

From Quebec City to Mar del Plata: Progress by the Inter-Parliamentary Forum of the Americas

Report submitted to the Heads of State and Government of the Americas

IV Summit of the Americas

Mar del Plata, Argentina, November 4 and 5, 2005

Foro Interparlamentario de las Américas
Fórum Interparlamentar das Américas



Forum interparlementaire des Amériques
Inter-Parliamentary Forum of the Americas

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Progress by the Inter-Parliamentary Forum of the Americas

The Plan of Action of the Third Summit of the Americas, held in Quebec City in April 2001, specifically recognized the importance of the Inter-Parliamentary Forum of the Americas (FIPA) in fulfilling the ambitions of the Summit of the Americas process. It called on the nations of the Americas to: “Encourage cooperation and exchange of experiences and best parliamentary practices between national legislators of the Hemisphere, while respecting the separation and balance of powers, through bilateral, sub-regional and hemispheric vehicles such as the Inter-Parliamentary Forum of the Americas (FIPA).”

Since receiving this mandate from the Summit, FIPA – the only state-focused parliamentary association for national legislatures encompassing all of the states in the Americas – has emerged as a pro-active organization devoted to fulfilling the promise of the Summit of the Americas process with respect to strengthening democracy, creating prosperity and realizing human potential.

Since its founding in 2001, FIPA has laid a foundation that will allow it to continue to develop as an action-oriented Forum. In addition to its annual plenary meetings – which bring together legislators from across the Americas to deal with issues such as the Free Trade Area of the Americas, hemispheric security and terrorism, gender equity and fiscal development – FIPA has carried out a series of special activities aimed at considering situations that require greater attention by parliamentarians. For example, in 2003 the legislators met to decide on their contribution to the Special Conference on Security of the OAS; subsequently, they met with trade ministers at the Ministerial Meeting on the FTAA in Miami; in 2005, two regional forums were held to discuss women’s leadership and democratic governance; and recently a parliamentary mission went to Haiti to support the work of international organizations in that country and to encourage the participation of women in the democratic process.

In addition, FIPA has completed the first phase of the Virtual Parliament of the Americas project, designed to bring together parliamentarians of the Americas to exchange information in a virtual space.

Though it has accomplished much, FIPA has arrived at a critical juncture in its existence. Realizing FIPA’s full potential – its ambition to become an action-oriented Forum committed to supporting the Summit agenda – will require a strong show of support and commitment from all the countries of the Americas, along with its official recognition as the parliamentary body associated with the Summit of the Americas process. In addition to support from the Institute for Connectivity in the Americas for the Virtual Parliament of the Americas, FIPA would benefit from the increased legitimacy that would come from a recommendation to the legislatures of the member states that they formally adhere to FIPA.

Our goal, as a Summit-mandated organization, is to involve the parliamentarians of the Americas in the promotion of the Summit objectives to the fullest extent possible. Therefore, support from the Summit’s member countries is crucial if FIPA is to achieve its goals.

The Honourable Céline Hervieux-Payette
Senator of Canada – President of FIPA

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1. Introduction

FIPA is a permanent parliamentary forum, complementing and strengthening the OAS and the Summit of the Americas process. As the only state-focused parliamentary association for all national legislatures, encompassing all states in the Americas, FIPA plays a crucial role in engaging parliamentarians on issues of hemispheric interest. A strong FIPA provides the inter-American system with the legislative voice it did not previously have.

FIPA was officially constituted during its inaugural meeting, held in Ottawa, Canada, on 7-9 March 2001. More than 110 parliamentarians from 26 countries of the Hemisphere attended that meeting and adopted the FIPA rules and guidelines.

The Plan of Action of the Third Summit of the Americas, held in Quebec City in April 2001, specifically recognized FIPA's importance in fulfilling the ambitions of the Summit process. It called on the nations of the Americas to "Encourage cooperation and exchange of experiences and best parliamentary practices between national legislators of the Hemisphere, while respecting the separation and balance of powers, through bilateral, sub-regional and hemispheric vehicles such as the Inter-Parliamentary Forum of the Americas (FIPA)."

