

STRENGTHENING THE TIES BETWEEN CITIZENS AND LEGISLATURES

**2ND GATHERING OF THE
OPEN PARLIAMENT NETWORK**





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This gathering was made possible by the generous support of the Legislative Assembly of Costa Rica, and the Government of Canada through Global Affairs Canada (GAC).



PARLAMERICAS



ParlAmericas is the institution that promotes **PARLIAMENTARY DIPLOMACY** in the **INTER-AMERICAN SYSTEM**



ParlAmericas fosters **OPEN PARLIAMENTS** by advancing the principles of transparency, accountability, citizen participation, ethics and probity



ParlAmericas is composed of the **NATIONAL LEGISLATURES** of the member States of the OAS from North, Central and South America and the Caribbean



ParlAmericas promotes policies and legislative measures to mitigate and adapt to the effects of **CLIMATE CHANGE**



ParlAmericas facilitates the exchange of parliamentary **BEST PRACTICES** and promotes **COOPERATIVE POLITICAL DIALOGUE**



ParlAmericas works towards strengthening democracy and governance by accompanying **ELECTORAL PROCESSES**



ParlAmericas mainstreams **GENDER EQUALITY** by advocating for women's political empowerment and the application of a gender lens in legislative work



ParlAmericas is headquartered in **OTTAWA, CANADA**



2ND GATHERING OF THE OPEN PARLIAMENT NETWORK

#OPN2017

THEME

Strengthening the
Ties between
Citizens and
Legislatures

DATE

March 16-17, 2017

LOCATION

San Jose, Costa Rica

PARTICIPANTS

More than 70
parliamentarians
and civil society
representatives
from 25 countries

The 2nd gathering of the Open Parliament Network (OPN) was hosted by the Legislative Assembly of Costa Rica and aimed to further advance work being undertaken to implement the [Road Map towards Legislative Openness](#) of ParlAmericas, with a particular focus on exploring strategies to enable effective participation of citizens in the legislative decision-making process.

Parliamentarians from across the hemisphere gathered in San Jose, Costa Rica, to share perspectives on ways to apply **co-creation** practices traditionally associated with the development of legislative openness action plans, to all stages of the legislative process, spanning from the adoption of agendas to the formulation of legislation, and oversight of its implementation using various online and in-person mechanisms.

The gathering opened with welcoming remarks by Member of the Legislative Assembly **Karla Prendas** (Costa Rica) as host of the gathering, and **José Alberto Alfaro Jiménez**, Interim President of the Legislative Assembly (Costa Rica). They were joined by Senator **Marcela Guerra** (Mexico), President of ParlAmericas; Senator **Hernán Larraín** (Chile), President of the OPN; Member of the Legislative Assembly **Ligia Fallas** (Costa Rica), Member of the Board of Directors of ParlAmericas; and **Pablo Collada**, Director of [Ciudadano Inteligente](#), the organization coordinating the [Latin American Network for Legislative Transparency](#) (LALT Network).

The gathering proceeded with a working session facilitated by former parliamentarian **Guadalupe Valdez** (Dominican Republic) where legislators explored how providing avenues for citizen

participation in the legislative process could improve citizen trust in parliament, interest in politics and perceptions of being effectively represented. It was followed by a panel of experts that presented on how these efforts can be undertaken through the Open Government Partnership (OGP). Senator **Hernán Larraín** (Chile), President of the OPN, promoted the new [OGP Legislative Engagement Policy](#), which encourages the submission of commitments on legislative openness within OGP National Action Plans (NAPs). **Scott Hubli**, Director of Governance Programs at the [National Democratic Institute](#) (NDI), in turn, explained how the OGP Co-creation Standards have been applied by governments and parliaments across the world; while **Agustina De Luca**, Director of Legislative Transparency at [Directorio Legislativo](#), explored the role of civil society in the development and implementation of OGP NAPs.

In a second working session coordinated in partnership with [GovLab](#) and facilitated by **Cristiano Ferri**, Director of the [Hacker Lab at the Chamber of Deputies of Brazil](#) (link available only in Portuguese), participants considered the stages of the legislative process in which citizens and civil society's input can be most valuable and effective to ensure a participative and inclusive decision-making process. To structure this debate, participants consulted the [Guiding Questions for Incorporating Citizen Engagement into the Legislative Framework](#), and explored the meaning of citizen engagement, the value it provides, the phase in which it is most productive, the methods and mechanisms that can be applied and the platforms through which it can take place.

