



SUMMITS OF THE AMERICAS BULLETIN

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Civil Society and the Summit Process

Introduction

*Jaime Aparicio Otero**

This new edition of the Summits of the Americas Bulletin is dedicated to the issue of civil society participation in the countries of the region, as well as within the Summits of the Americas process and the Organization of American States (OAS).

In the case of the OAS, while the relationship between non-state actors and the Organization in some technical areas

dates back to the first years of its existence, it is only with the establishment of the Summits of the Americas that this issue has been integrated into the inter-American agenda. A year after Quebec City, the opportunities for civil society participation are ever-increasing: on the negotiations for the Democratic Charter; on issues such as hemispheric security, indigenous peoples, social corporate responsibility and political parties; and in the Committees on Inter-American Summits Management and the Participation of Civil Society in OAS Activities. The OAS accreditation process for non-governmental organizations (NGO) is also in effect, as is the annual meeting of NGOs with Ministers of Foreign Affairs at each General Assembly.

In the preparatory process for and during the actual Quebec City Summit, there were institutional spaces of participation that allowed for the incorporation of various concerns of non-state actors from distinct sectors of society into its Plan of Action. Also underway is a vast follow up and consultation process among civil society on the Summit process, which includes the participation of over 800 NGOs from sixteen countries.

These new possibilities for non-state actors in national public matters and multilateral processes reflect profound changes in the very structure of the state and in the work of international institutions. Today decisions that affect our societies

are taken by way of democratic processes that in general allow for more direct and continuous interventions of those diverse social sectors affected by such decisions. National reform and multilateral negotiation take into consideration more and more voices of citizens from throughout the region.

This participation has a different

“...it is a question of constructing a new hemispheric model of governance that is defined by dialogue.”

- Francine Jácome

nature than that of political actors, since its effective legitimacy is not in its representative character but in its role as reaffirming the new reality of societies of individuals, of citizens with rights and of a multiplicity of particular and collective interests. As a consequence, it has been endowed with instruments of pressure and resistance that serve to limit the excessive power of the state, from within society to within its own political structure.

That being understood, the recently created Executive Secretariat for

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(Introduction)

the Summit Process, which is responsible, within the OAS General Secretariat, for supporting the participation of non-state actors in the Organization's activities and in the Summit process, seeks to promote a balanced, open and intelligent relationship between the diverse non-state actors, governments and international institutions. Its objective is to articulate a new relationship between the state and civil society in light of a new social agenda that demands the cooperation of both parties. This agenda can only be made a reality if everyone takes part in its fulfillment. The experience demonstrates that joint activity is essential for the reduction of poverty, for education and health and in the fight against corruption, among other issues, and is an instrument for the strengthening of democracy and an antidote to totalitarian or populist temptation.

Today the ability of citizens to mobilize themselves for public causes is growing. In Latin America it was effective in resisting military regimes and promoting democratic processes. It is therefore within the governments' own interests to foster this partnership with non-state actors in order to generate effective solutions for the urgent social and cultural concerns of our time.

This is not easy, since it requires the development of a different culture, a change in mentality and a true rupture from

history – and the greatest difficulty is rooted in the fact that this kind of partnership goes against the epistemological logic of the concept of power, the real motivator in politics. Effectively, there is a visible contradiction between the nature of the political system and its link to the idea of power in juxtaposition with a civil society that has as its vocation precisely that of limiting this power, affecting decisions, opening processes of transparency and imposing transactions and commitments.

In highly institutionalized countries and with the exercise of power influenced effectively by other powers and lobbying groups, opening spaces for civil society is not so difficult. However, in institutionally weak countries, which have a long authoritarian and caudillista tradition, as well as rigid and closed off governmental mechanisms, this process is much more difficult to carry out. That being said, there is no doubt that this process is well underway, and there is nothing to indicate its slowing down. The Summit process has favored a genuine transition towards legitimizing new avenues of participation and towards more open and transparent societies, both of which are good for the stability and health of democracy in the XXI Century.

