

Legislative Modernization Experiences in Latin America

#ParlAmericasOPN #NDI



THEME: Legislative modernization, innovation, citizen participation



DATES: November 13, 2020 & January 29, 2021



LOCATION: Virtual



PARTICIPANTS: More than **50** parliamentarians and parliamentary staff from **7** countries



ORGANIZING PARTNER: National Democratic Institute (NDI) - Central America



These activities aligned with SDG 16.

This series of virtual meetings was designed for parliamentarians and parliamentary staff from Northern Central America, namely: El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras. Its objective was to provide practical knowledge on legislative modernization through the exchange of experiences and to establish a subregional, inter-parliamentary agenda on advancing these modernization processes. The outcomes of the meetings will be used as a reference to develop work plans and guide the programming of NDI and ParlAmericas in support of the established agenda in these three countries.

Meeting 1: Strengthening Parliamentary Function

The first meeting of the series explored the concept of legislative modernization and its role in strengthening parliaments. Participants shared information about initiatives undertaken to move towards virtual parliamentary sessions and other open parliament efforts related to transparency, open data, and public integrity. The dialogue also considered the challenges of adaptation faced by the region's parliaments due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Meeting 2: Innovation and Citizen Participation in Parliamentary Processes

The second meeting focused on legislative modernization from the perspective of innovation and citizen participation mechanisms. Through their exchanges, participants discussed the implications of such mechanisms in the context of evolving political contexts. It was also evident that in addition to adapting the parliament's functioning to the circumstances of the ongoing pandemic, planning is necessary for disasters, such as the recent case of Hurricane Eta.

Both sessions included open dialogue to share reflections and identify issues that could be linked to a sub-regional agenda for further learning and collaboration.

Among the references shared were:

- [Protocol for Remote Parliamentary Work of the Chamber of Deputies](#) (Argentina)
- [Citizen Participation Regulation](#) (Chile) *in Spanish*
- [National Agricultural Parliament](#) (Costa Rica) *in Spanish*
- [Institutional Policy on Open Parliament](#) (Costa Rica) *in Spanish*
- [Reform of the Organic Law of the Legislative Function](#) (Ecuador) *in Spanish*



AGENDA HIGHLIGHTS

Opening remarks by:

- Member of the National Assembly **Elizabeth Cabezas** (Ecuador), President of ParlAmericas
- Member of the Legislative Assembly **Cristina Cornejo** (El Salvador), ParlAmericas Board Member
- Mr. **Eduardo Nuñez Vargas**, Director of NDI's Regional Program for Central America

Panel on reforms for institutional strengthening featuring:

- Ms. **Pamela Lozano**, specialist in legislative openness
- Vice-President of the National Assembly **César Solórzano** (Ecuador)
- Member of the Chamber of Deputies **Daniela Vilar** (Argentina)

Presentations on progress in legislative modernization by:

- Member of the Legislative Assembly **Anabel Belloso** (El Salvador)
- Member of Congress **Cornelio García** (Guatemala)
- Member of Congress **Enrique Yllescas** (Honduras)
- Member of Congress **Víctor Martínez** (Honduras)
- First Vice-President of the Congress **Sofía Hernández** (Guatemala)

Panel on Latin American experiences:

- Member of the Legislative Assembly **Ana Lucía Delgado** (Costa Rica)
- Member of the Chamber of Deputies **Vlado Mirosevic** (Chile)

Closing remarks by:

- Mr. **Alejandro Urizar**, Director, NDI - Honduras
- Ms. **Natalí Casanova**, Senior Program Officer - Open Parliament, ParlAmericas

Interparliamentary Dialogue

Among the topics highlighted was the importance of being able to hold virtual sessions, not only in the context of the pandemic, but also in disastrous situations. For example, Honduras mentioned challenges in traveling from the different districts to parliament after the recent Hurricane Eta. In terms of citizen participation, the importance of expanding beyond only providing information to also incorporating interaction and feedback between the parliament and citizens was highlighted.

Regarding the adoption of new technologies to advance legislative modernization in all forms, important challenges ahead were highlighted. This included achieving political consensus among different parties to adopt new methods and transparent legislative procedures that generate trust of the population as well as ensure that the tools are secure, accessible and easy to adopt for both citizens and legislators.

INTERPARLIAMENTARY AGENDA FOR LEGISLATIVE MODERNIZATION

Use of ICTS		Active mechanisms for citizen participation	Which actions are considered important?
Citizen participation. Generate spaces for two-way interaction.	Accountability. Open parliaments to the examination and analysis of legislative work.	Co-creation of open parliament commitments. Discussion and exchanges with different sectors in society.	Sectorial and sub-regional agendas in relevant themes such as migration.
Representation. Connect with other sectors in society.	Transparency. Make information available to citizens on legislative activities: biographical information of parliamentarians, attendance, voting.	Lawmaking process. In the stages of drafting, reviewing, socialization and approval (through citizen votes) of the content of the law.	Networking between legislators. Strengthen subregional relationships within existing parliamentary networks.
Lawmaking process. In the phases of socialization and approval (plenary vote) of the content of the law.	Development and use of applications.		

KEY CONSIDERATIONS FOR LEGISLATIVE MODERNIZATION IDENTIFIED IN SESSIONS

- Legislative modernization efforts require: strong bipartisan agreements; stable and committed multi-partisan committees; a long-term outlook; and citizen participation.
- Legislative reform and modernization processes can be useful in addressing citizen distrust of democratic institutions, particularly if they involve expanding opportunities for effective citizen participation.
- In the region's parliaments, legislative modernization processes focus mainly on the organizational structure (administrative processes). It is important to complement this progress by further strengthening the institutional dimension, that is, the principles, values, and rules that guide legislative work.
- The adoption of ICTs in the legislative processes during a pandemic presents various challenges but it also represents opportunities for modernization in terms of streamlining tools that can overcome the challenges associated with the pandemic and that can be incorporated on a permanent basis.
- Legislative modernization is not only focused on the implementation of ICTs. It also involves betting on reforms and efforts in favour of legislative openness, thus strengthening parliamentary work in agreement with the Sustainable Development Goals.

The agendas ([session 1](#) & [session 2](#)) in Spanish, [press release](#), and [presentations](#) from these two activities can be accessed on the ParlAmericas website.

PARTICIPATING PARLIAMENTS



Argentina



Ecuador



Honduras



Chile



El Salvador



Costa Rica



Guatemala



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