



# Year in Highlights



2015



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# Message from the President of ParlAmericas

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Dear colleagues,

It is an honour to address you as President of ParlAmericas and present you with our *Year in Highlights 2015* report. This past year has been one of major growth for our forum.

As you can see throughout these pages, this year we had numerous opportunities to share experiences, exchange promising practices, and build inter-parliamentary dialogue. We organized meetings where we addressed fundamental topics like legislative transparency and gender equity, among other topics of interest in the hemisphere.

During our last Plenary Assembly, we carried out our first institutional strategic consultation as a way to gather the points of view, experiences, and ideas of the legislators in the region and ensure they are taken into account when implementing our projects over the long term.

I would like to highlight the addition of a new permanent working group to ParlAmericas: the Open Parliament Network. This Network is led by Senator Hernán Larraín from Chile and is contributing to the success of our organization.

I would also like to draw attention to the election of the new President of the Group of Women Parliamentarians, Gina Godoy, Member of the National Assembly of Ecuador. In addition, it is with great pleasure that we welcome Cuba and Saint Lucia to our Board of Directors.

I thank you for your valuable contributions throughout 2015 and invite you to continue to work collaboratively for the well-being of the Americas and the Caribbean, and to strengthen the ties between our countries.

Sincerely,

*Marcela Guerra*

**MARCELA GUERRA**

Senator, Mexico  
President of ParlAmericas

# Message from the President of the Group of Women Parliamentarians

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Dear colleagues,

Warm greetings from the Group of Women Parliamentarians of ParlAmericas.

In this annual report prepared by ParlAmericas, it gives me great pride to highlight the 7th Annual Gathering of our Group held in Termas de Rio Hondo, Argentina. At the gathering, we presented an ambitious agenda for parliamentarians dedicated to the political empowerment of women.

We also participated in the II Parliamentarian Beijing+20 Forum, organized by the National Assembly of Ecuador. As part of the forum, ParlAmericas organized a session with more than 100 civil society representatives, where our discussions revolved around women and the solidarity economy.

In addition to this, I had the honour of participating in ParlAmericas' Election Observation Mission in Haiti, where we met with leaders who work ceaselessly to achieve greater participation of women in politics and freedom from discrimination.

It is with much enthusiasm that I take on this presidency, to continue to carry out our group's action plan for women's rights. I would like to extend a special thank you to my predecessor, President Jennifer Simons, for her guidance, leadership, and strong commitment.

On behalf of the Group of Women Parliamentarians, I would like to thank you all for your significant contributions. Through ParlAmericas, women and men will continue to demonstrate commitment to moving forward in the struggle for gender equity.

Sincerely,

*Gina Godoy*

**GINA GODOY**

Member of the National Assembly,  
Ecuador  
President of the Group of Women  
Parliamentarians

# Message from the President of the Open Parliament Network

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Dear friends,

It is an honour for me to address you as President of the Open Parliament Network. This year our Network was incorporated into ParlAmericas' structure to continue its establishment in the countries of the hemisphere.

It has been very rewarding to be able to share and discuss the Network's action plan, as well as hear your valuable contributions and ideas in the working session we held in October in Mexico. I hope that in the next months our legislatures continue to commit to the principles of transparency, accountability, citizen participation, and probity. In this way we can continue to strengthen our democratic system and pave the way for more open parliaments in our countries.

I send my best regards and express to you my conviction that with ParlAmericas we will be able to

advance in the achievement of these principles for the good of all our communities. This is ParlAmericas' commitment and I invite you to join in the activities that we have planned for 2016.

Sincerely,

*Hernán Larráin*

**HERNÁN LARRAÍN**

Senator, Chile

President of the Open Parliament Network

# About ParlAmericas

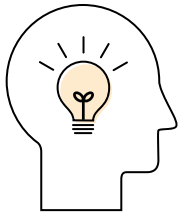
**ParlAmericas** is the network of the national legislatures of member states of the Organization of American States (OAS). Headquartered in Ottawa, Canada, we serve as an independent forum for parliamentarians of the Americas and the Caribbean dedicated to cooperative political dialogue and participation in the inter-American system. Since 2001, ParlAmericas has created a supportive professional community for parliamentarians through regional forums, training opportunities, year-round discussions, and follow-up actions. Our network is a space to share experiences and best practices on gender equality, legislative transparency and other issues of hemispheric concern, and to strengthen the ties between the countries of our region through parliamentary diplomacy.

ParlAmericas is managed by parliamentarians for parliamentarians, with a board of directors representing member legislatures from North, Central, and South America and the Caribbean.



# The Pillars of our Work

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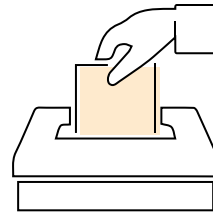
## Capacity building

ParAmericas enhances the skills and knowledge of parliamentarians. The application of this continuous learning benefits the efficiency of parliamentary institutions of the hemisphere.



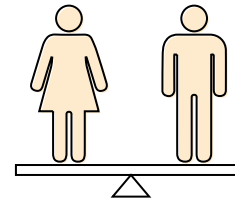
## Networking

ParAmericas builds relationships by facilitating the exchange of innovative ideas and practices among parliamentarians, as well as between parliamentarians and stakeholders including civil society groups, academics, policy specialists, and other parliamentary groups.



## Democracy

ParAmericas strengthens parliamentarians' abilities to represent and work on behalf of the people of the Americas. Our activities inspire critical analysis on topics such as open government, social equity and sustainable development.



## Gender equality

ParAmericas empowers parliamentarians to advocate for gender-sensitive laws, policies and societies. We create spaces for debate on how to accelerate progress on women's leadership and human rights.



## Transparency

ParAmericas promotes initiatives for open and transparent parliaments. This work involves mechanisms that foster accountability, access to information, ethical conduct and citizen participation in legislative processes.



# National Legislatures Represented on our Board of Directors

## Executive Committee of the Board of Directors

**MARCELA GUERRA**, President. Senator, Mexico

**GERMÁN BLANCO**, 1<sup>st</sup> Vice-President. Representative, Colombia

**GINA GODOY**, 2<sup>nd</sup> Vice-President and President of the Group of Women Parliamentarians. Member of the National Assembly, Ecuador

**HERNÁN LARRAÍN**, 2<sup>nd</sup> Vice-President and President of the Open Parliament Network. Senator, Chile

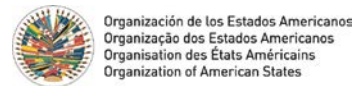
Our board is composed of elected individuals and sub-regional representatives from member parliaments, in addition to associate members, the immediate past President, the host of the next Plenary Assembly, and the Director General of the International Secretariat.



# Partners

In addition to our member parliaments, over the past year ParlAmericas collaborated with a number of organizations that contributed specialists, support, and resources to our activities. We are

grateful for their contributions and look forward to our continued collaborations to strengthen democracy, legislative transparency, women's equality and sustainable development.



