



ParlAmericas

Volume IV Issue 2 English

Foro Interparlamentario de las Américas
Fórum Interparlamentar das Américas

Forum interparlementaire des Amériques
Inter-Parliamentary Forum of the Americas

The first Parliamentary Dialogue held alongside a Summit of the Americas took place in Port of Spain

An open and honest exchange

Increased parliamentary participation in the Summits process will enhance accountability, transparency and respect for diversity, concluded the participants of the Special Parliamentary Dialogue that took place on April 16, 2009, in Trinidad and Tobago.

A number of parliamentary and governmental representatives from the continent participated in the meeting. This was the first Parliamentary Dialogue held alongside a Summit of the Americas.

FIPA and the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago, country which hosted the Fifth Summit of the Americas, initiated the Dialogue with the aim of incorporating a legislative dimension into the Summits of the Americas process.

Minister Stanford Callender, FIPA representative for the Caribbean, began the meeting by saying, "our discussions today will be a catalyst for developing new perspectives on the role of parliamentarians in the Americas."

Yet, "this is no simple task", noted Senate President Danny Montano, who is concerned about the rift "between the Executive that makes the decisions and the people who are responsible for making legislation." The

Speaker of the House of Representatives, MP Brendra Sinanan, pointed out the region's diversity, which comprises "920 million people existing under varying economic, social, political and ecological circumstances."

Minister of Foreign Affairs for

Gutiérrez called on parliamentarians to use the instruments at their disposal—the budget, legislation or policy control—to ensure the implementation of commitments. She also pointed out that privileged access to information is essential for this purpose, which is why inviting

founder of the OAS Caucus in the US House of Representatives. "Anything we can do to support FIPA will benefit inter-American co-operation and democracy," said OAS Secretary General José Miguel Insulza.

The parliamentarians expressed their desire to continue to participate in the Summits process through FIPA, and they passed a declaration to that effect at the end of the meeting.

It was "mission accomplished" for Brazilian congressman and FIPA President Luiz Carlos Hauly and Canadian Senator Céline Hervieux-Payette, who moderated the discussion. At the beginning of the meeting, they had challenged the participants to an "open and honest exchange."



Photo: FIPA

Trinidad and Tobago hosted the Fifth Summit of the Americas.

Trinidad and Tobago Paula Gopee-Scoon started by challenging her parliamentary counterparts to support and promote the implementation of the commitments made at the Summits, for example by inquiring about the content and the status of the reports submitted by each participating government.

For her part, Colombian Senator Nancy Patricia

parliamentarians to participate in sectoral ministerial meetings arising from the Summits process is so important.

FIPA's essential role was reiterated. "To talk to one another, not at one another, is so important and I thank FIPA for giving us this opportunity" said US Congressman Gregory Meeks, who is himself a

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The empowerment of women in politics in Haiti

Emotions were not far from the surface during the opening of the training program for women in politics in Port au Prince, Haiti, on April 2-3. "There was so much feeling, so much emotion", said deputy María Estela de la Cruz, representative of the Inter-Parliamentary Forum of the Americas (FIPA) for Central America, describing her experience. De la Cruz, together with Gladys Sofía Azcona, another deputy from the Dominican Republic, Otilia Lux de Cotí, a deputy from Guatemala, and Martha Angélica Tagle Martínez, a deputy from Mexico, members of the Group of Women Parliamentarians of the Americas, were invited by the Parliamentary Centre of Canada and by MINUSTAH to share their experiences of political life.

The main objective of the program, which runs for one year, is to strengthen the skills of women interested in politics by means of sessions with a mentor, in order for them to participate in the 2009 and 2010 municipal, legislative or presidential elections.

Humble and generous, the female lawmakers shared their stories of life in politics: how they started out, the difficulties of reconciling family life with the commitments of a political career or of being a female head of the family, and the challenges of fulfilling citizens' expectations. In reviewing the lessons learned, all agreed on the need to work together beyond partisan boundaries, to maintain solidarity with other women in the field, and

never to attack another woman in public.

Deputy de la Cruz emphasized that she found it satisfying to be able to pass on her experiences of "finding the strength to change things in a poor country". Describing herself as someone who has worked her way up "from the bottom", de la Cruz believes that it is particularly auspicious that this knowledge is being passed on by women from

Azcona herself experienced the difference between "what you read and what actually happens when you are in the country". "We are told that Haiti is the country with the highest levels of poverty and violence in the hemisphere, and people worry about coming here. But when we come here and see what the people are like, their warmth, the reality is different", she noted.

"I wish I had had this kind of

peers on the need to pursue this initiative "into the second phase". As an example, she cited the possibility of a mentoring program aimed at forming a women caucus, as a way of creating a gender focus in the legislature in general or introducing political training as a core issue.

For Martha Tagle, of Mexico, the encounter was significant because it made her realize that "even in a time of grave economic, political and social crisis, citizens look for democratic stabilization".

She pointed out that "FIPA and the Parliamentary Centre are running a program for women candidates in order to empower women as a way of bringing about change – especially, she noted, because "the point of view that women bring to the Chamber of Deputies or to the Senate will allow them to legislate from a gender perspective".

Tagle summed up a wish shared by her fellow parliamentarians in the group: "that FIPA continue encouraging the sharing of experience by women parliamentarians and that it provide a follow-up to this program in Haiti and in other countries".

For FIPA, it was the second time that a group of women parliamentarians travelled to Haiti to be part of the training program for women in politics. The previous program was held in 2005.



Photo: FIPA

Parliamentarians, candidates and organizers share experiences and a laugh.

"another poor country", because it is empowering to women to learn that "even with limited resources, it is possible to bring about change".