ParlAmericas signed a **MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING** with the LALT Network within the framework of the 2nd gathering of the OPN. It expresses the network's commitment to collaborate with civil society to advance legislative openness throughout the hemisphere.



PABLO COLLADA, Director of Ciudadano Inteligente, coordinator of the LALT Network

“ParlAmericas has signed a memorandum of understanding with the Latin American Network for Legislative Transparency that constitutes a reminder of our shared objectives, and of the ongoing efforts that need to be made to narrow the gap between legislators and their constituencies.”

The gathering promoted several new legislative tools, programs and processes that foster citizen participation within legislatures.

⇒ **Application “Mi Senado” (My Senate by the Senate of Colombia)** – This [mobile application](#), presented by **Mauricio Lizcano**, President of the Senate (Colombia), allows citizens to monitor attendance and votes in plenary sessions in real time, and cast a vote to express opinions about legislative debates which are then displayed in the plenary. This application also functions as an educational tool for citizens and provides quick access to the contact information and social media accounts of senators.



⇒ **Citizen Engagement by the National Assembly of Suriname** – [Several measures](#) have been undertaken by the National Assembly of Suriname to increase transparency and educate young people about its work, as was explained by **Jennifer Simons**, Speaker of the National Assembly (Suriname). In addition to modernizing its website to provide more comprehensive legislative information, the National Assembly of Suriname has developed a page that is dedicated to young people and three board games to familiarize them with the work of parliament in an interactive and engaging manner. The National Assembly has also launched a TV channel, started parliamentary tours, and is developing a mobile application to make parliamentary information more easily accessible.

⇒ **Applying a Gender Perspective to Legislation in the Legislative Assembly of Costa Rica** – The Legislative Assembly of Costa Rica has institutionalized a triad of mechanisms to promote increased participation of women, and consideration of gender implications in all legislative debates. **Haydee Hernandez**, Head of the Technical Unit on Gender Equality and Equity at the Legislative Assembly of Costa Rica, described how this unit, in collaboration with the Special Permanent Commission on Women and the Parliamentary Group of Women Parliamentarians develops research papers, holds hearings, requests information, creates advocacy strategies and monitors the impact of legislation from a gender perspective, among other approaches, to ensure participative and gender inclusive decision-making.

The final working session of the gathering consisted of a practical exercise facilitated by **Hannia Vega**, Advisor at the Legislative Assembly of Costa Rica, where legislators and civil society representatives worked together to co-create a solution to a scenario case, and reflected on the challenges and benefits of this collaborative process. The case related to the effective implementation of access to information legislation, a founding block for citizen participation, in which participants received guidance from experts **Lemarque Campbell**, Policy Subcommittee Chairman at [Citizens for a Better Bahamas](#), and Dr. **Magaly McLean**, Senior Counsel of the [Department of International Law at the Organization of American States \(OAS\)](#), which has developed a [Model Inter-American Law on Access to Public Information](#) and provides technical assistance through its [Inter-American Program on Access to Public Information](#).

“Aside from being able to access information, citizens need to be able to understand the information they are given, especially on how the process to pass legislation works.”



Member of the National Assembly **JENNIFER SIMONS** (Suriname), Speaker of the National Assembly

The **OGP** is a multilateral initiative launched in 2011 that currently includes 75 countries and aims to secure concrete commitments from governments to promote transparency, empower citizens, fight corruption, and harness new technologies to strengthen governance. These commitments are adopted through National Action Plans (NAP) that are co-created by governments and civil society in accordance with the [OGP Co-Creation Standards](#), and renewed every two years.

As of October 2016, legislatures in OGP participating countries are invited to develop a legislative openness action plan to include within their country's next NAP or as a separate parliamentary chapter of their NAP, as per the OGP [Legislative Engagement Policy](#).

KEY FACTORS FOR THE EFFECTIVE IMPLEMENTATION OF ACCESS TO INFORMATION LEGISLATION

As identified by parliamentarians and civil society representatives at the gathering:

- ⇒ Establishment of an independent enforcement agency responsible for implementing a sanctioning process
- ⇒ Allocation of budgetary resources to allow for the effective implementation of the legislation
- ⇒ Consideration of international standards on access to information and protection of information legislation, as well as ethical standards (i.e. requirement to disclose assets and interests)
- ⇒ Application of a periodic assessment of the implementation of legislation to determine if it is effectively achieving its objectives
- ⇒ Implementation of training and communications programs for both public servants and citizens on the application of the legislation
- ⇒ Involvement of civil society in the development of the legislation and in evaluating its implementation

“Democracy is only possible when the authorities are held accountable, when there are enforcement bodies in place to ensure this is the case, and that laws are enforced. Only then shall we have an empowered citizenship that becomes involved in the legislative decision-making process ... Moving forward in the right direction is what matters.”