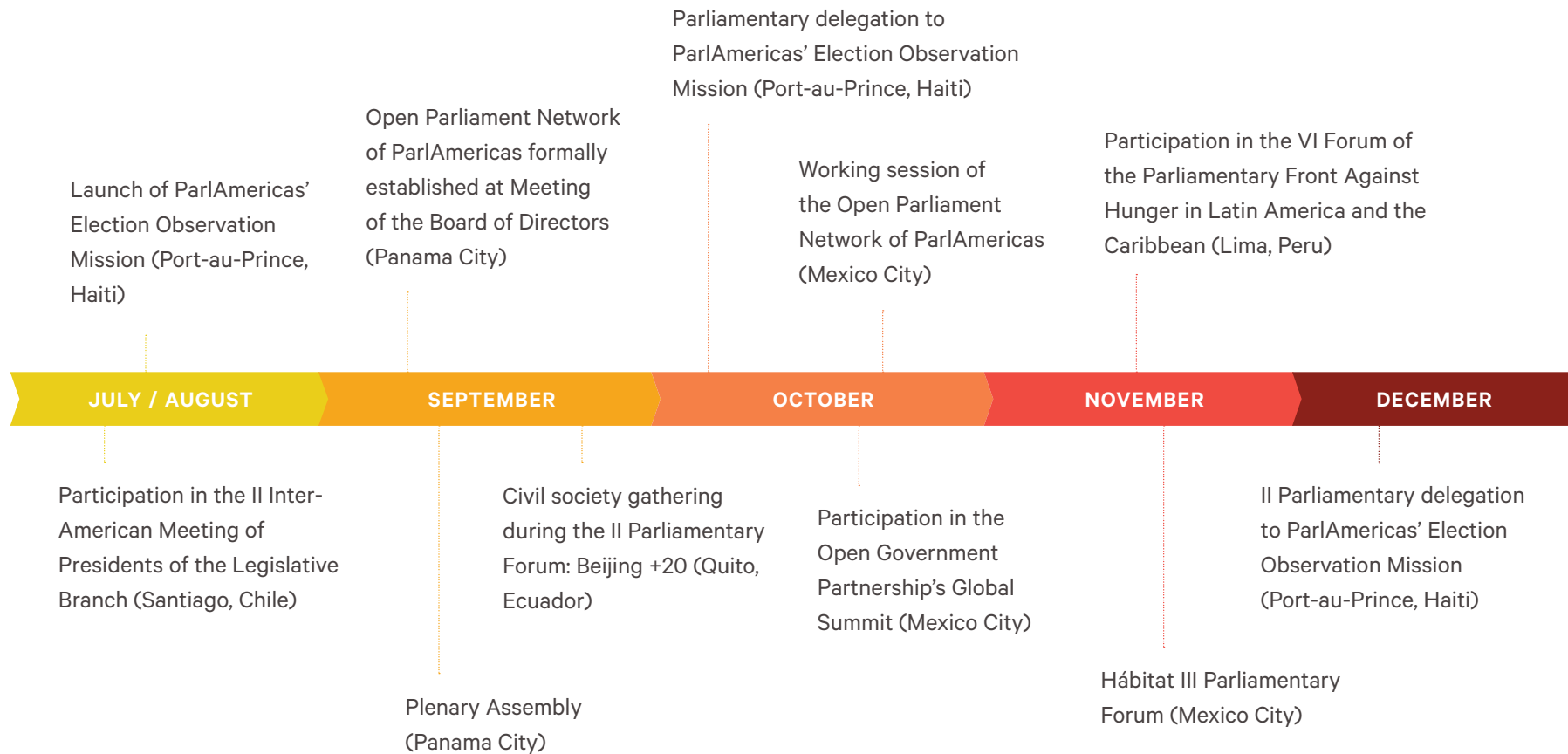
Empowered lives.  
Resilient nations.



# 2015 at a Glance



# 2015 at a Glance





# Parliamentary Gathering on Legislative Transparency on the margins of the Summit of the Americas

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**THEME:** Democratic innovations and parliamentary ethics

**DATE:** April 10, 2015

**LOCATION:** Panama City

**HOSTS:** Parlatino and ParlAmericas

**PARTICIPANTS:** National legislators representing 26 countries of the Americas and Caribbean, and the foreign affairs ministers of Canada and Uruguay

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The Latin American Parliament (Parlatino) and ParlAmericas co-organized a parliamentary gathering on the margins of the VII Summit of the Americas, during which participants shared

experiences and knowledge on the topic of transparency from a legislative perspective. At the gathering, ParlAmericas and Parlatino also signed a Memorandum of Understanding.

Luis Almagro, Secretary General Elect of the OAS, gave a keynote speech in which he expressed his enthusiasm for joint agendas promoting dialogue and public participation in the development of solutions to social conflicts, and for increased efficiency and effectiveness of parliamentary work.

*“I hope that these partnerships become the norm, and that consultations and dialogue serve as a source of ongoing inspiration to us”.*

Luis Almagro

The gathering's program included two panel sessions in which parliamentarians from across the region shared perspectives on **democratic innovations** and **parliamentary ethics**, examining the opportunities presented by new communication technologies, citizen engagement initiatives and ethics offices.

The first panel was moderated by Luis Eduardo Quirós, Member of the National Assembly of Panama, and featured panellists José Roberto Alejos, Member of Congress of Guatemala; Gina Godoy, Member of the National Assembly of Ecuador; Earl Dreeshen, Member of Parliament of Canada; Domingos Neto, Member of the Chamber of Deputies of Brazil; and Alejandro Encinas, Senator of Mexico. The second panel was moderated

by Ana Matilde Gómez, Member of the National Assembly of Panama, and featured panellists Miguel Edgardo Martínez, Member of Congress of Honduras; Wade Mark, Speaker of the House of Representatives of Trinidad and Tobago; Epsy Campbell, Member of the Legislative Assembly of Costa Rica; and Jorge Pedraza, Senator of Colombia.

At the gathering's closing, participants issued the Declaration of the Assembled Parliamentarians of the Americas on the Occasion of the VII Summit of the Americas. More information, including the full text of this declaration, is available in the report on this gathering, which can be accessed through the open parliament resource hub of the ParlAmericas website.



*“It is crucial to be aware that governmental affairs are of public interest and that it is our moral responsibility to keep voters fully and continually informed. It is clear that our jointly coordinated initiatives will bring about benefits not only for our institutions, but for all of the people of the continent.”*

**Member of the National Assembly  
Elías Castillo (Panama), President of  
Parlatino**

*“The ideas brought forth today will surely allow us to refine solutions to improve the living conditions in all our communities, but above all, they will motivate us to ensure that we share with the public—in a transparent way—what we are doing as political representatives, how we go about our work and why we do it.”*

**Senator Blanca Alcalá (Mexico),  
Secretary General of Parlatino**

*“I hope that this gathering serves to remind us that we are directly responsible for the promotion and creation of democratic governments. I trust that by convening we will devise proposals and recommendations to promote legislative transparency across the Americas.”*

**Senator Marcela Guerra (Mexico),  
President of ParlAmericas**

# International Conference on Strengthening Legislative Oversight

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**THEME:** Accountability, transparency and sustainable growth

**DATE:** June 2–4, 2015

**LOCATION:** Kingston, Jamaica

**HOST:** Parliament of Jamaica, ParlAmericas, World Bank, Inter-American Development Bank, United Nations Development Programme

**PARTICIPANTS:** More than 200 parliamentarians, former parliamentarians, government officials, and civil society actors from the Caribbean, North and South America, and Africa

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In collaboration with partners, ParlAmericas co-organized a conference on **strengthening financial oversight in Caribbean legislatures**, with a focus on the critical importance of ensuring limited resources are utilized for maximum development impact and in improving efficiency, accountability and transparency. Parliamentarians—including board members Jennifer Simons, Speaker of the National Assembly of Suriname; and Hugh Buchanan, Member of Parliament of Jamaica—were joined by auditors general, the clerks of public accounts committees, and other stakeholders in these processes.