To achieve its goal of realizing Summit objectives, FIPA requires the continued commitment of its member countries in order to promote the organization and to gain the support of all governments. Such support would include not only financial contributions but also political backing from the legislative and executive branches of government, in order to reinforce the role of FIPA as the new player in the Inter-American system.

As is demonstrated by this document, which outlines FIPA's past and current activities, in the three years since its inauguration FIPA has emerged as a pro-active organization devoted to fulfilling the promise of the Summit of the Americas process with respect to strengthening democracy, creating prosperity and realizing human potential.



*OAS Secretary General, Cesar Gaviria,
1st Plenary Assembly, Mexico, 2002*



2. Supporting the mandates from the Summits –FIPA’s objectives

Since its inauguration, FIPA has worked in tandem with the Summit of the Americas process to fulfill the following objectives, set forth in its regulations and adopted at the Ottawa plenary:

- To contribute to the development of inter-parliamentary dialogue in dealing with issues on the hemispheric agenda.
- To increase the sharing of experiences, dialogue, and inter-parliamentary cooperation on issues of common interest to the member states.
- To help strengthen the role of the legislative branch in democracy, and in the promotion and defense of democracy and human rights.
- To promote the harmonization of legislation and development of legislation among member states.
- To contribute to the process of integration as one of the most appropriate instruments for sustainable and harmonious development in the hemisphere.

Using tools such as the Virtual Parliament of the Americas (www.e-fipa.org), FIPA members continue their work beyond the annual plenary sessions in areas ranging from anti-terrorism to the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA). FIPA is currently working to establish a permanent secretariat in order to guarantee the continuity of the organization and to increase its capacity to fulfill its objectives.



*President Ricardo Lagos Escobar,
3rd Plenary Assembly, Chile, 2004*

In its endeavor to fulfill the proposed objectives, FIPA has held four other plenaries, in addition to the inaugural plenary meeting held in Ottawa in 2001, namely: in Mexico City in 2002, Panama City in 2003, Valparaiso, Chile, in 2004, and Brasilia, Brazil, in 2005. The Mexico City plenary was attended by more than 80 delegates from the national legislatures of 23 countries of the Americas, while more than 90 parliamentarians from 18 countries attended the Panama City plenary, and 86 delegates from 15 countries attended the plenary in Brazil. The next plenary is scheduled for Colombia in early 2006.

Lastly, it is worth noting that, since 2001, representatives from 33 of the 34 member countries of the Summits process have participated in at least one FIPA activity.

3. Strengthening Democracy

3.1 Making democracy work better - Plenary meetings and working groups

Mandate from the 3rd Summit: “Encourage cooperation and exchange of experiences and best parliamentary practices between national legislators of the Hemisphere, while

respecting the separation and balance of powers, through bilateral, sub-regional and hemispheric vehicles such as the Inter-Parliamentary Forum of the Americas (FIPA).”

FIPA’s main activities are carried out at the annual plenary meetings and in the working groups, where the participating legislators have the opportunity to learn about and discuss various policy alternatives for meeting the social, political and economic challenges of the hemisphere. So far, the various working groups have considered the following topics at these meetings:

<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Legal instruments for security;• The problem of organized crime;• Migration and borders;• Fight against terrorism;• FTAA negotiating process;• Gender equality;	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Interaction between fiscal policy and trade, economic growth and social development;• Impact of financial and economic crises on the region;• Tax systems in the Americas;• External debt.
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In addition to the plenaries, parliamentarians deliberate on these issues in working groups, assisted by experts in the subject matters under discussion. The working groups, which are structured like parliamentary committees or commissions, allow parliamentarians to learn from the experts present and provide an opportunity to share information with their colleagues from other countries. The members of these groups not only meet in person, but also use the Virtual Parliament for ongoing discussions. This type of activity not only encourages the sharing of ideas among the region’s leaders, but also strengthens democratic values and highlights the importance of political dialogue and cooperation in the search for common solutions.