Senator
HERNÁN LARRAÍN (Chile),
President of the Open



Member of the Chamber of
Deputies **MAYRA ENRÍQUEZ**
(Mexico)

“We must first be clear as to whether institutional mistrust is the cause or consequence of the lack of citizen participation. We wish to overcome mistrust by involving citizens, but it is hard to make them participate in something they do not believe in.”

The gathering concluded with the adoption of a [declaration of commitments](#) recognizing that citizen participation is a fundamental principle of democracy that aims to ensure that citizens are informed, involved and participate actively in public decision making processes, and committing to:

- ⇒ Promote the adoption of regulatory frameworks and offices that guarantee access to public information and the effective participation of citizens in the legislative process
- ⇒ Ensure the institutionalization of spaces for citizens to contribute to legislative decision-making in-person or through information and communications technologies (ICTs) and social networks
- ⇒ Disseminate the rights of citizens in the area of citizen participation, the importance of participation for democracy strengthening, and the mechanisms through which it is possible



Senator **MARCELA GUERRA**
(Mexico), President of
ParlAmericas

"An Open Parliament seeks to be more transparent and accountable, to have better access to information, and to incorporate other elements for effective citizen participation, such as the use of new technologies, with the objective to be receptive, innovative and effective in the work done for the benefit of the people."

DECLARATION OF SOLIDARITY WITH PERU

Participants at the 2nd gathering of the OPN signed a [declaration of solidarity with Peru](#) to offer their support and present their condolences for the human losses and material damages it had suffered due to the strong rain, floods and landslides that had occurred.

"Connection to citizenry is critical through information and communications technologies ... but we need to be conscious of the digital divide as the most vulnerable in our populations may not have access, and still use TV and radio. (This connection) provides us with better discussion, more inclusive decision-making, and help with the implementation of laws because there is buy-in from citizens when they participate in the process ... and if you get it right, it allows you to include minority rights."



Member of Parliament
RANDY BOISSONNAULT
(Canada)



CECILIA RODRÍGUEZ,
representative of
Costa Rica Integra

"Citizens see the world from a different perspective than politicians, and for this reason, their vision is fundamental to ensure an effective participative, transparent and democratic exercise."

"Given the transversal character of gender issues, the challenges and exposure facing women politicians need be made visible, need to be addressed, and need to be the target of awareness-raising efforts, within the framework of the Open Parliament initiative. These efforts should be led by all those engaged in politics, whether they are men or women."

"I think most importantly, once the citizens have the access to information, it increases trust. It dispels any perception of wrongdoing on part of the government. So you can see how this [access of information legislation] is an effective tool to not only engage the citizens but to have them participate in the actual decision-making process."



LEMARQUE CAMPBELL, Policy
Subcommittee
Chairman, Citizens
for a Better Bahamas



Member of the Legislative Assembly
KARLA PRENDAS (Costa Rica), host of
the gathering

Maximizing the use of social networks to promote citizen participation

DATE

March 15, 2017

PARTICIPANTS

34 parliamentarians
from 19 countries

LOCATION

San Jose, Costa Rica

This training session was conducted on the margins of the 2nd gathering of the OPN and focused on the use of social networks to improve communication with constituents. The training was facilitated by **Sebastián de Lara Gomís**, Managing Partner of *Navegación Política*, who presented strategies for the effective use of social media channels including Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and Snapchat. Legislators also explored strategies for handling common challenges like coordinated online attacks by political opponents and negative comments from concerned citizens. The session concluded with an exchange on online harassment faced by women parliamentarians and steps that can be taken by all legislators to promote gender equality, and prevent gender-based and personal attacks online.

“Following this workshop, I have created a public Facebook page and through my social networks I have launched an outreach initiative and mobilized individuals to attend an upcoming training to empower women in Saint Kitts and Nevis.”