The conference was opened on behalf of the host parliament by Speaker of the House of Representatives of Jamaica, Michael Peart. Following a keynote speech by a World Bank representative, the participants were honoured by an **address by Prime Minister Portia Simpson-Miller**, who highlighted the value of parliamentary scrutiny of public expenditures.

*“We...will look diligently, and with industry and intelligence, into how we can strengthen legislative oversight to foster accountability, transparency, and sustainable development.”*

Jennifer Thomson, Chief Financial Management Officer (The World Bank)

The conference was divided into **technical sessions enriched by case studies** from the countries present, which covered topics such as: institutional

capacity development, opportunities for audit institutions, effectiveness of ex-ante financial oversight and ex-post review, and development of accounting and auditing standards in the Caribbean. The challenges associated with each of these topics were analyzed from a regional point of view with special attention to the distinct contexts faced by small jurisdictions relative to their larger counterparts.

One of the most prominent observations was the need to widen the conversation by educating and involving citizens, whether as individuals, civil society organizations, or professional bodies. One noteworthy effort in this direction involved the host country; every Wednesday in Jamaica, the hearings of the Public Administration and Appropriations Committee are broadcast in real time so that everyone can be informed on public spending.

On the basis of their deliberations, the conference participants issued a statement of **recommendations** focused on a) strengthening the efficacy of ex-ante financial oversight by parliament, b) strengthening the efficacy of ex-post review by parliament, c) institutional strengthening for more effective parliamentary oversight, and d) development of accounting and auditing standards to better support parliamentary oversight of public expenditure. They committed to assessing the potential of implementing these recommendations and moving forwards where appropriate to do so according to national resources and priorities.



# Annual Gathering of the Group of Women Parliamentarians

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**THEME:** Preventing political harassment and violence against women

**DATE:** June 11–14, 2015

**LOCATION:** Termas de Río Hondo, Argentina

**PARTICIPANTS:** More than 75 parliamentarians, former parliamentarians, civil society activists and parliamentary stakeholders from 12 countries

Since 2003, the Group of Women Parliamentarians of ParlAmericas has promoted respect for women’s human rights and the inclusion of a gender lens on the legislative agendas of member parliaments. The Group’s inter-parliamentary activities facilitate the exchange of knowledge from a gender equality perspective and strengthen the political capacities of women and men parliamentarians committed to advancing women’s empowerment.



## Executive Committee of the Group of Women Parliamentarians

**GINA GODOY**, President.  
Member of the National  
Assembly, Ecuador

**CLAUDIA NOGUEIRA**, Vice-  
President. Member of the  
Chamber of Deputies, Chile

**MAGDA RODRÍGUEZ**, Secretary.  
Member of the Chamber of  
Deputies, Dominican Republic

This year's gathering organized by the Group of Women Parliamentarians was hosted by Aída Ruiz, Member of the Chamber of Deputies of Argentina and facilitated by Ms. Keila González of the National Democratic Institute.

Political harassment—the theme of the gathering—is a form of violence against individuals active in public life, which is both politically motivated and based on gender. A widespread barrier to equality in decision-making, examples of political harassment or violence include: **sexist language**,

biased media coverage, pressure to renounce elected office, and other forms of intimidation and aggression. Whether manifested overtly or through more subtle forms of discrimination, this violation of women's political rights reinforces traditional gender roles and male-dominated political structures. The gathering's delegates were committed to raising awareness and effectively addressing and preventing political harassment.

After a welcome to the province of Santiago del Estero by Governor **Claudia Ledesma**, delegates shared progress reports on their parliaments' initiatives related to the work plan of the Group of Women Parliamentarians, established through the strategic planning undertaken at the previous year's gathering. The program also included a keynote address on Bolivia's Law 243 by former parliamentarian Ingrid Zabala, a presentation on **parity democracy** by Irune Aguirrezabal of UN Women's Regional Office for the Americas and Caribbean, an **exchange with local women's groups**, and a panel discussion among



parliamentarians and former parliamentarians. The men in attendance furthermore participated in a ceremony to officially join UN Women’s HeForShe movement.

Following working group discussions, the delegates developed specific commitments in line with the five priority areas identified in the gathering’s action plan.

1. **Apply** multisectoral approaches to the prevention of gender-based political harassment
2. **Engage** men in the empowerment of women in politics at all levels
3. **Hold** political parties accountable for gender equality
4. **Create** an enabling environment to raise the issue of political harassment in public and parliamentary debate
5. **Present** policies, bills, or reforms on political harassment, and once passed ensure compliance by the corresponding institutions



*“I commit to raising awareness on this topic among my male colleagues.”*

*“I commit to organizing forums to bring to light what political violence is, and to publicly denounce it through a social media campaign.”*

*“I commit to disseminating the group’s action plan and promising practices in my parliament, and also to disseminate these through interviews with the media.”*

More information, including the full text of the action plan, is available in the report on this gathering, which can be accessed on the [political harassment resource hub](#) on the ParlAmericas website.



*“In a world dominated by men, there are high costs associated with raising our voices and carrying out active roles in politics. But our efforts come with great rewards.”*

**Member of Chamber of Deputies Claudia Nogueira (Chile), Vice-President of the Group of Women Parliamentarians**

*“Nobody will give you power. You take power.... Do not get down, because you are the people that will make the changes by taking power.”*

**The Honourable Sheila Copps, Former parliamentarian (Canada)**

*“I have been able to hear testimonies of so many women who have lived through violence in politics, and it has made me aware that the problem is not one of underdeveloped countries or nations but of the entire world.”*

**Member of Parliament Hugh Buchanan (Jamaica)**

*“It is clear that women are subjected to violence where the gender gap is greatest, such as in the competitive arena of parliamentary politics. We have come a long way in the fight for equality, yet politically ambitious women are still perceived as a threat to many men...The way forward is our action plan and support for one another in fulfilling the commitments made.”*

**President of the National Assembly Jennifer Simons (Suriname), President of the Group of Women Parliamentarians, 2013-2015**



## In Focus: Plenary Assembly

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**THEME:** Legislating for prosperity with equity

**DATE:** September 4-5, 2015

**LOCATION:** Panama City, Panama

**PARTICIPANTS:** 45 national legislators representing 18 countries

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At the 12<sup>th</sup> Plenary Assembly, hosted by Javier Ortega, Member of the Chamber of Deputies of Panama, parliamentarians from across the region convened under theme *Legislating for Prosperity with Equity* to debate parliamentary initiatives related to the key issues addressed at the

VII Summit of the Americas: education, health, energy, security, migration, environment, citizen participation and democratic governance. This year's Plenary Assembly additionally featured strategic consultation sessions with the objective of incorporating parliamentary perspectives and priorities into the developing of programming in line with ParlAmericas' newly announced five-year project. As the Plenary Assembly is also the highest decision-making body of ParlAmericas, delegates elected certain representatives to the Board of Directors.

