peoples regarding whom they elect as their leaders are fully respected in this Organization. All that is required here is that, where democracy is concerned, we abide by the common principles on which we have agreed.

That said, there is no question that a number of recent controversies have affected our unity. I believe, as I have mentioned on several occasions, that fiery rhetoric, interference (albeit only verbal) in the affairs of other countries, and a moral condemnation of the policy decisions of other members, do not contribute to the climate of harmony that ought to exist among our countries.

Serious differences have existed among some of our governments over matters concerning human rights, environmental issues, territorial problems, and economic decisions. Naturally that does not ease relations among us, but we must learn to discuss our differences in a dignified manner and avoid ideological rhetoric and condemnation in our discussions.

The need for the foregoing is all the greater at a time when Latin America and the Caribbean are going through a period of solid economic growth, helped by the excellent prices for our commodities on the international market. This is the time to generate agreements and design policies that enable us to consolidate what we have accomplished and attract the necessary investment to maintain our growth in times of greater difficulty for the international economy.

Sustained growth is the foundation of any effort at social justice that we might undertake. We must be able to overcome our differences in the area of trade and continue to move forward with our integration processes, with each of us maintaining own vision and discussing our differences with respect and in a spirit of hemispheric unity.

The international press speaks, to my mind prematurely, of a division in Latin America. I hope that this session of the Assembly will give the lie to such assertions and that here in Santo Domingo we can reaffirm our democratic convictions and our full adherence to the principles of nonintervention and mutual respect that must guide our relations.

This Secretariat has participated in negotiations to settle differences among our countries peacefully. I would like to mention the recent signing of definitive agreements on borders between Honduras and El Salvador, and the Agreement on a Framework for Negotiations and Confidence-Building Measures between the Governments of Belize and Guatemala, agreeing on a new round of negotiations. Those negotiations have been carried out under the auspices of the OAS, and we hope that they will serve to encourage other countries to take similar paths.

It is normal for it to be said that the OAS has no jurisdiction over issues between countries. That simply means, however, that they cannot be brought unilaterally before the Organization. Without calling this principle into question, I submit that the General Secretariat can be an appropriate mechanism for bringing parties together and facilitating the solution of their problems, a task that it is fully prepared to take on if called upon to do so. I emphasize that the matter is a strictly voluntary one, but I ask that our members give due consideration to the possibility, especially if the dispute concerned can be resolved through good-faith mediation or facilitation.

Integral Development

Integral development is one of the fundamental pillars of the Organization. It is not a question of measuring the Organization's success merely by the amount of money obtained for certain projects, but also by its capacity to steer the efforts of the Americas toward attaining sustainable development, improving the quality of life of its people, and eradicating poverty. We must find a way to help guide development so that its benefits are fairly distributed.

The Mar del Plata Summit, which was held on November 4, 2005, marks a watershed in that direction. It was at that moment it was fully accepted that our democracies and our economies will never be stable while millions of our compatriots continue to be excluded from the possibility of holding decent jobs, leaving poverty behind, and enjoying a greater share of the benefits of economic growth.

The Declaration of Mar del Plata presents the vision of the 34 governments on how to confront the principal challenges of job creation and strengthening of democracy. The initiatives set forth in the Declaration refer to the issues of growth with employment; jobs to fight poverty; training the labor force; micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises as an engine of job growth; strengthening democratic governance; and how to build a framework for creating decent work.

The Plan of Action addresses each area of the Declaration from the point of view of national commitments, hemispheric cooperation, and international organizations. In addition to advocating sound macroeconomic policies, it vigorously advocates the need to generate equal opportunity. It also emphasizes the importance of the fundamental role of the private sector in generating employment and stepping up efforts to meet the commitments adopted at the Millennium Summit. Although the Mar del Plata Summit was concerned with many more issues, the ones that I have summarized here help us to understand where we stand in terms of the greatest challenge of our times

The six summits held since 1994 have addressed in depth the issues of development, environment, education, poverty, employment, and governments. All these issues are at the heart of the agencies of the inter-American system and are precisely the ones that the OAS has included as priorities in organizing its integral development area.

It is in the framework of the Executive Secretariat for Integral Development that assistance and coordination is provided, *inter alia*, for the ministerial meetings on education, environment, culture, science and technology, labor, and social development. These efforts should form the real backbone of these multilateral efforts to move toward fulfillment of the millennium goals set by the United Nations, in coordination with the other agencies of the inter-American system (the IDB, PAHO, IICA, and ECLAC) and those with which we make up the Joint Summit Working Group.

