

Forum of Presidents of the Legislative Bodies of Central America and the Caribbean Basin (FOPREL, as per its Spanish acronym)

First Working Meeting of the Inter-Parliamentary Commission on Security and Justice (CIJI)

As a Member of ParlAmericas Executive Committee, I was appointed to attend, in the capacity of observer, the First Working Meeting of FOPREL's Internal Commission on the issue of Security and Justice (CIJI), which was held at the Sheraton President hotel in the City of San Salvador, El Salvador, on February 16-18, 2012.

The meeting was attended by senators, representatives, deputies, and assembly members of El Salvador, Costa Rica, Honduras, Dominican Republic, Nicaragua, and Guatemala, in addition to observers from Colombia (ParlAmericas) and Mexico (GOPAC).

It was also sponsored by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the Parliamentary Centre (Canada) (CPC), with the presence of its President and CEO Jean-Paul Ruzskowski, and by the Foundation for Peace and Democracy (FUNPADEM), with the presence Randall Arias, Director of Governance and Justice.

Mexican Senator Ricardo García Cervantes, as Global Chair and Chair of the Latin American Chapter of the Global Organization of Parliamentarians against Corruption, took the opportunity to announce the formation of the new GOPAC National Chapter in El Salvador.

The topics of discussion comprised three key areas that were duly expounded on by the following speakers:

1. Subject Area 1: Regional Harmonization of Legislation: The importance of harmonization of legislation, the current situation in Central America, and what is expected of parliamentarians.

Presentation of the E-PORTAL mockup as a tool in the harmonization of legislation. Speakers: Shankar Rao & Lola Giraldo, Parliamentary Centre (Canada).

Presentation of the AGORA portal for parliamentary development; its potential relationship with the E-PORTAL on harmonization of legislation. Speaker: Diane Sheinberg, AGORA, UNDP.

2. Subject Area 2: Parliamentarian Interaction with Civil Society regarding Citizen Security. Current Situation and Parliamentarian Perspective. Speaker: MP Carlos Humberto Góngora, Costa Rica.

Civil Society Relationship and Involvement with Parliaments regarding Security and Justice.
Speaker: Randall Arias, director, Governance and Justice Program, FUNPADEM.

3. Subject Area 3: Parliamentary Oversight of the Security Sector: Speaker: MP Benito Lara, President of the Board of the Parliamentary Forum on Small and Light Weapons.

Parliamentary Oversight of the Public Security Sector: strengthening of the Parliamentarians' Capabilities. Speaker: Jean-Paul Ruszkowski, President and CEO of the Parliamentary Centre (Canada).

Once presented, the topics were discussed and a series of activities were identified to be included in the CCSAJ road maps and undertaken by it with international assistance. It was concluded in the Plenary Meeting that the regional legislative strategy on citizen security and the administration of justice should necessarily include five issues:

- a) Weapons and munitions in the region
- b) Police reform
- c) Human trafficking and sexual crimes
- d) Maras, gangs, and juvenile contract killers
- e) Private security companies, small weapons

The main idea of the meeting, of the analysis and of the conclusions drawn is to underscore the importance of such a paramount and relevant issue as citizen security and the administration of justice, and the role of parliamentarians through their initiatives, starting from an international context and narrowing down to own national experiences.

It is worth noting the participation of parliamentarians from Mexico and Colombia, as these two Latin American countries have perhaps reached the largest legislative development in this respect as a result of their own experiences.

Furthermore, the participation of ParlAmericas attests to the existence of a senior parliamentary interstate organization interested in observing regional processes and in providing the expertise of its members; I therefore recommend partaking in these meetings in future.

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