FIPA Mission to Haiti, 2005

A concrete example of work done on behalf of democracy by these groups is the recent mission of the Group of Women Parliamentarians to Haiti. On that occasion, four women parliamentarians representing different sub-regions of the hemisphere completed a three-day visit to that country to help strengthen the democratic process and to encourage the participation of Haitian women in the legislative elections. In addition to meeting with groups of women candidates, the mission engaged in dialogue with representatives from various sectors of society, including the business sector and political parties, and with executives of international organizations that are working to restore democracy.

Lastly, it is worth noting that on several occasions FIPA has come out in favor of respect for democratic values in the hemisphere, as evidenced by its declarations regarding specific situations in Colombia, Venezuela, Nicaragua and Haiti, available at the website www.e-fipa.org.



3.2 Hemispheric Security and the Fight against Terrorism - Working Group on Terrorism

Mandate from the 3rd Summit: “Support the work initiated by the Inter-American Committee on Terrorism (CICTE) established within the OAS as a result of the Commitment of Mar del Plata adopted in 1998, and encourage hemispheric cooperation to prevent, combat and eliminate all forms of terrorism, taking into account the approval of the Statute and Work Plan of CICTE; and

Consider signing and ratifying, ratifying, or acceding to, as soon as possible and as the case may be, those international agreements related to the fight against terrorism, in accordance with their respective internal legislation.”

Terrorism and security issues have been on the agenda of all FIPA plenaries. In addition, FIPA established a Special Group on Terrorism, which held its first meeting in Mexico City in May 2003. This meeting was attended by 16 parliamentarians from 13 countries. The meeting was organized following a proposal by the Colombian delegation that FIPA establish a parliamentary group focused on the issue of terrorism in order to seek alternatives aimed at confronting this most pressing issue.



1st Meeting of the Working Group on Terrorism, Mexico, 2003.

The main objective of this working group is to provide a forum for the discussion and implementation of strategies that will enable parliamentarians to contribute effectively to the fight against terrorism. In this regard, the group has promoted the ratification and implementation of hemispheric and global commitments, such as the Inter-American Convention Against Terrorism, and the eventual development of common legislation throughout the region on the issues of terrorism and hemispheric security.

Since its creation, the group has continued to follow up on security issues in the region, discussing, among other things, the outcome of the October 2003 OAS Special Conference on Security in Mexico City (at which FIPA was represented). Likewise, the group is continuing to seek new initiatives whereby parliamentarians can contribute to the work being done by international agencies in the matter of security. To this end it has begun developing cooperative links with CICTE and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC).

4. Creating Prosperity

4.1 Work and Employment - FIPA Recommendations

Mandate from the 3rd Summit: “Promote and protect the rights of all workers, in particular those of working women, and take action to remove structural and legal barriers as well as stereotypical attitudes to gender equality at work, addressing, inter alia, gender bias in recruitment; working conditions; occupational discrimination and harassment;

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discrimination in social protection benefits; women's occupational health and safety; and unequal career opportunities and pay;"

At the regional forum on women's leadership and strengthening democratic governance, held in Buenos Aires in April 2005, the parliamentarians focused, among others, on the issue of female poverty and access to employment. With a view to contributing to the Mar del Plata Summit, the legislators drew up the following recommendations:

- To reduce poverty, we must solve the problem of inequality, particularly with respect to access to land, housing, information, and technology, and to the means of production.
- The main avenue is training, education, and public policies to reduce social inequalities.
- There is a feminization of poverty that is linked to the difficulties faced by women in gaining access to the same means as men, particularly as a result of their unequal treatment in the workforce, where discrimination and lack of protection with respect to wages and social benefits can clearly be seen.
- Poverty affects women more, and therefore its elimination is linked to the elimination of gender discrimination. Therefore the impact of general policies on women should be evaluated and specific policies and programs should be implemented, plus gender perspective should be incorporated as a cross-cutting issue in public policies.
- More technical and financial resources are needed for women's promotion.
- We must promote concrete means for more equitable distribution of family responsibilities between men and women; equitable access for both sexes to the education system; and the eradication of domestic violence and protection of jobs in the informal sector.

