



VIRTUAL PLATFORM OF THE SUMMITS OF THE AMERICAS

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STRENGTHEN PUBLIC SECURITY AND DEMOCRATIC GOVERNANCE

(Report of the Virtual Forum held from January 28 to February 15, 2009)

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I. Introduction

In September 2008, the Summits of the Americas Secretariat launched the Summits of the Americas Virtual Platform, in coordination with the OAS/SEDI Department of Human Development, through the Educational Portal of the Americas, and with the support of the Institute for Connectivity in the Americas / International Development Research Centre (IDRC/ICA). In preparation for the Fifth Summit of the Americas, the Summits Secretariat is organizing a series of virtual fora on the main themes addressed in the Draft Declaration of Commitment of Port of Spain.

The main objective of the virtual fora is to open a space to promote the participation of different social actors in the Summits Process by using Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs). The results of the fora are presented for the consideration of the National Secretariat, National Coordinators and Member States representatives during the negotiation of the text of the Declaration to be undertaken in the framework of the Summit Implementation Review Group (SIRG) meetings. In addition, the results will be published online and will be utilized as reference material by the social actors that participate in the face-to-face meetings that are being coordinated by the Summits Secretariat.

This report summarizes the main comments and recommendations from the forum on “Strengthen Public Security and Democratic Governance”, held from January 28 to February 15, 2009. The information in this report has been divided into subtopics and, to the extent possible, has been classified into the following categories: (i) priorities for social actors in this area, (ii) proposed action strategies, (iii) main comments on the Declaration, and (iv) suggestions on the language and text of the Declaration.

II. Main comments and recommendations

During the Virtual Forum’s period for exchange, there was discussion of five questions related to public security and democratic governance: (i) What are the greatest challenges in the Americas related to Public Security?; (ii) What are the greatest challenges in the Americas related to Democratic Governance?; (iii) Are these challenges being addressed in the Draft Declaration?; (iv) What should the role of inter-sectorial partnerships be in confronting these challenges?; (v) What should the role of inter-sectorial partnerships be in confronting these challenges? The main comments and recurring recommendations are set out below:

- Participants emphasized the importance of guaranteeing the implementation and fulfillment of the commitments made in the Declaration, as well as the fundamental part played in this area by nongovernmental and civil society organizations.
- Also emphasized was the need to promote public/private partnerships at both the national and regional levels to facilitate the design and implementation of public policies geared to the realities of each country.
- Participants also underscored the role of the OAS as a regional forum promoting spaces for participation and inclusion of different societal players.
- Lastly, participants suggested placing greater emphasis in the Draft Declaration on public security- and democratic governance-related matters, such as institution building, combating corruption, curriculum development, combating domestic violence and violence against children, discrimination, and environmental security.

The following section highlights comments made during the virtual forum on subthemes addressed in specific paragraphs of the Draft Declaration:

1. What are the greatest challenges in the Americas related to Public Security? (paragraphs 48-50)

- Priorities in this area: For most participants, the most urgent needs in the public security area are related to the history of each country which, in turn, is the source of its current realities and future challenges. However, beyond national and regional differences, participants emphasized the few specific public policies tailored to the local context, which jeopardizes the daily security of all Latin American and Caribbean citizens.

“Strengthening public security should include all mechanisms that make the lives of the citizens of the Americas insecure and not free from fear. For example, we should discuss how national police forces are instruments of repression and not at the service of the citizenry, as well as the need to redefine the existence and operation of these law enforcement bodies.”

*Lorena Espinoza, Dominican Republic
Women and Health Collective*

Therefore, with regard to public security, priority was assigned to raising levels of citizen acceptance of and trust in security and law enforcement agencies; controlling abuse of power by public officials and police and army officers, coordinating their action, improving team work, and reducing their vulnerability to corruption. Also mentioned was the need to enhance levels of transparency and efficiency of judicial systems.

“The greatest challenge today related to Public Security is trust. Both between public officials and the public and between/among security personnel.”

*Gale Mohammed-Oxley, Trinidad and Tobago
G.O. International-Consultants in Education*

It is also necessary to have in place modern methods and appropriate mechanisms for border security; and to join forces in these areas of greatest vulnerability in order to proceed effectively against organized crime, drug trafficking, human smuggling, and smuggling of firearms and goods.