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Civil Society and the Summit Process: A Search for Consensus

*Francine Jácome**

The social organizations and networks of the hemisphere have designed different participation mechanisms for the Summits of the Americas process that have depended upon perspectives formulated around this process and association strategies that are developed

“A year after Quebec City, the opportunities for civil society participation are ever-increasing.”
- Jaime Aparicio

as a result of these perspectives. On one hand, a series of initiatives has been developed based upon the concept that it is necessary to generate contributions that not only allow for the deepening of civil society participation in inter-American processes but also add to, through a series of national and regional consultations, the creation of proposals and recommendations. In this way, one of the objectives sought has been to ensure that integration agendas incorporate social, political and cultural issues, so that their present-day trade and economic emphases can be overcome. On the other hand, there has been progress in joint activities and schemes founded upon a deep uncertainty about the Summit process and, more specifically, the establishment of the FTAA. In this latter case, there has been progress through a strategy of confrontation.

That being said, in spite of divergences that reflect the existing heterogeneity within civil society, there also exist commonalities that could mark the beginning of a permanent dialogue that ends with the search for minimal points of consensus, which could strengthen its

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For more information on civil society participation in the Summits of the Americas process, please see:
<http://www.summit-americas.org/eng-2002/civil-society.htm>

For more information on civil society participation in the OAS, please see:
<http://www.civil-society.oas.org>



Civil Society Participation in the Summit Process

Andrea Sanhueza*

Civil society participation has been increasing over the past ten years. It could be said that its formal origins began in 1994 when, with the initiative of the United States' government to create consultative groups for each agenda issue and ad hoc groups consisting of government, civil society and private sector representatives, the mandate of civil society was included as a part of Miami Summit Plan of Action. At that time, as well, a coordinator was designated within the SIRG to be responsible for civil society issues, and the Civil Society Task Force was formulated as the group to promote civil society in the Summit process.

From these beginnings, participation has continued, so much so that with the Quebec City Summit, PARTICIPA, in partnership with FOCAL of Canada and *Fundación ESQUEL* of the United States, coordinated a consultative process with civil society organizations (CSOs) in seventeen countries, which resulted in the formulation of 243 proposals for the Quebec City Summit. This was carried out throughout the region and successfully strengthened 17 CSOs in their role as National Coordinators for the consultative process. It also made possible the articulation of 900 CSOs working to shape the official negotiations of the Summit process. After evaluating this consultative process, the main conclusions are:

- National consultations indeed constitute an effective (albeit imperfect) mechanism that promotes civil society participation in the Summit process.
- The main contribution of this consultative process is that it has created a space for the participation of civil society; now it is necessary to maintain and broaden this space.
- These consultations seem to have allowed for an increase in the mutual

The Participation of Indigenous Peoples after Quebec City

Executive Secretariat for the Summit Process

Following the objectives specified at the Santiago Summit of the Americas, the Quebec City Plan of Action recognizes the necessity of creating bridges of dialogue between governments and indigenous organizations, communities and peoples. It asks governments to continue to develop processes that will ensure the full participation of indigenous peoples in the Inter-American system, including in the negotiations on the Draft American Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People.

In compliance with these Summit objectives, as well as those of a XXXI OAS General Assembly mandate that was approved shortly after Quebec City (AG/RES. 1780 (XXXI-O/01) *American Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*), a Working Group to Prepare the Draft American Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People was established and is currently being chaired by the Ambassador of Peru to the OAS, Eduardo Ferrero Costa. This group organized Special Sessions on March 11-15, 2002, in order for Member State representatives to field the comments and opinions of indigenous leaders on the Draft Declaration. Canada, the United States and Finland contributed funds to ensure the broad participation of indigenous representatives in these sessions.

