

PRESS RELEASE

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Parliamentarians from El Salvador, Honduras, and Guatemala participated in a series of sessions on *Experiences of Legislative Modernization in Latin America* organized by ParlAmericas and the National Democratic Institute in Central America

On November 13, 2020 and January 29, 2021, ParlAmericas and the National Democratic Institute (NDI) held two virtual sessions for members of the Legislative Assembly of El Salvador, members of the National Congress of Honduras, and members of the Congress of the Republic of Guatemala as part of the series *Experiences of Legislative Modernization in Latin America*. The purpose of these activities was to provide parliamentarians from northern Central American countries with practical knowledge on legislative modernization, facilitate the exchange of experiences with parliamentarians from other Latin American countries, identify basic elements required to establish an inter-parliamentary agenda for legislative modernization, and promote collaboration between the parliaments of the three Central American countries.

The first meeting, held on November 13, 2020, was inaugurated by Member of the National Assembly Elizabeth Cabezas (Ecuador), President of ParlAmericas, who highlighted the importance of legislative modernization in the current situation: “The modernization and strengthening of parliamentary work is essential because it allows us to improve and continue fulfilling our legislative, representation, and oversight duties. In complicated contexts, such as those we are currently facing as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, the role played by legislators is crucial to achieving an economic recovery that meets the Sustainable Development Goals of the 2030 Agenda.”

[Mr. Eduardo Núñez Vargas](#), Director of NDI’s Regional Program for Central America, also welcomed the participants and highlighted opportunities for parliaments to innovate and adapt: “The pandemic has made it necessary to innovate so that parliaments can continue to play their strategic roles. This situation should be seen as an opportunity to align the demands of our current context with medium- and long-term approaches to parliamentary reform and modernization as a tool for adapting to change and as a way to establish new foundations for the relationship between parliaments and citizens.” Mr. Núñez Vargas also moderated the session, which included presentations on reforms for strengthening institutions from a comparative perspective, as well as the cases of Ecuador and Argentina. [Ms. Pamela Lozano](#), an invited panellist and legislative openness specialist, highlighted modernization processes in public administration carried out in Latin America and how related laws and policies have also contributed to recent efforts by parliaments to transition to remote sessions. [Member of the National Assembly César Solórzano \(Ecuador\)](#), Vice-President of the National Assembly and member of the Open Parliament Group, shared his thoughts on the opportunities and challenges related to implementing virtual plenary sessions in the National Assembly to adapt parliamentary work to the context of the pandemic. He also commented on the recent amendment of the [Organic Law on Legislative Functions](#), highlighting its focus on

strengthening the principles of ethics, accountability, and transparency. Member of the Chamber of Deputies Daniela Vilar (Argentina), President of the Special Committee for the Modernization of Parliamentary Work, presented on the progress that has been made to strengthen parliamentary functions in Argentina through the modernization program. This has included efforts to establish an open parliament, such as processes launched in November to co-create an action plan and measures to hold virtual parliamentary sessions through the approval of the [Protocol for Remote Parliamentary Work of the Chamber of Deputies](#).

Following these presentations, Member of Congress Cornelio García (Guatemala), Member of the Legislative Assembly Anabel Belloso (El Salvador), and Member of Congress Enrique Yllescas (Honduras) shared reports on progress toward legislative modernization in their respective parliaments. They highlighted specific challenges in adopting the technologies needed to hold virtual plenary sessions and the importance of considering experiences and practices of different countries in the hemisphere in response to the pandemic as part of broader reforms. After these presentations, participating parliamentarians had the opportunity to ask the panellists questions and share additional thoughts on the topic. The session ended with closing remarks from Member of the National Assembly Cabezas and Mr. Alejandro Urizar, Director of NDI in Honduras.

The second session in this series focused on innovation and citizen participation. It was held on January 29, 2021 and included the participation of parliamentary staff from northern Central American parliaments, as well as Ambassador Rita Rudaitis-Renaud of the Canadian Embassy in Guatemala. The meeting began with welcoming remarks from Member of the Legislative Assembly Cristina Cornejo (El Salvador), a member of the ParlAmericas Board of Directors, who shared her thoughts on El Salvador's progress in this area and highlighted that "parliaments' ability to adapt in the context of changing political scenarios is essential to ensuring that citizen's demands are taken into account and that effective conditions for political stability are established, especially in adverse times such as those we are currently facing as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic."

In addition, Member of Congress Víctor Martínez (Honduras) shared information about the Open Parliament Committee of the National Congress of Honduras, which has provided training on openness and citizen participation tools both to members of Congress in the committee and to technical teams responsible for different parliamentary departments, with the goal of guiding the co-creation process for an open parliament action plan. Member of Congress Sofía Hernández (Guatemala), First Vice-President of the Congress of the Republic of Guatemala, presented on the implementation of parliamentary initiatives using information and communication technologies to expand the means used to interact with the Guatemalan population, including through social media, a television channel, and a mobile application. She also emphasized the value of the Unit for Access to Public Information as an accountability mechanism for citizens.

During the presentation on regional experiences, [Member of the Legislative Assembly Ana Lucía Delgado \(Costa Rica\)](#), First Secretary of the Legislative Board of the Assembly, explained the experiences and lessons learned in relation to efforts on legislative openness and more effective citizen participation in the Legislative Assembly over the years. These have included key milestones, such as the [Institutional Policy on Open Parliament](#) approved in 2019 and the forthcoming approval of the regulations governing the Institutional Committee on Open Parliament, which will include civil society representatives, members of the Legislative Assembly, and parliamentary staff. In addition, Member of the Chamber of Deputies Vlado Mirosevic (Chile), a member of the Bicameral Transparency Group of the National Congress, emphasized the importance of initiatives to address citizen demands in the context of growing democratic

tensions in the region and around the world. He highlighted strategies and significant advances made in Chile, including the [Citizen Participation Regulations](#) and [Virtual Congress](#)—a digital tool used to facilitate and increase the visibility of citizen contributions to debates on bills.

Following these presentations, participating parliamentarians shared their thoughts during a dialogue about a potential inter-parliamentary agenda for legislative modernization in northern Central American countries, moderated by Mr. Núñez Vargas and Ms. Josseline Matute, NDI Senior Program Officer. The meeting ended with closing remarks from Mr. Urizar and Ms. Natalí Casanova, Senior Program Officer of Open Parliament at ParlAmericas.

For more information, we invite you to visit the websites of [ParlAmericas](#) and [NDI in Central America](#) and follow @ParlAmericas, @NDIcentroameric, and @NDI on social media.

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ParlAmericas is the institution that promotes parliamentary diplomacy in the inter-American system. Composed of the 35 national legislatures in North, Central and South America, and the Caribbean, ParlAmericas promotes cooperative political dialogue, facilitates the exchange of good legislative practices, and produces tailored resources to support parliamentarians in their work. The International Secretariat of ParlAmericas is headquartered in Ottawa, Canada. For more information, visit www.parlAmericas.org or write to info@parlAmericas.org.

The National Democratic Institute (NDI) is a non-profit, non-partisan, and non-governmental organization whose mission is to contribute to promoting and strengthening democratic institutions through citizen participation, ensuring accountability and transparency in government. Since it was founded in 1983, NDI has worked with national partners in 132 countries and territories. For more information, go to www.ndi.org/ or contact us at info@ndicentroamerica.org