Also emphasized was the importance of increasing controls of national financial systems, banking, and currency exchanges in order to minimize transactions from illicit practices and decrease operations by criminal groups.

As regards the financial sector, this is an essential service for criminal organizations. A State that is negligent in the money laundering control area or that seeks to attract foreign investment from unknown and/or suspect sources, and the ease with which individuals can be bribed to cooperate with money laundering, are more than sufficient factors enabling such groups to operate.”

*Rita BIASON, Brazil
UNESP – State University of Sao Paulo*

Participants also emphasized that one of the main challenges is the capacity to address public security issues at their roots. Identified among the most common causes of crime and violence were high poverty and unemployment rates, limited access to education, and lack of youth opportunity. It was also mentioned that other obstacles to achieving citizen security needed to be included, such as domestic violence, child abuse, human rights, and discrimination based on gender, race, or religion, as well as violence against the environment and natural resources.

“One of the greatest challenges in the region is: The lack of action by leaders in the hemisphere on “working with the winds of change” to deal with climate change” are we blind to the fact that this is related to public security when at anytime your home could leave you - due to raging waters, floods and landslides to name a few.”

*Abraham Fergusson, Trinidad and Tobago
Natural Disasters Youth Summit*

- Proposed strategies for action: Participants emphasized the importance of creating cooperation mechanisms that helped disseminate best regional practices of updating security systems, implementing new technology, exchanging information, and providing training for human resources needed to tackle modern criminal organizations.

“One our greatest challenge is that we look at ourselves as each being an isolated nation when we should look at ourselves as one. In this way we would be able to exchange ideas on Public Security and learn from each other’s successes and mistakes.”

*Danielle Lewis, Trinidad and Tobago
University of the West Indies*

Participants also advocated mass educational and information campaigns for the public on their human and citizen rights that would help build moral values. Also emphasized was citizen involvement, as well as the creation of a network of security agencies of different countries to control the operation of security systems and help ensure greater autonomy and political impartiality.

“Disseminating human rights through mass media campaigns and education system campaigns thereon. Such campaigns have a crime prevention value in themselves if appropriate education is provided and they have access to the media as required to reach the public.”

*Elvira Muñoz, Panama
Liberty and Social Development Foundation*

Also underscored was the importance of improving police force recruitment and promotion systems, improving employment and wage conditions, and contributing to continuing police education in order to reduce vulnerability to corruption and ensure that police actions are prompted by concern to benefit the citizenry and promote the common good.

- Regarding the Declaration: Most participants agreed that the draft Declaration document is limited in addressing a subject as broad as public security.

There was discussion of the inflexibility of the word “terrorism” and of its meaning in this section. Repeated mention was made of the need to broaden the document’s approach, and it was proposed to include other threats to public security in keeping with the realities of each country.

“I agree that this document confines itself to defining “terrorism,” firstly in a way far removed from Latin America, and then from the daily reality of violence and lack of public security in our cities, and rural and suburban areas.”

*Maritza Melara, El Salvador
Inclusive Development and Human Rights Consultant*

Additionally, the need was emphasized for the commitments established in this Declaration to be accompanied by a specific plan of action facilitating its long-term follow-up.

“...overall the Declaration fails to reflect both commitment and action. Commitment tells us what will be done; action articulates how it will be done, by whom and in what time frame. The removal of the Action Plan from the process is a retrograde step which should have been resisted.”

*Karen Bar-Alexander, Trinidad and Tobago
Social Development and Planning Consultant*

Participants also mentioned the importance of an autonomous follow-up and implementation mechanism facilitating accountability and ensuring fulfillment of those mandates. It was suggested it be based on earlier experiences such as the Inter-American Convention against Corruption.

“If the intent existed to move forward, the experience of the follow-up mechanism of the Inter-American Convention against Corruption would be taken and, based thereon, errors would be corrected, participation expanded, and the shadow reports, inter alia, included. The CICC mechanism is far from perfect, but it was an important starting point.”

*Delia Ferreira, Argentina
Citizen Power*

- Suggestion on the language and text of the Declaration: It was suggested to amend paragraph 48 to include, in addition to terrorism and organized crime, the other challenges mentioned above now faced by Latin American countries.