## Inauguration

The Plenary Assembly opened with welcoming remarks from host parliamentarians from Panama and other representatives of the Board of Directors of ParlAmericas.

*“ParlAmericas’ mission is a commitment to improving the democratic processes in the hemisphere, managing to keep the channels of conversation flowing with clear questions that are of mutual benefit to the whole of the American continent.”*

Member of the National Assembly  
Javier Ortega (Panama), Host of the Plenary Assembly

*“ParlAmericas has become... an open forum where not only have bonds of trust and friendship been formed between parliaments of the Americas, but where parliamentarians have also developed innovative proposals...in these political arenas to improve the quality of life in our communities.”*

Senator Marcela Guerra (Mexico),  
President of ParlAmericas



*“As women legislators committed to improving the well-being of women in our countries, we ourselves also experience challenges based on our gender...Our gender perspective is important in drafting new laws.”*

Speaker of the National Assembly  
Jennifer Simons (Suriname), Outgoing President of the Group of Women Parliamentarians

*“Today we live in a globalized world...a world that has transformed institutions and that has allowed for better and more rapid communication between everyone, and that has enabled greater participation on topics that previously were unknown to people.”*

President of the National Assembly  
Rubén de León (Panama)

## Keynote Address

After the Plenary Assembly's official inauguration, Dr. Marcel Salamín from the Ministry of External Relations of Panama spoke on "A hemisphere in crisis, an uncertain future," providing participants with an overview of the complex reality of the countries represented, which find themselves in processes of change and transition.

According to Dr. Salamín, the crisis includes economic, political, social, and cultural aspects; for example, he underscored the problem of social inequity whereby 1% of the population hold the majority of wealth, and in politics where dialogue is not always participatory or representative of the needs of the electorate. Another factor he drew attention to was that democracy tends to be seen from a political perspective and not a social one, which limits democratic legitimacy as the needs of

minorities are not taken into account.

He acknowledged that these problems cannot be resolved on an individual basis. "We need to be aware and we need to appeal to multilateral forums to find solutions," he affirmed. It is evident on the streets; citizens are demanding a deeper search for solutions, which requires more space for participation.

He concluded the presentation saying that legislative bodies have a primary responsibility in implementing this agenda and realizing relevant agreements.

*"The process of this Summit of the Americas brings results when you as parliamentarians begin to concretely discuss the roadmap that will bring it to a satisfactory outcome."*

**Dr. Marcel Salamín, Ministry of External Relations (Panama)**



## Panel Exchange: Legislative Case Studies on Education, Health, Energy and Security

**MODERATOR:** Alicia Comelli, Member of the Chamber of Deputies of Argentina

**PANELLISTS:** Blanca Ovelar, Senator of Paraguay; Humberto Costa, Senator of Brazil; Chester Humphrey, President of the Senate of Grenada; Gladys López, Member of the National Assembly of Cuba

## Education

In the opening presentation on education, Senator Ovelar provided a global and regional overview, citing development indices with examples from the experience of Paraguay. She began her presentation by informing the audience that in 1990 delegates from more than 150 countries met in Jomtien, Thailand for the World Conference on Education for All. However in 2000, given the lack of time and resources available to achieve the proposed objectives, it was suggested that the goal be extended to 2015. Today the objectives have not yet been achieved, even though certain social conditions have improved, such

as in Paraguay where more than one million students began attending school in just one decade.

Despite the advances made, Senator Ovelar reiterated that we live in the most unequal region in the world and that education is the only factor that can combat this social inequity. She concluded with a comparative analysis of the gross domestic product (GDP) per capita of various countries in the Americas and its evolution over the last decades. She pointed out that investment in education in East Asian countries makes up almost 20% of the GDP, whereas in Latin American countries it hovers around only 6%.

*“We are a fundamental part of the State structure. We need to provide the tools to the State to ensure that schools do not reproduce the existing inequality.”*

Senator Blanca Ovelar (Paraguay)

## Health

Next, Senator Costa presented on the topic of health with a case study

of the program *Más Médicos*. He explained that this program has benefited over 60 million people, in particular people who previously had limited access to medical attention. He explained that the program put in place infrastructure for clinics, health centres, and medical attention for the public. At the same time, there was a reform of the medical education system to improve the training of doctors in all specialization fields.

In parallel to the program, the government of Brazil signed an accord with Cuba through the Pan-American Health Organization to send 15,000 doctors to Brazil to improve medical attention and support training. This has resulted in both an increase with respect to the proportion of doctors per citizen and also in terms of quality of care.

*“It has been exactly two years since Brazil started this health program which has been one of the most important instruments for social inclusion in the country”.*

Senator Humberto Costa (Brazil)



## Energy

President Humphrey opened his presentation on energy emphasizing that his country is small both in size and in population. Grenada has limited resources and there is a dependency on products derived from petroleum to fulfill a growing demand.

According to President Humphrey, the high cost of energy is one of the main challenges for the country’s development. In the case of electrical energy, there is a foreign company that holds a monopoly as the country’s sole provider. With a price of \$0.65 US /kW, Grenada has the second highest cost for electric energy in the Caribbean. This is also an important factor in the growth of alternative energies, which has begun to affect the hotel industry.

President Humphrey commented that his parliament is in the process of drafting an act that will grant other companies access to the market and will make it possible to offer more competitive prices to citizens. The government is also exploring alternative energies to take advantage of certain geographic advantages, such as experimental wind energy stations. He concluded stating that energy conservation and diversification are essential issues to address.

*“[Energy] is a fundamental topic in many countries, and no country in the modern economy can afford to evade the topic.”*

President of the Senate Chester Humphrey  
(Grenada)

## Security

Ms. López then presented on the work Cuba is undertaking in the area of human security. She said that her parliament identifies with the slogan of the Plenary Assembly, *Legislating for Prosperity with Equity*; all decisions including the approval of the yearly budget are debated rigorously with the active participation of all the members of the assembly; the same process is followed in approving projects in the regular assemblies. This provides a secure foundation and enriches the work of the legislatures as deeper knowledge and awareness is gained for passing laws.

Another example of human security is the

enactment of the Labour Code law, which defines work as a right and a social duty. The law promotes equality, protects young workers and female workers, and prohibits all forms of discrimination as well as child labour.