Over 70 indigenous delegates from communities throughout the Hemisphere participated at this mid-March meeting, where participants proceeded to hold a high-level, open and transparent discussion on the elements of the Draft Declaration. Self-determination was a fundamental issue discussed at these sessions. Indigenous representatives also emphasized that consultations should be continued and, moreover, a voluntary fund needs to be established for a permanent indigenous forum. In the closing session, there was consensus that progress had been made in the Draft Declaration. Participants also agreed that the dialogue between Member States and indigenous peoples should be continued.

To further these commitments to ensure the participation of indigenous peoples throughout the Hemisphere in the drafting of the Declaration, a resolution will be presented at the XXXII OAS General Assembly in Barbados for the creation of a voluntary specific fund to be used to finance such participation.

perceptions and considerations of civil society and government.

The methodology implemented in these national consultations contributed in part to strengthening the ability of CSOs to work in a coordinated way with governments and international organizations. Those familiar with the documents are also in agreement that the level of integration of civil society proposals into the Quebec City Plan of Action was appropriate.

Civil society participation in the Summit process has been an important exercise in citizenship - a citizenship defined not only by the set of rights and obligations that each person has but also by the active membership of a determined and political community, in which CSOs have been continuously opening spaces.

The next step in this initiative is to design a strategy to follow up on the implementation of some of the mandates from the Quebec City Plan of Action. To do this, PARTICIPA organized a

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workshop in Buenos Aires, Argentina, on May 23-24, in which civil society organizations from 19 countries participated. Without a doubt, advancing in a follow up strategy is a key step towards the effective operation, permanence and impact of this initiative. If you are interested in receiving information on this strategy, you can contact Andrea Sanhueza at azanhueza@participa.cl.

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(A Search for Consensus):

presence in multilateral processes. In terms of thematic priorities, a discussion on sustainable development – a discussion that contains the equity necessary for confronting the growing economic, social and political exclusions to which a great majority of the population is exposed – is vital. So too are the strengthening of democracy, respect for human rights and a more profound participation of social networks and organizations in the national, regional and hemispheric spheres.

Regarding the strategies of participation, there exists a series of important challenges that could be jointly addressed with a view towards the next Summit. These include the role of social networks and organizations in the design and implementation of follow up mechanisms as well the evaluation of the mandates from the Third Summit of the Americas, particularly those which refer to civil society participation, the strengthening of democracy and social issues. Secondly, it is important to include the promotion of proposals and dialogue with governments, both of which would lead to the design and implementation of instruments for the direct and official participation of representatives from civil society organizations and networks in the preparation and celebration of the Fourth Summit. Indeed, it is a question of constructing a new hemispheric model of governance that is defined by dialogue.

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OAS Creates Summit Secretariat

OAS News

The OAS will play a more central role in coordinating the broad Summit of the Americas agenda, through its newly created Executive Secretariat for the Summit Process.

“The Summit of the Americas now charts the course for the hemisphere on so many issues that affect people’s lives,” said Jaime Aparicio, Executive Secretary of the new entity. “As this agenda develops and matures, it requires greater coordination, support and follow-up to ensure that real progress can be achieved.”

At the most recent Summit of the Americas held in April 2001 in Quebec City, Canada, the hemisphere’s leaders recognized the “central role” of the OAS and called for reforms to improve its ability to carry out Summit mandates.

The new Secretariat, which replaces the OAS Office of Summit Follow-Up, will document and coordinate the implementation of mandates by the OAS and other institutions such as the Inter-American Development Bank, the World Bank, the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, the Pan American Health Organization and the Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture. It will track progress in areas as diverse as drug prevention, justice reform and education policy, following up on advances made at ministerial and other high-level meetings. It will also support efforts to increase civil society participation in Summit initiatives.

The Secretariat will also provide technical support services - such as preparing and translating documents, organizing meetings and publishing reports - for the Summit Implementation Review Group, which directly manages the Summit agenda. On a large scale, the Secretariat will act as an information clearinghouse, maintaining the Web-based “Summit of the Americas Information Network” and serving as the institutional memory of the Summit process.

If you have comments or questions on the Summits of the Americas Bulletin, please contact:

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