Paragraph 49. *“We will deny any resources to terrorists and criminals and will combine our efforts to identify, track, seize or freeze assets associated with terrorism and organised crime, in accordance with national legislation and consistent with international law”*, it was suggested to include greater control and regulation of national financial systems and currency exchanges.

Paragraph 50. *“We direct the OAS, through the Secretariat for Multi-Dimensional Security, to continue in the preparation of a high level meeting of experts and authorities to develop a common approach to matters related to crime and violence and also to prepare a regional strategy to promote Inter-American cooperation in dealing with criminal gangs, giving special attention to young people,”* should include local nongovernmental organizations, as well as the Secretariat for Multidimensional Security, so that a coordinated effort can be made.

2. What are the greatest challenges in the Americas related to Democratic Governance? (paragraphs 51-57)

- Priorities for societal players in this area: A matter considered urgent by Forum participants was to build the institutional capacity of the Latin American governments in replicating solutions appropriate to their contexts and in creating political stability. They indicated the importance of consolidating the social rule of law, self-determination of peoples, the basic principles of democratic electoral systems, and implementation of the Millennium Development Goals as a starting point for achieving citizen well-being.

“Only a democratic society affording its citizens a life of dignity will make stable government possible, since it affords leaders greater legitimacy owing to their election by an informed citizenry not pressured by need that responds to promises of political patronage. Accordingly, achieving stable government is one of the most important challenges to be overcome.”

*Verónica Celedón, Argentina
San Andrés University*

Also emphasized was the need to provide countries with the tools necessary to design and implement specific anti-corruption policies, and to enhance the credibility of governments and leaders through the use of a meritocratic, accountability-based system wherein the public interest is paramount.

“If long ago our countries had combated “corrupt tyranny,” we surely would now have far fewer social problems. Surely without corruption, we would have no guerrilla warfare, drug trafficking, paramilitary forces, gangs, or social inequity.”

*Néstor Iván Lagos, Colombia
Municipal Youth Council*

Again, participants mentioned the importance of launching efforts to strengthen democratic processes through special education programs available to all citizens. There is also an urgent need to guarantee fundamental rights, diversity, plurality, and universal participation in political, economic, and social processes, regardless of gender, race, age, sexual orientation, or disability.

“One of the major challenges we face in the Americas may be combating the racism and racial discrimination experienced daily by Afrodescendant peoples of the Americas ... enabling States to generate public policies and affirmative action for communities whose access to democracy has traditionally been thwarted.”

*Hernando Viveros Cabezas, United States
Ibero-American Network of Afrodescendant and Indigenous Youth*

Lastly, a need was indicated to strengthen OAS leadership at the regional level in promoting positive synergies among its member states, in strengthening fraternal bonds, and in creating political, economic, and cultural rapprochement. To that end, participants indicated the advisability of strengthening their initiatives to provide appropriate solutions to the different social scourges undermining democratic governance in the region.

“In any case, until the OAS has been replaced by another supranational international organization, it is the ideal organization for the non English-speaking Caribbean to achieve modernization, update, and advancement with ideas and in communities, getting ahead of events and anticipating the needs of the world’s people, specifically, those of the countries with which they are concerned.

*Carmen Giménez, Argentina
ALBA*

- Proposed strategies for action: Participants again emphasized the need to implement ongoing educational and awareness campaigns to enable all citizens to become familiar with democratic values from an early age. The need to promote social integration and build a more committed citizenry taking responsibility for its obligations and rights as fundamental protagonists of democracy.

Additionally, participants suggested promoting more forums for participation such as the Summits Virtual Forum where societal players can influence the definition of regional strategies.

“Discussion forums of the States, and societal organizations and groups should be public and disseminated on a daily basis. If we take account of the topics now discussed in these forums, of which few each country has few ... That is why the media should publicize these matters”

*Martha Ines Miravete, Argentina
Women’s Group of Argentina – Observatory*

- Regarding the Declaration: Participants insisted that the challenges of democratic governance are addressed in the Declaration in a very general manner. To that end, a more direct approach was required to defining the objectives established in the draft Declaration, so that it facilitated the development of

relevant public policies, and progress with its implementation made in each country could be monitored on an ongoing basis.