The Social Charter that is currently under discussion will be inseparable from the Inter-American Democratic Charter to the extent that it will be part of this already quite comprehensive reality of mandates from our Summits, ministerial meetings, and the Millennium Development Goals; adequately encapsulates them; and is accompanied by a Plan of Action that also takes all of our current programs into consideration. The Social Charter ought to be the active synthesis of all that has been done over the last decade and not simply remain another attempt to proclaim principles that we have defined on many occasions.

This process is not advancing as quickly as we would like and it would be extremely beneficial for you to reiterate its urgency. Many citizens of the countries that our Organization comprises have profound doubts regarding our capacity, as democratic governments, to govern well through management of the state apparatus and to direct growth, become part of the world, eliminate poverty, improve social services, and better distribute the benefits of democracy.

Our countries have been growing for the past three years but doubts still exist about our capacity to create stable policies that can attract investment and ensure the continuation of that growth through times when the economic cycle is less favorable for us. Furthermore, millions of people are excluded from the benefits of that development and there is a tendency toward a concentration of income.

I am convinced that if we manage to implement the Inter-American Democratic Charter more faithfully and join it with the future Social Charter, we will be taking a major step toward steering development in a fairer way. However, what we must avoid is allowing the Social Charter to get us bogged down once again in meaningless ideological and political discussions, at a time when most of its contents have already been defined and included in mandates at the Summits and ministerial meetings of the past decade.

If these mandates are to be carried out in a practical sense, it is necessary substantially to strengthen the work of our departments in the Executive Secretariat for Integral Development and to better disseminate their activities and scope. We have, for instance, a Department of Sustainable Development, which enjoys considerable prestige in all specialized forums on issues such as integrated water resource management; natural disasters and climate change; renewable energy; biodiversity; and environmental law, policy, and economy. People who say that the OAS could do more on energy matters are losing sight of our broad program in that area; and when we are called upon to discuss a resolution at this session of the Assembly on the problem of water, perhaps we should turn more to our experts on the matter, who are considered first among their peers.

What I wish to say is not criticism, but self-criticism. As an organization, we have not managed to integrate the fine work that some of our technical units do in our political activities, in close contact with their counterparts in various countries. I hope that the recent changes in the Executive Secretariat for Integral Development will enable more progress to be made toward the inclusion of integral development policies in the top tier of the Organization's activities.

A core component of the activities of SEDI which we want to strengthen consists of technical assistance projects to further development, in particular in the island and smaller states. In this area we are in the process of a fairly comprehensive re-engineering effort that appears likely to bear dividends. In order to continue to obtain sufficient resources, in competition with many other institutions, we must substantially improve the quality of our projects and their management.

We must find a way to approve larger-scale projects, some of which will have to be of a regional nature, without for that reason abandoning the national approach whenever it is more useful. Furthermore our activities should center in particular on the issues of institution-building and training of human resources. We must overcome the problems that have arisen this year in our scholarship and loan system, in order to be in a position to increase our funds and coverage so that we can reach a larger number of young people in our region.

Natural disasters must be one of our prime concerns. The 2005 hurricane season was equivalent to two full hurricane seasons in one. Of 27 tropical storms, 15 were hurricanes and seven major hurricanes. We have still not even finished estimating the human and economic cost, much less their impact on development in the countries affected. Never again do I want to experience the impotence of the Organization as it stood by unable to help and coordinate efforts against these disasters.

For that reason draft amendments to the Statutes of the Inter-American Emergency Aid Fund (FONDEM) have been prepared for adoption at this session of the Assembly, as has a draft resolution to continue to accord the highest priority to the topic of natural disasters, their management, and assistance. Furthermore, we will increase technical cooperation to provide training to persons responsible for dealing with disasters in each country.

Nonetheless, I have to say that the issue of natural disasters is symptomatic of the coordination problems faced by international agencies. I believe that, together, we could develop a viable and well-financed prevention and mitigation policy. However, if each agency, however important it may be, believes that it can develop a policy on its own, we will probably not be up to future challenges. This is a new call for us to become coordinated in this area, and frankly what matters is not to take the initiative or any credit for it, but simply to do our part in an essential undertaking for our countries.

There are issues that our Assembly, Council, and forums almost never address, despite their inclusion in and increasing prominence on the hemispheric agenda. Such is the case of immigration, whose importance on this year's agenda is undeniable and yet which fails to receive the importance it deserves in our deliberations and the work of the Secretariat.

This is truly a topic of hemispheric interest that exists in a large number of countries (north and south) and affects economies, cultures, and lifestyles throughout our region. It will not diminish over the coming years but, rather, tend to increase so long as the structural factors that cause it persist in our countries.

