



ParlAmericas

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Fórum Interparlamentar das Américas



Forum interparlementaire des Amériques
Inter-Parliamentary Forum of the Americas



On its blog, FIPA is posting what legislators think about their role in the Summit of the Americas process

Parliaments at the Summit

The Fifth Summit of the Americas will be held from April 17 to 19 in Port-of-Spain, Trinidad and Tobago. The summits are events that periodically bring together heads of state and government. Civil society organizations, young people and the private sector have been invited to express their opinions in forums created for this purpose; however, one of the most important political actors in the various countries, namely the legislature, is not represented at these summits.

FIPA has launched a discussion group on its blog, *BlogAmericas*, where legislators and special guests can express their opinion on what congresses and parliaments, while respecting the division of powers between the executive and legislative branches, can bring to the Summit process. Here are some opinions found on the blog.

Starting the discussion, Rut Diamint, a researcher at Torcuato Di Tella University in Argentina, said that participating in a mechanism like the Summit of the Americas is an attractive opportunity for parliamentarians. According to her, joint action at the

Summit helps to reinforce the direct legitimacy of national and regional parliaments and is essential in communicating the interests of civil society.

Chilean parliamentarian Iván Moreira, FIPA representative for South America, said that the Summit of the Americas has become an excellent

President of the United States.

According to Mexican parliamentarian Salvador Ruiz Sánchez, parliamentarians must demand to be heard at the next Summit of the Americas, where heads of state and government from various

Photo: FIPA



Port-of-Spain will host the Fifth Summit of the Americas.

forum for high-level discussion of the present and future of Latin America. In particular, he pointed out that, since the Summit is about to be held in Port-of-Spain in April 2009, parliamentarians from all countries should try to really grasp the complexity of the current international crisis, taking into account that Barack Obama is now

countries share opinions and discuss the current situation in this hemisphere, so that they can be involved in the Summit process, leading to parliamentary participation in future and to large-scale multilateralism.

For Canadian MP James Bezan, FIPA representative for North America, it is very hard for parliamentarians to promote or explain ideas or

decisions taken by the Summit members when they are not party to those decisions and not familiar with the context in which they were made. That is why he insisted on parliamentarians being represented at the next Summit and taking an active part in the Summit process. He made it clear that this objective could not be achieved when parliamentarians act as individual politicians, but stated his conviction that it could be done through concerted efforts of parliamentarians in FIPA countries.

To read all the opinions and to publish yours, visit [BlogAmericas](http://www.e-fipa.org) at www.e-fipa.org.

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The Status of Women in the New Bolivian Constitution

In commemorating International Women's Day on March 8, FIPA would like to share with its readers an opinion article on women's progress related to the new Bolivian Constitution.

The ethics of "vivir bien" (living well), a concept of development particular to the native and indigenous cultures of Bolivia, guide us to live in harmony and respect for nature. Men and women should live well by practising gender equality, inclusion, dignity, equitable distribution, justice, tolerance and democratic participation, reclaiming their ties with their cultural roots.

Since January 2006, Bolivia has undergone profound changes, culminating in the new Constitution (promulgated on February 7, 2009). This process is the result of prolonged social struggles since the 1990's by social, indigenous and rural movements and by popular organizations in the cities.

Bolivian women have always played an active part in these struggles to win and consolidate all their constitutional rights. The new Constitution seeks to end exclusion and discrimination against women. We briefly note some of the progress to equality and gender equity in the new Constitution.

The current Constitution recognizes that the Bolivian nation consists of all Bolivians, regardless of sex.

In Spanish, it uses both the masculine and feminine forms (Article 3).

The principles, values and purposes of the state (Chapter 2) include equal opportunity and social and gender equity, and guarantee access to education, health and work for men and women.

Bolivia adopts a participatory, representative and

conditions for all (Article 14). Article 15 specifically states that everyone, and in particular women, has the right not to suffer physical, sexual and psychological violence.

The chapter on civil and political rights establishes equitable participation under equal conditions for men and women.

Social rights include the right

values of gender equity, non-differentiation of roles, non-violence and full application of human rights (Chapter 6).

With respect to land ownership, the state will allot public lands without discrimination on the basis of sex or civil or marital status (Article 395).

The new Constitution represents tremendous progress for Bolivian women

Photos: Lapidim



The new Bolivian Constitution guarantees access to education, health care and employment for men and women.

communitarian form of government, with equivalent conditions for men and women (Article 11).

As for fundamental rights and guarantees, the state forbids and punishes all forms of discrimination based on sex, color, age, sexual orientation, gender identity, civil status, religious creed (...) or other grounds that affect the recognition, enjoyment or exercise of rights under equal

to secure motherhood, regardless of a woman's culture, with support before, during and after childbirth (Article 45).

The right to work means a guarantee of equal pay for men and women. It also means that pregnant women are entitled to keep their jobs for one year after their children are born (Article 49).

Education includes the

but there is still a long way to go. These constitutional precepts must now be translated into policies, laws, programs and projects ensuring their full and sustainable exercise.

María Esther Udaeta, Sociologist, Bolivian Senator from the Movement Toward Socialism (MAS)



Legislative Power in Uruguay

Photo: Departamento de Fotografía del Poder Legislativo de Uruguay



The original project for the Legislative Palace, conceived by architect Vittorio Meano, experienced important modifications.