Ms. López cited José Martí to describe the work of parliamentarians to analyze and remedy society’s problems. Their vision must emanate from the community, they must be dedicated to seeing their mandates through to completion, and they must ensure the population’s full rights and protections to universally guarantee security of life. She concluded by noting that what is essential for development is to continue improving the experiences shared and that are being undertaken to increase citizen participation.

*“Security is an issue that cuts across all areas of life. It has to do with unity, with the conviction that everything we do must be with, and for, our communities.”*

Member of the National Assembly Gladys López  
(Cuba)

Following the presentations, Ms. Comelli, as moderator, summarized the main points of each panellist; for example, the need to incentivize the completion of 12 years of schooling and increase education budgets; the goal of establishing egalitarian health coverage both in big cities and in less populated areas; the need for collective participation in drafting laws as in the case of

energy self-sufficiency in small islands; and that the only way to provide widespread security is by fully guaranteeing basic rights. Following this, delegates exchanged experiences and initiatives in their respective parliaments to address these issues.

## Panel Exchange on Migration, Environment, Citizen Participation and Democratic Governance

**MODERATOR:** Germán Blanco, Representative of Colombia

**PANELLISTS:** Tanisha Tynes, Senator of The Bahamas; Ignacio Urrutia, Member of the Chamber of Deputies of Chile; Ana Matilde Gómez, Member of the National Assembly of Panama; Marlelly Vásquez, Member of the National Assembly of Ecuador

### Migration

Senator Tynes introduced the second panel making reference to the many benefits of migration, including contributions to the economy and well-being of the country. She explained that problems can also arise however from uncontrolled and undocumented migration. According to Senator Tynes, in the case of The Bahamas, the high levels





*“Human trafficking is a concern. There are people who have lost their savings and even their lives.”*

Senator Tanisha Tynes (The Bahamas)

## Environment

Next was a presentation on the environment from Mr. Urrutia, who emphasized that climate change is a reality with effects being manifested in many countries. Stressing the elevated CO2 emissions that are being recorded—the main cause of the problem—Mr. Urrutia underscored the urgency of incorporating environmental protection into politics, the economy, and society. He noted that Latin America’s rich biodiversity and freshwater is unique and that countries must take responsibility for the management of these resources. He culminated his presentation by sharing the experience of Chile, a country that over the last 25 years has developed a system for environmental regulation, based on a regulatory framework that the country has had since early 1992, prior to the Rio

Summit. Today, the Ministry of the Environment evaluates and regulates projects being developed in Chile, particularly those that do not comply with environmental policies.

*“In Latin America, our biodiversity and freshwater reserves are one-of-a-kind, therefore it is necessary that our countries be conscious of our responsibility to manage and preserve the richness that enables eco-systemic services at the local, national, and global level.”*

Member of the Chamber of Deputies Ignacio Urrutia (Chile)

## Citizen Participation

Ms. Gómez began her presentation by defining citizen participation as an individual or collective effort that any citizen or group of citizens undertakes with the goal of impacting public policy, or trying to take part in the decision-making process without holding public office. Referring to Article 6 of the Inter-American Democratic Charter of the OAS, signed in 2001 by all countries in

of migration expected to take place within a year could generate large spending and losses.

A major problem is the human trafficking that occurs in the region. She also noted that in trying to migrate illegally, many people have lost their savings and even their lives. She explained that the islands tend to be a transit centres for migrants with

destinations elsewhere, in general the United States.

To conclude her presentation, she shared details about a project in her country that aims to increase security associated with migration. She also indicated that as part of this project she hopes to identify citizens that are living illegally in the country with the objective of legalizing their status.

the hemisphere, she signalled that citizen participation is a right and a responsibility, as well as a necessary condition for exercising democracy.

In her view, the democratic transition that many Latin American countries have experienced has not strengthened citizenship, but rather has strengthened the creation of political parties. This trend, in her experience, tends to discredit citizen participation. She noted that a major challenge currently facing Panama and other countries in the region is that democratic consolidation is not sustainable from the perspective of citizens, who do not manage to have their voices heard unless a political actor becomes involved.

In spite of this, she was of the belief that nowadays there is more work being done to address this challenge, and more spaces have been created in which citizens can participate in formulating different public policies that will impact human development.

By way of conclusion, Ms. Gomez brought attention to society's concern about Latin America's

political systems. She said that state decentralization would play a significant role in allowing citizen voices to be incorporated into democracy, and through this, to gain society's confidence.

*“There is no democracy without women, there is no democracy without minorities, and there is no democracy without citizen participation.”*

Member of the National Assembly  
Ana Matilde Gómez (Panama)

### **Democratic Governance**

In her presentation on democratic governance, Ms. Vásconez explained that citizen participation and democratic governance are two extremely important and complementary themes. She noted that both involve citizens' active involvement in decision-making, not merely in demanding changes but also in creating them.

She believes that there are three, complementary types of democracy: representative, participative, and

deliberative. She presented articles from the Ecuadorian constitution that set the groundwork for an increase and improvement in citizen participation.

She concluded her talk by presenting the example of Article 103 from the constitution, which establishes that citizen participation should be guided by the principles of equality, autonomy, public deliberation, respect for differences, popular control, solidarity, and interculturality.

*“The concept of democracy implies the incorporation of citizen's participation in decision-making; they are not demanding change but taking part in creating change.”*

Member of the National Assembly  
Marlley Vascónez (Ecuador)

Following the panellists' presentations, Representative Blanco, who moderated the session, opened the floor to questions, most of which concerned aspects of citizen participation and democratic governance. The question

that resonated most was how to increase the public's interest in how parliaments are managed. To conclude the session, there was a discussion on the negative image of parliamentarians and difficulties resulting from this.

## **Presentation on Gender-Sensitive Parliaments**

Each year the Group of Women Parliamentarians contributes a gender perspective to the Plenary Assembly sessions. To illustrate the importance of institutionalizing a gender lens in all parliamentary work—and by extension to the topics under consideration at the Plenary Assembly—delegates heard from Jutta Marx of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), who presented on IPU's gender-sensitive parliaments guidelines. The five essential components of gender-sensitive parliaments are the: 1) composition of parliament; 2) legal framework; 3) methods, structures, and mechanisms of the work; 4)

culture and infrastructure; and 5) strategic partners.

The first component refers to increasing the number of women participating in politics, facilitating their access to elected politics and supporting their leadership. The next consists of implementing laws or actions that promote gender equality in parliaments and/or revising current laws. The third component refers to establishing a strategy that positions the topic of gender equality at the centre of general policy and institutional decisions, and in the distribution of resources. The fourth refers to the need to eliminate from parliaments any language that promotes discriminatory stereotypes or sexual harassment. Finally, the support and backing of men can be a fundamental element in the struggle for gender equity in parliaments by means of measures that facilitate women's inclusion in parliaments.

Ms. Marx shared with the

delegates guidelines, best practices, and a self-assessment approach that can be used to evaluate the gender sensitivity of parliaments, including the identification of weaknesses which can help formulate recommendations and priorities for technical support or reform.