These recommendations received the unanimous approval of the Plenary Meeting in Brasilia, in May 2005, which also recommended:

- "That, through FIPA, the voice of parliamentarians be taken into account in promoting social dialogue that commits governmental and social actors to a development model with more and better employment."
- "That at the Fourth Summit of the Americas, to be held in Mar del Plata (Argentina) on 4th and 5th November 2005, FIPA's Executive Committee raise the need for the heads of state and government in the Americas to ratify their commitment to combat inequalities and differences in access to education, and eliminate hunger, poverty and corruption through job creation and promotion of employment and the promotion of education, while sustaining the principles of regional integration, equity and cooperation in order to reinforce the democratic system as the only viable means of participation by our peoples."



4.2 Trade and Investment – Working Group on the Free Trade Area of the Americas



The Executive Committee of FIPA at the 8th FTAA Ministerial Meeting in Miami, 2003

Since its inception in Ottawa in 2001, each FIPA plenary has considered developments in the negotiating process of the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA), which is one of the most significant undertakings of the Summit of the Americas process.

In this regard, the FIPA Executive has worked to follow up on the recommendations made by the Working Group on the FTAA at the plenary meeting in Panama. One of the most

important initiatives is a proposal to have FIPA act as the official intermediary between the parliamentarians and the FTAA negotiating process. As the voice of parliamentarians in the hemisphere, FIPA can play an essential role in the process by acting as a link between legislators and the FTAA negotiators. This idea has been well received by government representatives, as evidenced by the letter from the United States Trade Representative in which he expresses his “strong support” for the idea of increasing the dialogue between FIPA members and government officials involved in negotiating the FTAA. This support was expressed during the November 2003 ministerial meeting in Miami, when the FIPA executive met with, among others, ministers from Canada and Costa Rica, members of various civil society groups and the representative of the Americas Business Forum.

At the last plenary meeting, held in Brasilia in May 2005, the parliamentarians of the Americas reiterated their “call for FIPA to continue its efforts to foster cooperation between parliamentarians so as to increase the sharing of information and experiences on the negotiation, implementation and effects of international trade agreements.” To this end, FIPA has established cooperative links with bodies such as the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) and the OAS Office of Trade, Growth and Competitiveness.

4.3 Economic and financial stability – Working Groups on Economic and Financial Crises and on External Debt

At the plenary meeting held in Panama in February 2003, one of the working groups focused on the issue of economic and financial crises in the hemisphere. There the parliamentarians had the opportunity to discuss, together with an expert on the subject, the causes and consequences of such crises. They also made several recommendations on the role of parliaments in setting policies to ensure economic and financial stability in the region.

Likewise, at the Executive meeting in Buenos Aires in August 2002, the FIPA parliamentarians issued a declaration on the economic crisis in the countries of the region. They urged governments to take joint action with international credit organizations to respond to the needs of the peoples and democracies of South America.

Finally, at FIPA’s IV Plenary Meeting, in Brasilia, the parliamentarians studied the issue of external debt. They recommended, among other things, greater involvement of parliaments in indebtedness issues, along with greater coordination among the parliaments to monitor international negotiations.

5. Developing Human Potential

5.1 Gender Equality - Group of Women Parliamentarians of the Americas

Mandate from the 3rd Summit: "Promote gender equity and equality and women's human rights by strengthening and fostering women's full and equal participation in political life in their countries and in decision-making at all levels."

