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FIPA holds meetings in Washington

Gaining momentum

As part of a campaign to promote FIPA, members of the Executive Committee traveled to Washington on October 23rd and 24th to meet with members of the OAS and the United States Congress.

That a picture is worth a thousand words was evident at the end of the meeting between the FIPA Executive Committee members and the Secretary General of the Organization of American States (OAS) - satisfaction was visible in the faces and smiles of all present. For the second time in just a few months, FIPA Executive members had established allies, advancing their work to enable lawmakers to participate actively in the inter-American organization and establish more efficient communication between legislatures and governments - an effort to promote greater input from the legislative branch into the inter-American cooperation agenda.

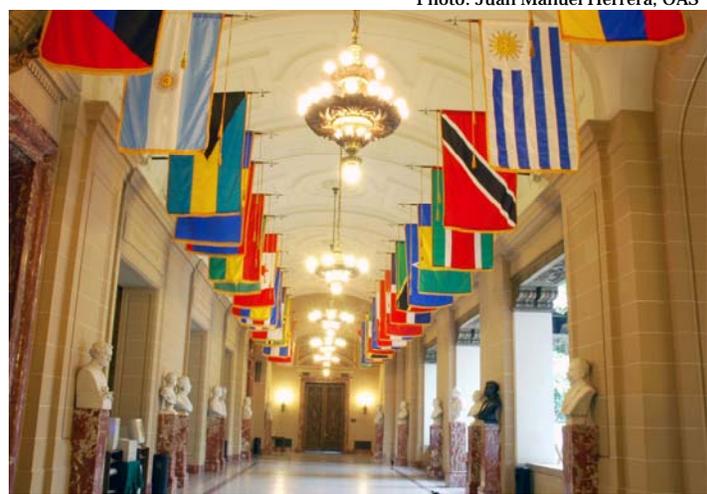
"We are very interested in an hemispheric parliamentary organization," stated Secretary General José Miguel Insulza while meeting with Luiz Carlos Hauly, President of FIPA, and the representatives of the congresses of Grenada (Brenda Hood), Colombia (Cecilia López Montaña), Mexico (Ricardo García Cervantes) and Chile (Iván

Moreira Barros).

Deputy Hauly shared the results of the October 23rd meeting during a speech presented before the Permanent Council of the OAS the following day. "Because FIPA is in regular and direct contact with parliamentarians, and because we at FIPA

support came from the delegations of Mexico and the United States, which committed to supporting steps to help define the role and participation of lawmakers in the OAS. "Simply put, there is no policy currently in place to allow legislators or their organizations to access the

Photo: Juan Manuel Herrera, OAS



FIPA held successful meetings at the OAS

genuinely believe that closer cooperation between the executive and legislative branches of the countries of the Americas will have a positive impact on improving the living conditions of citizens in the region, we feel that our organization can make a tremendous contribution to the OAS agenda for discussion," stressed the FIPA President during part of his address.

This time the shows of

OAS," remarked the representative of the US. "Such a discussion is necessary and overdue," he emphasized.

In search of a common agenda

The successes did not end with the OAS meetings, but were continued in the meetings held with United States lawmakers in the halls of Congress. Government and opposition members of

the United States House of Representatives listened attentively to FIPA's call for the United States to actively participate in the activities and projects of the Forum, which brings together the parliaments of the Americas.

Here too results exceeded expectations. The United States lawmakers recognized the importance of rebuilding the relationship between the United States and the countries of the Americas, contributing in particular to economic and social development in the region. They therefore committed to strengthening relations with FIPA and perhaps, in the near future, requesting official inclusion of the United States as a member of the organization.

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Costa Rica legislates on organic farming

Growing concerns over food safety and the negative environmental consequences of modern farming practices have led to rising demands for organic products, particularly in developed countries. As a result, the global market for organic products has been growing in Europe, the United States and Japan. In the four years between 1998 and 2002 the annual compound growth rate for the

Born from a consensus among political parties, the government, and civil society organizations promoting organic farming, including peasant farmer movements, it received the vote of all congressmen present at the legislative session. The law is extremely important in Costa Rica, where the rural population accounts for roughly 41% of the population and some 5,000

Barrantes Castro remarked that in order to integrate farmers into the world export market “the government should promote mechanisms that can take our products to alternative markets.”