The methodology of this assessment highlights seven elements of gender-sensitive parliaments that are critical to consider: 1) the number of women in parliament and the positions they hold, 2) the legal and political framework, 3) the integration of gender equality, 4) the parliamentary environment, policies and procedures, 5) the distribution of responsibilities with men, 6) political parties, and 7) parliamentary staff.

*“A gender sensitive parliament responds to the needs and interests of both men and women in its structures, operations, methods and in its work.”*

### **The Inter-Parliamentary Union defines a gender-sensitive parliament as one that:**

- Promotes and achieves equality in numbers of women and men across all of its bodies and internal structures.
- Develops a gender equality policy framework suited to its own national parliamentary context.
- Mainstreams gender equality throughout all of its work.
- Fosters an internal culture that respects women's rights, promotes gender equality and responds to the needs and realities of MPs—men and women—to balance work and family responsibilities.
- Acknowledges and builds on the contribution made by its men members who pursue and advocate for gender equality.
- Encourages political parties to take a proactive role in the promotion and achievement of gender equality.
- Equips its parliamentary staff with the capacity and resources to promote gender equality, actively encourages the recruitment and retention of women to senior positions, and ensures that gender equality is mainstreamed throughout the work of the parliamentary administration.

Learn more in IPU's [\*Plan of Action for Gender-sensitive Parliaments\*](#).

## Strategic Consultation

The Director General gave a dynamic presentation on ParlAmericas' new five-year project on strengthening parliaments. This gave way to two strategic consultation sessions facilitated by Ms. Keila González. The objective of the sessions was for parliamentarians from member legislatures to identify ideas, approaches, and strategies that could be implemented during the course of the project.

In the first part of the consultation, participants shared their experiences on the inter-parliamentary initiatives that they found to be the most useful and beneficial in supporting their legislative work. They identified strategies to more effectively involve member parliaments in these activities and to promote actions that would help parliaments' progress towards increased gender-sensitivity.

The second part of the strategic consultation helped establish a road map to contribute to the Mandates for Action of the VII Summit of the Americas: education, health, energy, security, migration, environment, citizen participation, and democratic governance in the region. In addition there was discussion around available resources for making decisions in parliaments with respect to the issues mentioned.

The discussion continued with roundtables where parliamentarians shared their viewpoints and experiences on the topics they considered key to legislative work in the hemisphere. Following these exchanges, the delegates presented small summaries of what they had discussed in order to share with the rest of the participants the conclusions of each table. The outcomes of these productive rounds of consultations will continue to inform the implementation of ParlAmericas' project.



## Election Results

Prior to the closing of the Plenary Assembly, the results of the elections to the Board of Directors of ParlAmericas were announced. Two representatives from Central America were elected: the parliaments of Costa Rica and Panama; two representatives from South America: the parliaments of Argentina and Suriname; and two representatives from the Caribbean: the parliaments of Cuba and Saint Lucia. It was also announced that Gina Godoy, Member of the National Assembly of Ecuador, would take on the role of President of the Group of Women Parliamentarians and that the next Plenary Assembly would be held in Brazil.



## Closing

Before closing, parliamentarians had the opportunity to report on the progress made towards the recommendations issued at the previous year's Plenary Assembly on the topics of open parliament, the post-2015 development agenda, and women's healthcare.

To close the 12<sup>th</sup> Plenary Assembly, Mr. Ortega, on behalf of the host country, and Senator Guerra, as President of ParlAmericas, thanked

delegates for their participation and acknowledged the committed work in the region's parliaments on initiatives strengthening comprehensive development. They underscored the collaborative spirit at the regional level to share promising practices in delegates' parliaments and to adopt strategies and techniques in response to the challenges encountered in each country. Finally, they thanked the team from the National Assembly of Panama for their contributions to the organization of the event.



# Civil Society Gathering during the II Parliamentary Forum: Beijing + 20

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**THEME:** 20-year review of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action

**DATES:** September 17-18, 2015

**LOCATION:** Quito, Ecuador

**HOSTS:** National Assembly of Ecuador, UN Women-Ecuador and ParlAmericas

**PARTICIPANTS:** More than 30 parliamentarians from Ecuador, as well as delegates from Argentina, Chile, Costa Rica, Nicaragua and Panama, and more than 100 civil society activists from throughout Ecuador

**Twenty years following the 4<sup>th</sup> World Conference on Women** held in Beijing, China, many aspects of the agreed-upon agenda for women's empowerment established in the Platform for Action remain unfulfilled. To evaluate the advances made and work that remains to be done from the perspective of the legislative branch, the gathering's keynote addresses and working groups focused on three of the critical areas of concern in the Beijing Platform: women and the economy, women and the media, and the girl-child.

As part of the forum, ParlAmericas organized a well-attended gathering between parliamentarians

and civil society members from various sectors from throughout Ecuador, in order to dialogue on issues concerning women’s economic empowerment. The gathering was opened by the President of the National Assembly, Gabriela Rivadeneira, and the Vice-President of the National Assembly, Rosana Alvarado. Discussions centred on increasing indigenous women’s participation in political processes, improving access to credit and land for agrarian work, and preventing discrimination, violence and cultural norms that reproduce inequality in society.

The exchange was an important opportunity to continue to **strengthen the relationship between civil society and parliamentarians** and to ensure that legislative initiatives—including the final declaration of the forum—are built with citizen input. For more information, including the full text of the declaration issued, visit the [blog](#) of this event.



*“Like the battle flags we received, what battle flags will we pass down to the generations that follow us?”*

**President of the National Assembly Gabriela Rivadeneira (Ecuador)**

*“Women are playing the role of protagonists not only in the media but also on the ground, in the fields, in neighbourhoods, in the community.”*

**Member of the National Assembly Martha Marina González Dávila (Nicaragua)**

*“We urgently need spaces for dialogue between parliaments and civil society; they are the mechanisms that guarantee legitimacy of the agreements we make and their implementation...[We must] strengthen these connections so that women can work alongside parliamentarians to guarantee their access to the economy.”*

**Member of the National Assembly Ligia Fallas (Costa Rica)**

*“Women and men, parliamentarians of the Americas, have gathered here in Quito, united in the firm conviction that the law can be a guidepost on the path towards equity and justice... We must follow the path that 20 years ago marked the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action...it provides us shelter and commits all of us to work, because the convictions that lead groups of brave women to fight for this victorious legacy that we remember today, will not succumb to adversity. And this can be our lighthouse that guides an unshakeable mission to fight for real gender equity that will make our America and the world a place where women and men are equal and coexist without differences or discrimination.”*

**Member of the National Assembly Gina Godoy (Ecuador), President of the Group of Women Parliamentarians**



## Panel Session on Efforts towards Parliamentary Openness Reform in the Americas on the margins of the Global Summit of the Open Government Partnership

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**THEME:** Legislative transparency reform

**DATE:** October 29, 2015

**LOCATION:** Mexico City, Mexico

**HOST:** OAS and ParlAmericas

**PARTICIPANTS:** More than 60 parliamentarians, government officials and civil society representatives

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**The objective** of this panel session co-organized by the Organization of American States (OAS) and

ParlAmericas was to provide a space for dialogue and the exchange of innovative practices regarding transparency and legislative openness in the Americas.