Gladys Sofía Azcona called the meeting a "marvelous experience", and said that it exceeded all of her expectations compared to other such encounters in the course of her political career.

training opportunity before entering Parliament", said parliamentarian Otilia Lux de Cotí.

Enthusiastic at what she calls "the transfer of knowledge from a group that has political experience behind it to women who need this kind of support, women who are just starting out in this career, who need a lot of political training", she agrees with her



Legislative Power in Nicaragua

Photo: Asamblea Nacional de Nicaragua

Nicaragua's Legislative Branch is unicameral, consisting of a National Assembly made up of 92 deputies. Elections to the legislature are held every five years, at the same time as the presidential elections. In addition to the 90 members elected by proportional representation at each election, both the immediate past president of the country and the runner-up in the presidential election automatically hold a seat in the Assembly.

The political parties use closed lists with a departmental or regional quotient, depending on the seat. Voting is not compulsory. Both regular or titular members and substitute members are elected for a five-year term. The substitute members replace the titular members either temporarily or permanently when the former are unable to exercise their functions.

The most important powers of the Legislative Branch are legislation (passing, amending, repealing and interpreting laws), representation (exercising the political power of the people by delegation and by mandate from the people), political and budgetary oversight (asking for information or requesting reports from the administration, etc.) and political direction. This last function includes the power to appoint members of the Supreme Council of the Office of the Comptroller General of the Republic, members of the Supreme Court of Justice, and magistrates of the Supreme Electoral Council.



Nicaraguan legislators during a plenary session.

In Nicaragua, the President of the Republic and every one of the 92 deputies of the National Assembly have the right to present legislative initiatives or bills. The following bodies also have the right to make initiatives, but only in their respective area of jurisdiction: the Supreme Court, the Supreme Electoral Council, the regional autonomous councils of the Atlantic Coast, municipal councils, Nicaragua's representatives to the Central American Parliament, and citizens, in accordance with the Citizen Participation Act. The majority of initiatives originate from members of the National Assembly.

It is up to the committee that is responsible for the subject matter with which the particular legislative initiative is concerned to rule for it or against it. The committee has the authority to make amendments, additions to or deletions from the proposal or, in the case of a new law, to present a new wording or version of the project. The

only bills that the committee cannot modify are those for approval of international treaties or conventions, which can only be either approved or rejected, and bills for pardons or proposals to award mercy pensions.

The next phase is that of consultation of the body or bodies that will execute the law and the various representatives and stakeholders. The results of the consultation are considered by the committee in the course of its work. Consultation is compulsory, and failure to carry out consultation may be grounds for the final decision to be declared invalid.

The final decision may be in favour of the legislation or against it, by majority or by minority. When the law is debated in plenary, the members of the Assembly have the right to make motions to modify, change, eliminate or reword the contents.

Once a proposed law has

been approved, it is sent to the Executive for final approval, promulgation and publication. The President has the power to veto the law either in whole or in part. If he does not do so or does not publish it within 15 days of the date on which he receives it, the president of the Assembly orders its publication in the Official Gazette, so that it may take effect.

National Assembly (2007–2012)

- ◆ 92 deputies
- ◆ 17 Women
- ◆ 75 Men
- ◆ Main political groups :

Sandinista National Liberation Front	41.3%
Liberal Alliance	21.7%
Liberal Alliance-Conservative Party	5.4%
Democratic	16.3%
Sandinista Renovation Movement	4.3%
Nicaraguan Unity	7.6%
Independents	3.2%



Trade Workshop in Peru

Photo: Embassy of Canada in Peru

Members of the Canadian Section of FIPA and Peruvian parliamentarians met in Lima, Peru, on March 25-26 to participate in a bilateral trade workshop. The *Workshop for Parliamentarians on Understanding Trade* took place in the Congress of the Republic of Peru in collaboration with the Ottawa-based Centre for Trade Policy and Law, of Carleton University, and the Economic and Social Research Consortium (CIES), in Lima.

Discussions and presentations focused on trade, competitiveness and development, examining the opportunities and challenges confronting Peru in light of the evidence of the advantages stemming from the opening up of trade and its relation to the reduction of poverty, the



Canadian and Peruvian parliamentarians during one session of the trade workshop evolution of labour markets in the context of the opening up of trade, and key aspects of the Peru-Canada economic relationship.

These FIPA trade workshops started back in 2007 with the aim of providing parliamentarians all over the Americas with an opportunity to gain a more in depth knowledge of trade law.

FIPA will hold its third regional trade workshop in coming months.

Sixth Plenary Meeting of FIPA in Ottawa

The Parliament of Canada will host the Sixth Plenary Meeting of FIPA in Ottawa, September 13-15, 2009.

On this occasion, legislators from the thirty-five countries of the Americas will meet to discuss issues related to the world economic and financial crisis, migrations and human rights, food security and gender equality.

The Plenary Assembly is

FIPA's highest body. Its recommendations are forwarded to the Legislative Powers of member states, to the OAS General Assembly and to the Summits of the Americas.

For more information on the Plenary Meeting, or to register, please visit www.e-fipa.org or www.cdnsectioncan-fipa.ca

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

Sixth Plenary Meeting Host Country

- Canada

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.

Calendar

- **June 2-3.** Mission of the Canadian Section of FIPA to the 39th Regular Session of the OAS General Assembly, San Pedro Sula, Honduras.
- **June 23-24.** 19th Executive Committee Meeting, Washington, DC, USA.
- **September 12.** 20th Executive Committee Meeting, Ottawa, Canada.
- **September 13-15.** Sixth Plenary Meeting and Fifth Meeting of the Group of Women Parliamentarians of the Americas, Ottawa, Canada.

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