Congresswoman Esna Williams emphasized one of the social aspects of the law: “The promotion of gender equity is a highly important element in organic farming

information on the advantages of food that is free from agricultural chemicals. As well, it proposes to incorporate the vision and philosophy of organic farming into school curriculums, while also promoting research. Among other measures, the law promotes access to and use of native seeds and controls the use of transgenic crops to minimize the risk of

Photos: FIPA and Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture's Office of Public Information and Institutional Image



The market for organic products continues to grow, particularly in developed countries

organic products market was 17.7%, while the volume of trade in organic food and beverages grew by 43% between 2002 and 2005.

This situation has not gone unnoticed by Costa Rican legislators who, combining environmental commitment and job creation strategies, passed an organic farming act in August 2006, considered by many to be one of the first of its kind in Latin America. The country's president promulgated the law in June of this year, meaning that it is already in force, though the regulatory process is not yet complete.

families are involved in organic farming.

Unanimous vote

The vote in favour of the law was unanimous. Only the approach differed. While some congressmen emphasized the social considerations of the act, others stressed its economic aspects. For example, congresswoman Janina del Vecchio Ugalde, highlighted the role played by farmers when she said “You are the ones who are contributing to the health of our population and our planet,” while congressman Luis Antonio

because, at least in the Caribbean, women have been pioneers in this activity.” For his part, congressman Jose Joaquin Rojas remarked that the law is an “incentive to counteract emigration, underemployment, and the rise in poverty.”

Main aspects

Law 8591 or the *Development and Promotion of Organic Farming Act* contains a series of incentives for farmers to become involved in organic farming and to provide consumers with more

contaminating organic crops in zones where the two coexist. The act includes both financial and educational components, as it promotes differentiated credits and includes measures for training in organic farming techniques.

In Costa Rica, beyond production for the domestic market, about US\$5 million worth of organic products are exported annually to the United States and Europe, including coffee, bananas, cacao, concentrated orange juice, blackberries, medicinal plants and pineapple.



The Chilean Congress

The Republic of Chile is a presidential democracy, with a system of government divided into three independent branches - executive, legislative, and judicial.

Legislative power is constituted by the Congress. Founded July 14th, 1811, Chile's Congress is one of the oldest in the world. Only the legislatures of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, France, and the United States are older. It is a bicameral system with a lower house and a Senate and is governed by the 1980 Constitution, which replaced the 1925 Constitution, as well as by the Congressional Act (Law 18918). Its main functions are to represent the citizenry, draft laws in conjunction with the country's president, and oversee government action.

The lower house (Chamber of Deputies) has 120 members, each elected by direct vote, representing the 60 electoral districts into which the country is divided.

Each district, which may be composed of one or more communes, elects two deputies for a four-year term; deputies may be re-elected indefinitely. Every four years, also known as the 'legislative period,' the entire lower house is renewed.

Parliamentary elections follow a binominal system, which is a proportional list system. Each electoral pact or list presents up to two candidates per district.



Photo: Congress of the Republic of Chile

Senators and Deputies listen to the President's message delivered during the inaugural session.

Candidates obtaining a majority from the two most voted lists are elected. When one list obtains twice the number of votes as the next-highest list, both candidates from the first list are elected.

Lower house committees are composed of 13 members and Senate committees have five members, proportionally designated depending on the representation of each political party in the legislature. During the government of Ricardo Lagos a constitutional amendment was introduced, after having been approved almost unanimously by Congress. The reform, which came into effect on March 11th 2006, permits the Senate to be composed exclusively of elected members, eliminating appointed and lifetime senators. The number of senators was also reduced from 48 to 38 members.