The panel participants were Luis Iberico, President of the Peruvian Congress; Carlos Amarilla, Senator of Paraguay; Guadalupe Valdez, Member of the Chamber of Deputies of the Dominican Republic; Marcela Guerrero, Member of the Legislative Assembly of Costa Rica; and Alejandro Guillier, Senator of Chile, who moderated the event. During the panel, the importance of transparency



and citizen participation within parliaments were stressed, as were accountability processes and strengthened parliamentary ethics as important pillars for democratic systems.

President Iberico and Ms. Valdez emphasized the efforts being made in parliaments in relation to citizen participation. President Iberico noted that the Peruvian congress has developed virtual legislative forums where citizens can comment on proposed laws. Similarly, Ms. Valdez explained the different tools that exist on her parliament's website to keep in contact with citizens and to post information for them on legislative work.

Ms. Guerrero highlighted that technology and innovation must serve a role in transparency efforts and should facilitate the interaction between citizens and parliamentarians. Finally Senator Amarilla shared the firm efforts of the parliament of Paraguay to combat corruption and guarantee transparency and access to public information.

### The Open Government Partnership

(OGP), a multilateral initiative made up of 69 member countries, has encouraged agreements to implement the principles of transparency, citizen participation and collaboration among governments. Mexico, the country chairing the OGP in 2015, organized the Global Summit with the aim of promoting the principles of open government from the post-2015 development agenda. Moreover, this Summit's agenda included a special stream for parliaments, in order to encourage legislative transparency processes, promote parliamentary innovation, and reflect on the challenges in establishing open parliaments around the world.



*“It is crucial that the representative link becomes ingrained among citizens and that they recognize the importance of congress for a democracy.”*

President Luis Iberico Núñez  
(Peru)

*“We need to strengthen civil society so that it can actively participate in parliamentary work in the region. Citizens must be continually connected to parliament.”*

Guadalupe Valdez, Member  
of the Chamber of Deputies  
(Dominican Republic)

*“Innovation must be at the service of democracy.”*

Marcela Guerrero, Member  
of the Legislative Assembly  
(Costa Rica)

*“ParlAmericas has set out to take an active part in the promotion of parliaments in the Americas that are increasingly open, because while many national laws on transparency and access to public information exist, these principles require increased internalization within legislative work. Parliaments should not open up only because the law mandates it, but rather because the very essence of a parliament is that it be open to citizens.”*

Senator Marcela Guerra (Mexico), President of ParlAmericas



# Working Session of the Open Parliament Network on the margins of the Open Government Partnership's Global Summit

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**THEME:** Open government and open parliament

**DATE:** October 29, 2015

**LOCATION:** Mexico City, Mexico

**HOST:** Mexican Senate

**PARTICIPANTS:** 34 legislators representing 21 countries around the world

### ParlAmericas' Open

**Parliament Network** promotes transparency, access to public information, accountability, citizen participation, and probity within the national assemblies of our member countries. Following the recent incorporation as a permanent group in ParlAmericas in September 2015, the Network has continued to implement activities to stimulate and consolidate legislative openness in the parliaments of the Americas and the Caribbean.

This working session of the Open Parliament Network was aimed at establishing dialogue and discussion among parliamentarians and representatives of international organizations on actions and initiatives for promoting transparency, access to public information, accountability, citizen participation and probity within

parliaments in the Americas and the Caribbean.

Senator Guerra opened the meeting by giving a brief introduction to ParlAmericas' work in the region. In her speech she mentioned the Network's recent incorporation into ParlAmericas and emphasized the importance of the activities it has been carrying out. Next Senator Larraín, President of the Open Parliament Network, gave a presentation to the delegates in attendance on the history, approaches, and actions of the Network. Afterwards the participants dialogued on the action plan the Network is developing for 2016–2018. The session concluded with a presentation from Mr. Scott Hubli, Director of Governance Programs at the National Democratic Institute (NDI) on the advances that have been made in the area of open government by the national legislatures in the region.

*“The principles of an open society, an open parliament, or an open government are both a means and an end, because they are a way to move forward and also an objective to reach. Otherwise, we will be left out of the course of history... And if we are not able to take on these roles as representatives—opening up, including citizens in our decisions, taking on the citizens' agenda, viewing the country in terms of its future development strategy—we will find it difficult to stay relevant and a political crisis will be inevitable.”*

Senator Hernán Larraín (Chile)





*“Citizen empowerment needs to begin with the work that congresses do and how the law can be of benefit... [In my country] we have a process for disseminating our laws not only in the commission but where we bring together different unions. We also, as a committee, go out into different parts of the country and raise awareness with various sectors about the laws that we are working on in Ecuador.”*

**María Verónica Rodríguez, Member of the National Assembly (Ecuador)**

*“I am convinced that [transparency and accountability] are tools [for transparency] which are not only an end in themselves, but also a way to...achieve many things on our agenda such as the productivity of the State.”*

**Martín Lousteau, Member of the Chamber of Deputies (Argentina)**

*“I think this is an irreversible process and sooner or later we will have the entire set of legislative instruments. But fundamentally it is a cultural change that allows us to advance within this framework. Three years ago we did not discuss these topics, and now we have a much more dynamic agenda.”*

**Senator Carlos Amarilla (Paraguay)**



# Parliamentary Delegations to ParlAmericas' Election Observation Mission in Haiti

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**THEME:** Strengthening democracy, electoral processes and women's political leadership

**DATES:** October 22-27, 2015 and December 8-12, 2015

**LOCATION:** Port-au-Prince, Haiti

**HOSTS:** ParlAmericas' Election Observation Mission in Haiti

**PARTICIPANTS:** 5 parliamentarians from Latin America and 10 former politicians from Canada

## Election Observation Mission in Haiti

Following the signature of a memorandum of understanding with the Provisional Electoral

Council, ParlAmericas launched the Election Observation Mission in Haiti (known by its French acronym MiOÉH) for the presidential, parliamentary, and local elections that took place on October 25, 2015, as well as upcoming run-off elections.

The objectives of the MiOÉH are to provide a systematic, independent, and impartial assessment of the electoral process while engaging in dialogue to promote **inclusive and rules-based electoral conduct**. The initiative is implemented through a team of technical and analytical specialists and the deployment of short- and long-term observers.

Based on information gathered through meetings with stakeholders including candidates, political party representatives, civil society, and electoral administrators in every department

across the country, the MiOÉH issues periodic statements on various aspects of the electoral process: the campaign environment, operational preparations, and the participation of women in political decision-making.

The MiOÉH will continue to observe the electoral process through the runoff elections scheduled for April 24, 2016. In the **post-election phase**, it intends to issue a final report and consult with Haitian parliamentarians on recommendations to strengthen the democratic framework.

## Parliamentary Delegations

ParlAmericas engaged delegations of current and former legislators of the Americas to support the MiOÉH's ongoing activities and to promote continued inter-parliamentary cooperation in the areas of democratic strengthening and human rights. On the occasion of the October 25, 2015

elections, it deployed a parliamentary delegation of short-term observers composed of Gina Godoy, Member of the National Assembly of Ecuador, and 10 Canadians with previous elected experience at the federal, provincial or municipal levels.