The member states of the Organization have different outlooks on the issue of immigration. However, they are compelled to seek common solutions for it. We can do that in different ways: either by strengthening the program for the protection of migrant workers that we approved at the Third Summit of the Americas, or by creating a new political organ on a level with the Council and the Secretariat. I am not making any proposals in this area but simply requesting that, quite obviously, we should include the issue on our agenda of concerns. I hope, therefore, that you will adopt some of the resolutions proposed in recent days in this area.

Security

Implementation of the policy on multidimensional security adopted in Mexico in 2003 has been slow, mainly due to a lack of new resources to accompany the important mandates received. This is not to say, however, that considerable progress has not been made in this area, in particular thanks to the work of the Inter-American Drug Abuse Control Commission (CICAD), the Inter-American Committee against Terrorism, and the Demining Program.

There is no denying the significance and quality of the work in these three areas. CICAD is now 20 years old and is responsible for one of the most prestigious areas of activity of the Organization of American States. Its importance has increased visibly since the creation of the Multilateral Evaluation Mechanism (MEM), now in its 10th year. Thanks to the successful functioning of the MEM, not only has awareness increased of the activities of countries against drug trafficking and abuse, but also a climate of greater trust has been created, in which the countries are prepared to share information and accept recommendations and cooperation for their activities.

CICAD has also made strides in coordinating efforts against money laundering, by helping countries to develop modern laws in this area and evaluating progress.

In addition to the efforts of the Secretariat, CICAD has developed a horizontal cooperation program through which the countries share their experiences in the war on drugs. However, the success of CICAD means that requests for cooperation and assistance are always far in excess of available resources. Therefore, we urge the countries to consider our proposal to allocate to CICAD a small percentage of seized assets, in keeping with their domestic laws, in order to help maintain and broaden our programs.

The CICTE program has made considerable strides in the area of ports, airports, customs, and border security, and, in general, in efforts to prevent terrorism in the region. In coordination with CICAD, progress has also been made with regard to the investigation of terrorist financing.

Also under way is our technical assistance and specialized training program. Among its specific activities, next year this program will offer training and cooperation for security measures adopted by the Caribbean countries on the occasion of the 2007 Cricket World Cup.

The humanitarian demining program has also made a valuable contribution to the widespread problem of antipersonnel mines, a legacy of times that should never again darken our region. In the period covered by this report, assistance in this area was provided to six countries in our region. As with many other OAS programs that are financed exclusively with specific funds, this program has to restrict its activities according to the availability of such funds.

In the area of security and defense, the biggest news this year, without doubt, was the full incorporation into the OAS of the Inter-American Defense Board. This achievement is in keeping with the times; as in our countries, the OAS has enshrined the principle of civilian command over military matters under its jurisdiction in the Hemisphere. It remains now to transform this historic decision into a concrete work plan, which we expect to do over the coming months.

Despite their importance, the four units mentioned above already existed as separate entities in the Organization at the time of the meeting in Mexico and, therefore, their mere placement in the same Secretariat is not sufficient grounds to claim that we are turning the multidimensional security policy that we adopted at that conference into a reality, particularly since some of the main aspects of that concept were of little substance in the activities of the OAS a year ago.

To make the resolutions that our countries have adopted on security a reality, I have created a Department of Public Security to carry out programs to combat organized crime and gangs; the proliferation of small arms and light weapons; and trafficking in persons. In the future I hope that we will have sufficient advisory capacity to provide cooperation on public security matters to the member states, in particular to medium-sized and small countries.

In the mid-term, our objective should be to draw up with all of these elements a regional security agenda that takes into account all the dimensions examined by our conference in Mexico and that also addresses problems in the region that could cause security problems among our states. It is necessary to ensure that the peace prevailing in our region in recent decades is maintained and strengthened by consolidating peace at the domestic level and by fighting crime.

Legal Matters

The Inter-American Juridical Committee, the leading advisory body in the area of international law for our Organization and its members, is a hundred years old this year. It goes without saying that this session of the General Assembly should mark the centennial and recall the many contributions that the Juridical Committee has made to the enrichment of international law, such as our American Convention on Human Rights and our Convention against Corruption, which are pioneering instruments of their kind in the world. The Juridical Committee has played a central role in the development of inter-American institutions and law, which we cannot fail to recognize. Its working agenda includes a host of topics that I have already addressed in this presentation, such as the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and the conventions on discrimination.