Today, these 38 senators are elected directly by popular vote - two for each of the country's 19 senatorial districts. They too can be re-elected indefinitely. Senators serve for eight years and the Senate is partially renewed every four years, altering

between odd and even-numbered regions (including the metropolitan region of Santiago).

Iván Moreira Barros
Deputy of Chile

Chamber of Deputies (2006–2010)

◆ 120 Deputies

◆ 18 Women

◆ 102 Men

◆ Main parties:

Independent Democratic Union 28.3%

Christian Democrat Party 17.5%

National Renovation Party 16.7%

Party for Democracy 15.8%

Socialist Party 14.2%

Radical Social Democrat Party 5.8%

Senate (2002–2010) (2006–2014)

◆ 38 Senators

◆ 2 Women

◆ 36 Men

◆ Main parties:

Independent Democratic Union 23.7%

National Renovation Party 21%

Socialist Party 21%

Christian Democrat Party 15.8%

Radical Social Democrat Party 7.9%

Party for Democracy 5.3%



Towards a common future

Creating a single organization to represent the parliaments of the Americas with a strong and unified voice is the objective that representatives of two of the main inter-American parliamentary organizations set for themselves at their meeting in Quebec City the 28th and 29th of October past.

The first meeting of the joint FIPA - COPA (Parliamentary Confederation of the Americas) task force, established through resolutions adopted by each of the associations in 2006, ended with the approval of a timetable for continuing negotiations. Jacques

Chagnon, a member of the National Assembly of Quebec and host of the event, congratulated the presidents of FIPA and COPA, Brazilian parliamentarian Luiz Carlos Hauly and Mexican Senator Carlos Jiménez Macias respectively, for their "openness" and "commitment."

Although they share similar goals the two associations differ in composition as, unlike FIPA, COPA membership includes state level parliamentarians from



Photo: Collection: Assemblée nationale
National Assembly of Quebec. Allegorical column detail.

federated and associated states of the Americas, as well as sub-regional parliamentary organizations.

The next joint meeting is slated for early 2008.

Happy Birthday!

The first issue of ParlAmericas was published one year ago!

With the goal of informing the continent's legislators about FIPA activities, ParlAmericas also seeks to report on the differences and similarities among congresses (page 3 articles), and to promote the sharing of information about legislation or parliamentary experiences of interest to the region (articles normally published on page 2).

If you are interested in sharing legislative news or information about the functioning of your country's legislature, please write to us at info@fipa.org.

Legal Cooperation

Brazil deposited its instrument of ratification of the Inter-American Convention on Mutual Assistance in Criminal Matters last November 12th, becoming the 22nd Party State to the convention after Antigua and Barbuda, Argentina, Bolivia, Canada, Chile, Colombia, Dominique, Ecuador, El Salvador, Grenada, Guatemala, Honduras, Jamaica, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Trinidad and Tobago, the United States, and Venezuela.

The convention addresses different actions for mutual assistance, making it an important instrument in the fight against transnational organized crime. Brazil's Congress approved the text in October.

About FIPA

The Inter-Parliamentary Forum of the Americas (FIPA) is an independent network made up of the national legislatures of the member countries of the Organization of American States (OAS) committed to promoting parliamentary participation in the inter-American system.

Happy Holidays!

Best wishes for the holiday season from everyone on the FIPA team.

Wishing you success in your endeavours for the New Year and hoping that 2008 brings peace, health, prosperity and happiness to each and everyone in the Americas.

See you in 2008!

FIPA EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

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- Deputy Luiz Carlos Hauly, Brazil

North America

- Senator Ricardo García Cervantes, Mexico
- Mr. James Bezan, MP, Canada

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- Deputy María Estela de la Cruz, Dominican Republic

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- Senator Brenda Hood, Grenada
- Mr. Stanford Callender, MP, Trinidad and Tobago

South America

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- Senator Nancy Patricia Gutiérrez, Colombia

Former FIPA President

- Senator Céline Hervieux-Payette, Canada

President of the Group of Women Parliamentarians of the Americas

- Senator Cecilia López Montaña, Colombia

Plenary Meeting Host Country

- To be confirmed

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