“These are good, although very universal, suggestions, making it impossible, after the upcoming Summit, to make a specific evaluation of each country... These specific goals will enable us to evaluate the extent to which the States have progressed at the end of the period stipulated for the next Summit”

*Marco Guzmán, Chile
World Peace Foundation*

Participants also discussed the possibility of mentioning in the draft Declaration mechanisms such as the International Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, adopted by the United Nations. They also emphasized the importance of continuing to support the progress made by the Rapporteurship on the Rights of Afro-Descendants and against Racial Discrimination of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights. Lastly, they emphasized the need to take account of the recommendations and observations of NGOs, societal groups, and shadow reports.

“It would be highly relevant to include in the draft Declaration the International Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, adopted by the United Nations.

*Sabina Ximena Inetti, Uruguay
Down Association*

- Suggestion for the language and text of the Declaration: As a general observation, participants emphasized the importance of mainstreaming gender, in a grammatical manner, throughout the Declaration: reducing the use of the masculine as generic and utilizing gender neutral language to prevent any trace of discrimination against women through the text of the Declaration itself. It should be noted that this is an especially relevant observation for the Spanish version of the text.

The language utilized is sexist. For example, we speak of citizens, children, and teachers [all masculine plural in the Spanish], rather than men and women citizens, boys and girls, men and women teachers. If you really wish to mainstream gender in public policies and promote the advancement of women, you must begin from within. Women must be mentioned in all documents produced by the OAS.”

*Lorena Espinoza, Dominican Republic
Women and Health Collective*

3. What should civil society commit to doing towards confronting these challenges?

There was agreement among the participants regarding the lead part to be played by civil society in representing citizen intent and interests and in strengthening public security and democratic governance.

“The challenge for civil society in our countries is their involvement so as to be able to generate enough pressure to make change possible. Otherwise, decision-making will always be in the hands of retrograde sectors only seeking to maintain their privileges and that of the sectors they represent.”

*Marta Ferrara, Paraguay
Seeds for Democracy*

The Forum underscored precise actions that civil society organizations and NGOs are urged to promote, such as:

- Involving themselves actively in creating forums for discussion and dialogue on local issues while at the same time promoting citizen participation;
- Creating national and regional partnerships making it possible to channel community proposals in an organized and efficient and effective manner;
- Promoting actions to strengthen their capacity to achieve political, institutional, and democratic reforms;
- Linkage of actions to resist intervention by and subordination to political party and governmental interests; and
- Following up on implementation of the commitments made in the Summits process, even where no institutionalized mechanisms for that purpose exist.

“We must come together and no need to re-invent the wheel on commitments made -- we must implement - this summit must call on all governments, private sector, business, civil society, youth and children to advocate for action on commitments made, it is no longer acceptable to agree and not follow up with action.”

*Gia Gaspard Taylor, Trinidad and Tobago
International Education and Resource Network Trinidad and Tobago (iEARNTnT)*

Additionally, participants underscored the importance of continued efforts by multilateral organizations such as the OAS to create forums to include civil society in regional political processes. Also emphasized was the need for coordination of initiatives among regional players to avoid duplication of effort and make better use of resources.

“Civil society actors should prepare itself to participate in transparent processes, by being credible and transparent themselves and by being democratic within the organizations... Civil society should also be able to innovate solutions and advocate for the changes which are based on best practices in other countries, and be consistent. The OAS is the only regional actor here I find which seems to genuinely want to engage civil society and that must continue.”

*Vidyaratha Kissoon, Guyana
Society against discrimination based on sexual orientation*

4. What should the role of inter-sectorial partnerships be in confronting these challenges?

Lastly, contributors emphasized the importance of promoting the creation of enduring public-private partnerships that helped promote participation by experts of different sectors, and of promoting teamwork, facilitating the exchange of experiences, and promoting sustainable solutions and specific action plans in connection with the Declaration’s mandates. They also underscored the importance of promotion and facilitation by the OAS of such partnerships in areas where they do not now exist, thus contributing to building the capacity of governments to address the regional challenges emphasized in the Declaration of Commitment of Port of Spain.