Over a period of six days, delegates met with international organizations, government officials, civil society groups, and political actors to acquire a deepened understanding of the Haitian electoral context and to exchange expertise and commitment to shared democratic values. On election day, delegates were deployed to voting centres across the country for observation of polling and vote counting processes. The MiOÉH issued a statement that summarized its preliminary observations in a press conference held 48 hours after election day.

As President of the Group of Women Parliamentarians, Ms. Godoy held additional meetings with national and international stakeholders and participated in a



roundtable with civil society groups that focused on **strategies to overcome political barriers experienced by women**. These meetings included a dialogue about best practices to increase women's involvement in elections with Gabrielle Hyacinthe, the minister responsible for women's affairs.

Building on the success of this first delegation, another parliamentary delegation was organized in early December, which was led by Ms. Godoy and included the

participation of other Latin American parliamentarians: Ligia Fallas, Member of the National Assembly of Costa Rica; Máxima Apaza, Senator of Bolivia; Luis Alberto Batres, Member of the Legislative Assembly of El Salvador; and Carmen Omonte, Member of Congress of Peru.

The delegates engaged in timely and constructive dialogue through **meetings, conferences and roundtables with a variety of political actors** in the electoral process. Their discussions focused on electoral

reform, gender mainstreaming in parliaments and political parties, violence against women during elections, and collaboration with local and international organizations to improve gender-sensitivity in the electoral process.

The highlights of the delegation included participation in a conference on electoral violence against women organized by UN Women, UNDP and the Haitian ministry for women's affairs. At this conference Ms. Godoy and Ms. Fallas spoke on panels in which they shared experiences and lessons from their countries. All of the delegates also participated in roundtable sessions with women candidates and activists, where they likewise shared perspectives on women's rights and political organizing.



*“The roundtables were spaces for horizontal inclusion. They allowed us to hear from Haitian parliamentarians and social organizations, offering them our support and solidarity.”*

Senator Máxima Apaza (Bolivia)

*“These meetings allowed us to visualize the current political, economic, and social situation in Haiti. It is the ideal time to raise the awareness of Haitian women and men to convince them that women play a fundamental role in building a real democracy that is both representative and equitable.”*

Member of the Legislative Assembly  
Luis Alberto Batres (El Salvador)

*“Haiti is facing significant challenges, like the integration of women into spaces for political decision-making, with perseverance and determination. Society as a whole must provide women with opportunities and encourage their participation in building a better country”.*

Member of Congress Carmen Omonte  
(Peru)

# Operations and Finances

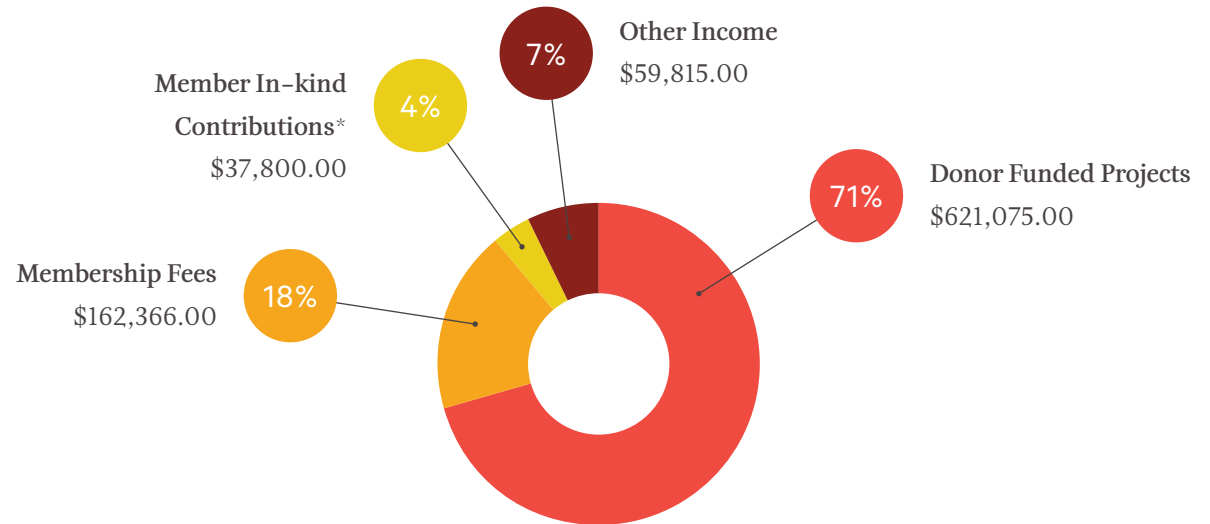
ParlAmericas' operations and activities in the 2014-2015 fiscal year were financed through the support of our member parliaments and the generous contribution of the Government of Canada.

**\*NOTE:** In-kind contributions are only calculated where fair values can be reasonably estimated or supporting documentation is provided by the member parliament. The amount shown is not an accurate representation of the overall value of in-kind support provided by member parliaments in the normal course of ParlAmericas' operations through the hosting of activities.

Source: ParlAmericas Annual Audited Financial Statements, September 2015

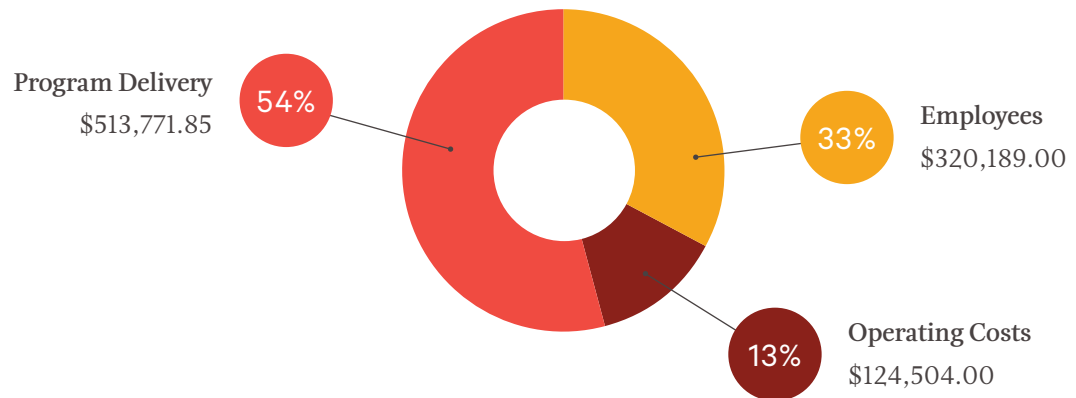
## Contributions 2014 - 2015

Total: \$881,056.00



## Expenditures 2014 - 2015

Total: \$958,464.85





We are grateful to all who have helped build our successful year and look forward to continuing to work with our members for a vibrant, sustainable, impactful ParlAmericas in 2016.

**The ParlAmericas team**

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