This brings me to another reflection of an institutional nature. The various American Conferences since 1889 proposed the creation of different institutions in the Inter-American system. These were gradually created--some sooner, others later--on the most varied issues: health (PAHO), women (CIM), children (IIN), development financing (IDB), agriculture (IICA), human rights, etc.

One institution that was proposed but never materialized was an Inter-American Court of Justice. The first draft resolution dates from 1923 (Fifth International Conference of American States), when the creation of a Permanent Court of American Justice was proposed; the second harks back to the Eighth International Conference of American States in 1938. The latter resolution says quite forthrightly, something not always common: "If at present it is not possible to realize the establishment of this institution to administer justice in America the idea and the purpose of creating it when those conditions imperatively demand its establishment should not be abandoned," and in

conclusion declares that, "It is the firm purpose of the States of the American Continent to establish an Inter-American Court of International Justice, whenever these States may recognize the possibility of doing so with complete assurance of successes..." (resolution XXV, adopted on December 22, 1938).

It was at that time that the International Court of Justice of The Hague, the successor to the Permanent Court, was established. The states of the Hemisphere then comprised almost 50 percent of the United Nations and therefore carried considerable weight in the new Court. A new request made at the Tenth Conference, in 1954, did not bear fruit. Now the situation has changed completely: the states of the Americas have much less heft on the International Court and might perhaps be able once again to consider the possibility of a establishing a regional court as a suitable complement to the present inter-American system. We may be nearing the "opportunity" envisaged in 1938, which is well worth examining in our specialized bodies.

Administration and Finance

When I took the helm of the General Secretariat a year ago, I decided not to alter the organizational structure of the OAS any more than necessary, so as not to disrupt still further the lives of the people working at the OAS, who had been going through a period of extreme uncertainty for almost a year before I took office. On this point, I concurred fully with the Assistant Secretary General, with whom we have formed a single team and a single administration.

Accordingly, although the Assembly had authorized us to make changes, those changes have essentially been restricted to three aspects. We have called the main working areas secretariats, to clearly indicate not only their responsibilities but also their inclusion in the General Secretariat. We have created a new Department of Control and Evaluation, so that the General Secretariat may have the necessary data to direct the way in which the Organization obtains and spends its resources. And we have reorganized the Office of Scholarships, to ensure independent and transparent operations, without detriment to the absolute right of the policy-making bodies to set substantive criteria for action.

The third change was due to unfortunate circumstances that had to be addressed. As for the first two, I cannot conceive that, in a centrally run institution, each unit would obtain and manage its resources autonomously without management's knowing about it.

Our intention is clear: to steer the Organization toward the objectives and priorities decided upon by the policy-making bodies and the General Secretariat. Strengthening this concept is essential to establishing what is appropriate for everyone, coordinating actions, and ensuring that work proceeds only in accordance with the mandates issued by legitimate bodies. Next year, when I present this report, I shall focus on the progress made and/or the shortcomings regarding the substantive topics entrusted to us. Reports will cease to be mere accounts of what has taken place, and the Organization will no longer be addressing any topics not linked to legitimate mandates.

For this to be possible, adequate financing is essential. In this regard, at the request of the CARICOM countries, which placed the topic of the ongoing financing of the OAS on the agenda for this session of the Assembly, I shall present a detailed report, which will be appended to this one.

I am also concerned, from an organizational point of view, about finding a more appropriate place for those countries that are currently observers and participate more closely with the OAS. At present, the Organization has 60 permanent observers, which demonstrates a confidence and an interest that we are grateful for. But we have to recognize that they demonstrate varying levels of interest and support.

Other institutions close to our own, like the IDB, have intermediate categories between full members and observers. I believe that we too, acting carefully and on the basis of consensus, could create such categories. Full membership should be restricted to the countries of the Americas, but it seems fair that friendly countries that cooperate with us in a systematic and significant manner should be given proper recognition.

I realize that this was discussed a few years ago and consequently I did not think it wise to introduce it again as a topic for the Assembly, but I hope we will be able to reconsider it during the course of the year.

This presentation must necessarily be brief, and for that reason the documents that each unit has submitted on its activities have been appended to it. In conclusion, I should simply like to mention the efforts we have made to reach out, beyond the member states, to establish appropriate links between the OAS and international, regional, subregional, and global organizations; the significant development of communications as a fundamental means of transmitting our thoughts and our activities; and the recognition given recently to the Lecture Series of the Americas, which by extending invitations to statesmen, people in the arts, intellectuals, and figures of international renown, generates high-quality dialogue on the present and future of our region.

José Miguel Insulza
Secretary General