“In the area of intersectoral partnerships and addressing challenges – we should first address what social responsibility means so as to be able to work through public-private partnerships and create a wider array in developing public institutions in promoting partnerships.”

*José Alberto Gautreau, Dominican Republic
Management and Legal Procedure*

To access a compilation of all comments and suggestions made by the social players who participated in the Forum on Public Security and Democratic Governance, [please click here](#).

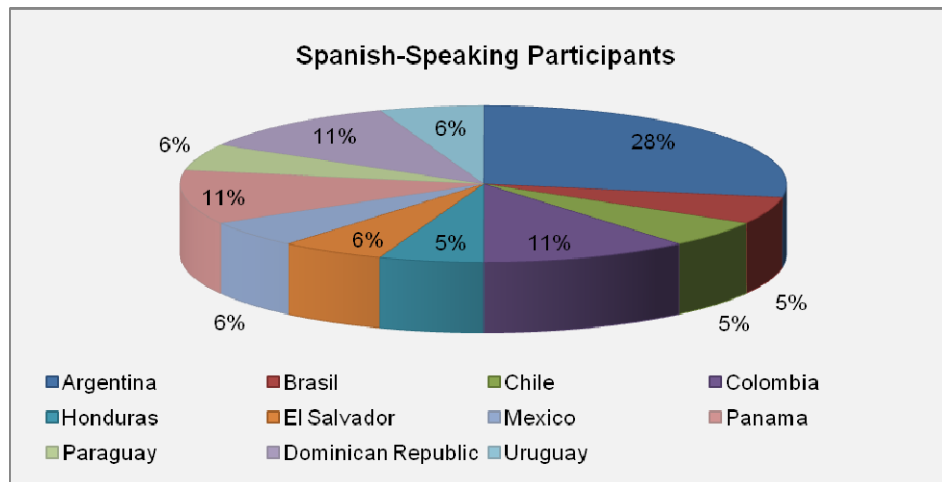
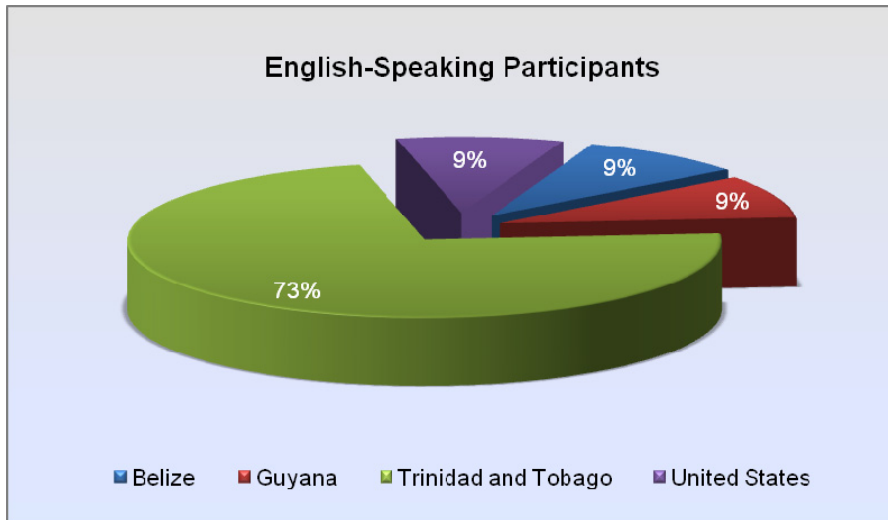
Annexes

A. Forum participants

The number of users registered with the Summits Virtual Platform has risen to 526 since its launch on September 8, 2008. In the 16 days of virtual exchange, a total of 29 users participated actively, 11 in the English Forum and 18 in the Spanish Forum.

The main participants in the English Forum were representatives of Trinidad and Tobago, Guyana, Belize, and United States. In the Spanish Forum, most participants were from Argentina and Dominican Republic. There was also some participation by the following countries: Chile, Colombia, El Salvador, Honduras, Panama, and Paraguay.

In general, participants represented international organizations, universities, the private sector, and civil society organizations.