Under the Constitution of the Eastern Republic of Uruguay (of 1967 and its amendments from the years 1989, 1994, 1996 and 2004), the Nation adopts a democratic republic form of government, recognizing the existence of three branches: the executive and legislative branches and the judiciary. Sovereignty is exercised directly by the electoral body (election, initiative and referendum), and indirectly by the representative branches established in the Constitution. Legislative power is exercised by the General Assembly, which is made up of the Chamber of Senators and the Chamber of Representatives (Deputies), which may act separately or jointly.

The thirty senators are elected in a single electoral circumscription. The Chamber of Senators also includes the Vice-President of the Republic, who is a full member and who acts as speaker of the Chamber and of the General Assembly.

The Chamber of Representatives is made up of ninety-nine members elected to represent the 19 political departments into which the country is divided, with at least two representatives for each department. Both senators and deputies are directly elected by the people using the system of proportional representation. They serve five-year terms and are elected at the time of the presidential election.

The legislative branch is responsible for representing, legislating and monitoring. It may monitor the executive branch through requests for reports or questioning the

Ministers of State. Such questioning may end up with the censure of one or more Ministers of State.

All bills shall have exclusive initiative of the executive branch in the determination of tax exemptions, establishment of minimum wages, product procurement prices, assets of public or private activity, job creation, interference in the retirement system, establishment of debt covenants and all budgetary matters.

The essence of parliamentary work is found in the work of the Standing Committees. These function in both chambers (17 in the Senate and 16 in the Chamber of Representatives and are classified according to subject area). There are also special committees assigned to a specific task and time, notwithstanding investigative committees.

The committees do not have the power to directly legislate; they are called upon as advisors to the

Plenaries. Representatives of civil society and social actors may appear before them to express their opinions.

After being approved by the two chambers, bills go to the executive branch for enactment or observation (veto). In the latter case, bills are returned to parliament. For the observation to be lifted, three-fifths of the members present in each of the chambers must be in favour. They may either accept the observations or reject them, while

maintaining the approved bill.

The functions of the legislative branch also include, at meetings of both chambers, appointing the members of the Supreme Court of Justice, the Electoral Tribunal, the Accounts Tribunal and the Contentious Administrative Tribunal.

*International Relations
Department, Chamber of
Senators*

Chamber of Deputies (2005–2010)

- ◆ 99 Deputies
- ◆ 11 Women
- ◆ 88 Men
- ◆ Main parties:
Progressive Encounter-Broad
Front-New Majority 52,5 %
National Party 36.3%
Colorado Party 10.1%
Independent Party 1%

Chamber of Senators (2005–2010)

- ◆ 30 Senators + the Vice-President of the Republic
- ◆ 3 Women
- ◆ 28 Men
- ◆ Main parties:
Progressive Encounter-Broad
Front-New Majority 54,9 %
National Party 35,4 %
Colorado Party 9,6 %



Towards the 6th Plenary

Photo: FIPA

The world economic crisis will be one of the major discussion topics at the Sixth FIPA Plenary Meeting to be held in 2009 (date and venue TBC), as decided by the FIPA Executive Committee during its eighteenth meeting, which took place on December 18 in the United States. Other discussion topics will include migrations and human rights –with an emphasis on the situation of indigenous peoples– and food security.

The Executive Committee also reviewed corporate affairs, issues related to the Fifth Summit of the Americas, the work plan of the Group of Women Parliamentarians of the Americas, and future activities under FIPA's training program for legislators.



The FIPA Executive Committee agreed on the topics for the 2009 Plenary Meeting.

Representatives from Brazil, Canada, Chile, Colombia and the Dominican Republic attended this meeting.

The Executive Committee, formed by representatives from each of the regions in the hemisphere, is the body responsible for carrying out the activities entrusted to it by the Plenary Assembly.

Dominican Republic Creates FIPA Section

The Chamber of Deputies of the Dominican Republic has created a Dominican-FIPA Friendship Group. This news was contained in a letter presented to the Executive Committee by the Chair of the Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation Committee, Minerva Tavárez Mirabal, last December in Miami.

The creation of this new FIPA section will advance the objectives of the organization and further

dialogue between Dominican legislators and their counterparts in the Americas.

FIPA invites member Parliaments to create chapters in their respective countries.

To create a chapter in your country, please contact the FIPA Secretariat at info@e-fipa.org.

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.

Bilateral Trade Workshop in Peru

Members of the Canadian Section of FIPA and Peruvian parliamentarians will meet in Lima, Peru, on March 25-26 to participate in a bilateral trade workshop.

The objectives of this workshop are to build the capacity of legislators in the area of international trade law and to promote the sharing of information among parliamentarians regarding the Peru-Canada free trade agreement.

FIPA EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

President

- Deputy Luiz Carlos Hauly, Brazil

North America

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

Central America

- Guatemala, vacant
- Deputy María Estela de la Cruz, Dominican Republic

Caribbean

- Senator Ann Peters, Grenada
- Mr. Stanford Callender, MP, Trinidad and Tobago

South America

- Deputy Iván Moreira Barros, Chile
- 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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