In furtherance of this goal, at its 2003 plenary FIPA established the Group of Women Parliamentarians of the Americas. This group is made up of representatives from all the regions of the Americas (North, Central, South and Caribbean), and is chaired by Argentine Congresswoman Margarita Stolbizer. The group's goals, designed to complement FIPA's mission, are summarized below:

- strengthen the leadership of female politicians through ongoing regional exchange actions;
- promote the creation of conditions for equal opportunities, prioritizing the fight against poverty and the elimination of employment discrimination;
- strengthen democracy in the countries of the Americas in an effort to achieve respect for human rights and conditions that promote equitable and sustainable social development;
- promote the creation of mechanisms that encourage the participation of women in politics;
- strengthen the active participation by women at FIPA working meetings, incorporating the gender perspective into each of the topics analyzed by the organization;
- promote regional debate and exchanges of experience and legislative frameworks through ongoing interaction and the holding of regional and/or sub-regional meetings aimed at fulfilling the proposed objectives;
- raise awareness among women in the region by analyzing the challenges and opportunities of hemispheric integration;
- analyze the negative impact on women of the economic and financial crises in the region, and propose cooperation policies to address and resolve those crises; and
- produce a participative assessment that helps illustrate the status of women in the region.



First Regional Forum of FIPA's Group of Women Parliamentarians of the Americas, Barbados, 2005

As part of the group's activities, two regional meetings have taken place. The first, held in Bridgetown, Barbados, in March 2005, was attended by more than 23 parliamentarians from the Caribbean and North America, along with participants from the private sector, government, academia and NGOs.

The second regional meeting of the Group of Women Parliamentarians was held in Buenos Aires, Argentina, in April 2005. It was attended by more than 40 parliamentarians from 16 countries, along with civil society representatives.



Because of the topics on the agenda, these meetings surpassed expectations, and, as a result, important conclusions and recommendations were produced (see the final reports, available at FIPA's website www.e-FIPA.org) and are now being implemented.

5.2 Connectivity – The Virtual Parliament of the Americas (VPA)

FIPA is also supporting the Summit's Connectivity Agenda of the Americas, announced at the Quebec City Summit, through its Virtual Parliament of the Americas project. The VPA – created in cooperation with the Parliamentary Centre of Canada and Bellanet International, and with the support of the Institute for Connectivity in the Americas (ICA) – is designed to enable parliamentarians to discuss issues, develop consensus and identify best practices, as is done in a parliamentary chamber or committee room – but using electronic communication and other technologies. This makes it possible to overcome geographic distances, so that group discussions can continue year round.

The VPA is also a valuable source of information for parliamentarians and citizens, and includes all the Forum's documentation and institutional memory. All the information on the website is available in all four of FIPA's official languages.

The VPA also supports the FIPA working groups by providing information and material relating to public policy development, facilitates deliberation and makes available to members alternative communication channels, such as password-protected work spaces. Currently, the VPA hosts working groups on the FTAA, women parliamentarians, fiscal affairs and anti-terrorism.

So far, phase one of the VPA project has been completed, including a new version of the website and the Virtual Parliament. It contains all documentation related to FIPA, such as reports, declarations and papers. Currently, FIPA requires funding for phase two of the VPA, which will focus on the involvement of users, in order to increase the number of parliamentarians using the system. Progress in the development of the Virtual Parliament itself will parallel ongoing interactions and expressions of interest on the part of FIPA members. When fully operational, the VPA will also provide communication tools to facilitate virtual meetings, information sharing and training services.

6. Consolidating FIPA – Maintaining the momentum

FIPA is at a critical juncture in its existence. In its efforts to contribute to the Summit goals of strengthening democracy, creating prosperity and realizing human potential, FIPA has grown quickly and accomplished much, but it now requires a renewed commitment from its members and supporters in order to realize its full potential.

Therefore, FIPA calls on its members and supporters to make a firm commitment to what is an essential link in the Summit of the Americas process. In addition to funding from the Institute for Connectivity in the Americas to help support the Virtual Parliament of the Americas, FIPA calls on the governments of the Americas to support its work, to encourage the active participation of their parliamentarians and to recommend to all the legislatures of the Americas that they formally adhere to FIPA. Actions such as these would provide the organization with the

resources, visibility and support it needs so that, through it, the parliamentarians of the Americas can make a positive contribution to the Summit process.

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Participants in the Fourth Plenary Assembly – Brazil, 2005

¹ *Plan of Action*, Third Summit of the Americas, Quebec City, 2001 (www.summit-americas.org).