B List of participants

	Country	Name	Institution	Position Held	e-mail
1	Argentina	Martha Inés Miravete	Women's Group of Argentina – Observatory	President	denunciasddhh@gmail.com
2	Argentina	Verónica Celedon	San Andrés University	Student	vero_cele_37@hotmail.com
3	Argentina	Carmen Gimenez	ALBA	President	cjgt1011@hotmail.com
4	Argentina	Delia Ferreira Rubio	Citizen Power	President	deliaferreira@gmail.com
5	Argentina	Marcelo Ernesto Ferreyra	IGLHRC	Program Coordinator	mferreyra@iglhrc.org
6	Belize	Caleb Orozco	United Belize Advocacy Movement	President	orozco.caleb@gmail.com
7	Brazil	Rita de Cassia Biason	UNESP - State University of Sao Paulo	Political Science Professor	rcbiason@terra.com.br
8	Chile	Marco Antonio Guzmán Sommer	World Peace Foundation	President	pazmundial@entelchile.net
9	Colombia	Amparo Mantilla de Ardila		Colombia	fungamma@gmail.com
10	Colombia	Néstor Iván Lagos Hernández	Municipal Youth Council	Municipal Youth Council of Medellín	nilagosh@gmail.com
11	El Salvador	Maritza Melara	Inclusive Development and Human Rights Consultant	Consultant	maritzamelara@yahoo.es
12	Guyana	Vidyaratha Kissoon	Society against discrimination based on sexual orientation	Member	vidyak1@yahoo.com
13	Honduras	Christian Rishmawy Rivera	UNICAH	Student	spesalvifactismus@hotmail.com
14	Mexico	Juan Ignacio Duran	Concejo Cívico de Instituciones de Nuevo León	Advisor	juan.duran1@gmail.com
15	Panama	Elvira Muñoz	Liberty and Social Development Foundation	President	emunoz@flydes.org
16	Panama	Cecilia Moreno Rojas	Centro de la Mujer Panameña	Executive Director	mujeres_panameas@yahoo.es
17	Paraguay	Marta Ferrara	Seeds for Democracy	Executive Director	martaferrara@semillas.org.py
18	Dominican Republic	Lorena Espinoza	Women and Health Collective	Communications and Human Rights	lorespe2002@yahoo.com
19	Dominican Republic	José Alberto Gautreau	Management and Legal Procedure	President-Manager	cogautreau@hotmail.com
20	Trinidad and Tobago	Abraham Fergusson	Natural Disasters Youth Summit	Youth Ambassador on Natural Disasters	afef10@hotmail.com
21	Trinidad and Tobago	Gia Gaspard Taylor	International Education and Resource Network Trinidad and Tobago (iEARNtNT)	National Coordinator	iearntnt_net@yahoo.com

22	Trinidad and Tobago	Gale Mohammed-Oxley	G.O.International-Consultants in Education	Director	galeoxley@hotmail.com
23	Trinidad and Tobago	Karen Bart-Alexander	Gayap Violence Prevention Peace and Love Movement	Leader	karenbartalexander@yahoo.com
24	Trinidad and Tobago	Danielle Lewis Akeila	University of the West Indies	Student	daniellelewis87@gmail.com
25	Trinidad and Tobago	Andy Paul	Elementary School Mayaro	Department Chief	acpaul2@hotmail.com
26	Trinidad and Tobago	Yema Jaikaran	Hillview University	UNESCO Club/ Learning Coordinator	yema.jaikaran@yahoo.com
27	Trinidad and Tobago	Merle Baker	Ministry of Education	Curriculum Coordinator	merlebaker@yahoo.com
28	Uruguay	Sabina Ximena Inetti Pino	Uruguay Association Down	Secretary	sabinainettipino@gmail.com
29	United States	Hernando Viveros Cabezas	Ibero-American Network of Afrodescendant and Indigenous Youth	Coordinator	hernandoviveros@gmail.com
30	OAS	Lina María Marmolejo	Moderator	Summits of the Americas Secretariat	lmarmolejo@hotmail.com
31	OAS	Claudia Salazar	Summits Virtual Platform Coordinator	Summits of the Americas Secretariat	csalazar@oas.org

C. Reference Documents

During the Forum, many documents were compiled related to its theme, among them, technical information, legislation and regulations, links to sites of interest, and videos.

To access the list of documents and reference resources, [please click here](#).