Representative Hon. **HAZEL BRANDY-WILLIAMS** (Saint Kitts and Nevis), Minister of Gender, Social Affairs, Social Development, Youths and Sports Affairs, Community Affairs, Import and Export Control and Licensing Unit



Member of the Chamber of Deputies **JIMENA COSTA** (Bolivia)

“Facebook has proven very useful to share information with citizens. It has helped me put the causes I lobby for (e.g. the environment) on the agenda. It also allows me to set up a network of people who support and comment on related topics, and this has proven very useful to me.”

BEST PRACTICES FOR THE USE OF SOCIAL NETWORKS BY PARLIAMENTARIANS

A more detailed [aide-mémoire](#) on this subject can be accessed on the Open Parliament section of the ParlAmericas website.

1. Understand the reach and the impact of social networks
2. Generate a participatory political debate
3. Engage in real-time dialogue and generate content
4. Build trust
5. Follow the activities or news of opponents on social networks
6. Maintain a network of followers free from trolls, setting limits, and being a friendly and active member of the community
7. Speak out against gender-based violence online
8. See negative comments as an opportunity to demonstrate knowledge and professionalism

COUNTRIES REPRESENTED AT THE GATHERING

ANTIGUA AND BARBUDA



CHILE



DOMINICA



GUATEMALA



MEXICO



SAINT LUCIA



ARGENTINA



COSTA RICA



DOMINICAN REPUBLIC



GUYANA



PANAMA



SAINT VINCENT AND
THE GRENADINES



BOLIVIA



COLOMBIA



ECUADOR



HONDURAS



PERU



SURINAME



CANADA



CUBA



EL SALVADOR



JAMAICA



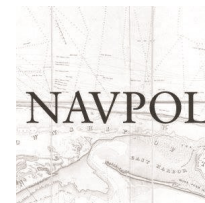
SAINT KITTS AND NEVIS

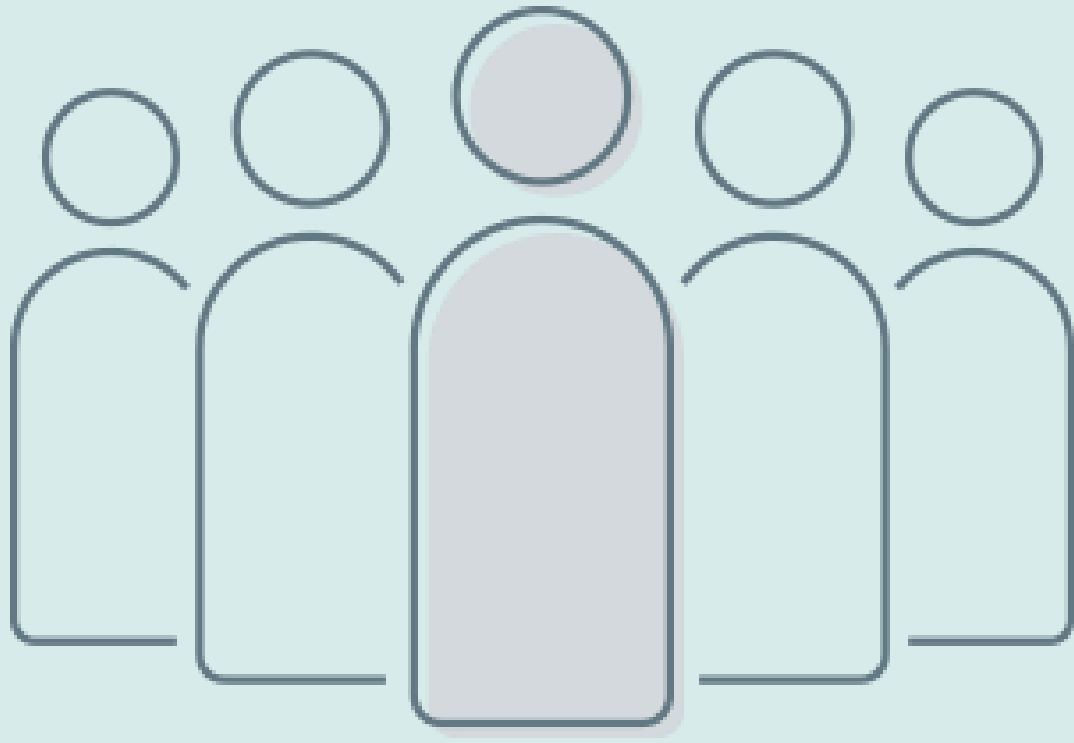


VENEZUELA



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