



Secretariat for
POLITICAL AFFAIRS
Strengthening Democratic Governance in the Hemisphere



Organization of
American States





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MESSAGE FROM THE SECRETARY FOR POLITICAL AFFAIRS

The Western Hemisphere is today, almost without any exceptions, a community of democracies. Considering the tormented political history of a great part of our region, this is an extraordinary achievement. The preservation, expansion and deepening of democratic accomplishments achieved by the previous generation, constitute a core pillar of the work of Organization of the American States (OAS), particularly after the approval of the Inter-American Democratic Charter on September 11, 2001 in Lima, Peru. The Charter is much more than a declaration of good intentions. It is a compilation of mandates supremely adopted by 34 countries to advance a broad democratic agenda leveraged with resources provided by the multilateral community.

True to those mandates, the Secretariat for Political Affairs of the OAS seeks to be an instrument that helps consolidate the Americas' achievements in adopting basic characteristics of democracy, mainly, the celebration of free and fair elections and the civilian control of government institutions. For this purpose, it is important to pay attention to political vulnerabilities deeply entrenched in the region — such as corruption or the political exclusion of certain societal groups — as well as to new and more sophisticated threats to democracy — as for instance, the noticeable disenchantment with politics, the erosion of checks and balances, the emergence of political contexts incompatible with fair electoral competition, and the erosion of legitimacy derived by poor government performance. The pending tasks in the road towards deepening democracy in the Americas are as great as the achievements accumulated to date.

Therefore, the Secretariat for Political Affairs aspires to be an instrument that assists OAS member States in the arduous and never-ending task of improving the quality of democratic governance. As the hemispheric political organization par excellence, gifted with an unparalleled multilateral experience in the world, the OAS occupies a privileged place to influence debates and support public policy

formulation-processes in areas essential to democratic performance. These include the improvement of the quality of electoral competition, adoption of political reforms, strengthening of representative institutions, promotion of electronic government, universalization of the right to civil identity, promotion of conflict resolution mechanisms, and the dissemination of good practices in public management. In some of these areas, the Secretariat already is an unavoidable reference point in the Americas, and aspires to continue being so.

The future success of the Secretariat for Political Affairs of the OAS undertaking this agenda will depend primarily, on how truthful our work is to the mandates of the Inter-American Democratic Charter as an expression of the irreversible will of the peoples of the Hemisphere to live in democracy. It will also depend on our capacity to work in harmony with the member States to respond to their cooperation needs and of our willingness to join efforts with many other governments, public and private institutions committed to the promotion of democracy.

Constructing a Secretariat increasingly clearer on its democratic vocation, but also more agile, more proactive, more connected to the world, and more oriented to the service of OAS member States, is the best homage that our team can do to the invaluable democratic legacy that has been entrusted to the current generation of the peoples of the Americas.

Kevin Casas-Zamora, PhD
Secretary for Political Affairs

ABOUT US

SECRETARIAT FOR POLITICAL AFFAIRS

The mission of the Secretariat for Political Affairs (SPA) is to contribute to the strengthening of the political processes of the member States, and in particular, sustaining democracy as the best option to guarantee peace, security and development. Therefore, the SPA must be an instrument that helps OAS member States to improve the quality of democratic governance, understood as the ability of its political institutions to process social demands and conflicts in peaceful ways, that are also fully respectful of the Rule of Law and the citizens' political and civil rights. In the context of the OAS, this entails the promotion of a broad democratic agenda that is mostly, albeit not exclusively, centered on Titles I, IV and V of the Inter-American Democratic Charter (IDC).



Photo: Wilfred Valencia

The promotion of a democratic agenda is important to:

- Consolidate the gains made in the Americas in terms of the adoption of basic democratic features, mainly free and fair elections and civilian control of government institutions.
- Pay increased attention to new and more sophisticated threats to democracy.
- Shift from an understanding of democracy as a series of procedures and events, to a more systemic understanding of democracy as a *way of life*.



**The guiding principle of the SPA is:
Add value to the OAS member States.**

To achieve such objective, the SPA has the following instruments:

1. Practitioners' networks (presential and online)

- Promote political dialogue and cooperation.
- Facilitate cross-fertilization of ideas and dissemination of good practices.

2. Knowledge management

- The SPA as a reference point and clearing house on priority issues.
- Making available information and experts

3. Voluntary peer-review-cum-knowledge sharing systems

4. Online training

- Multiply OAS interaction with civil society and the public sector in the Hemisphere.



The SPA is composed of the following departments:

- Department of Electoral Cooperation and Observation (DECO)
- Department of Sustainable Democracy and Special Missions (DSDSM)
- Department of Effective Public Management (DEPM)

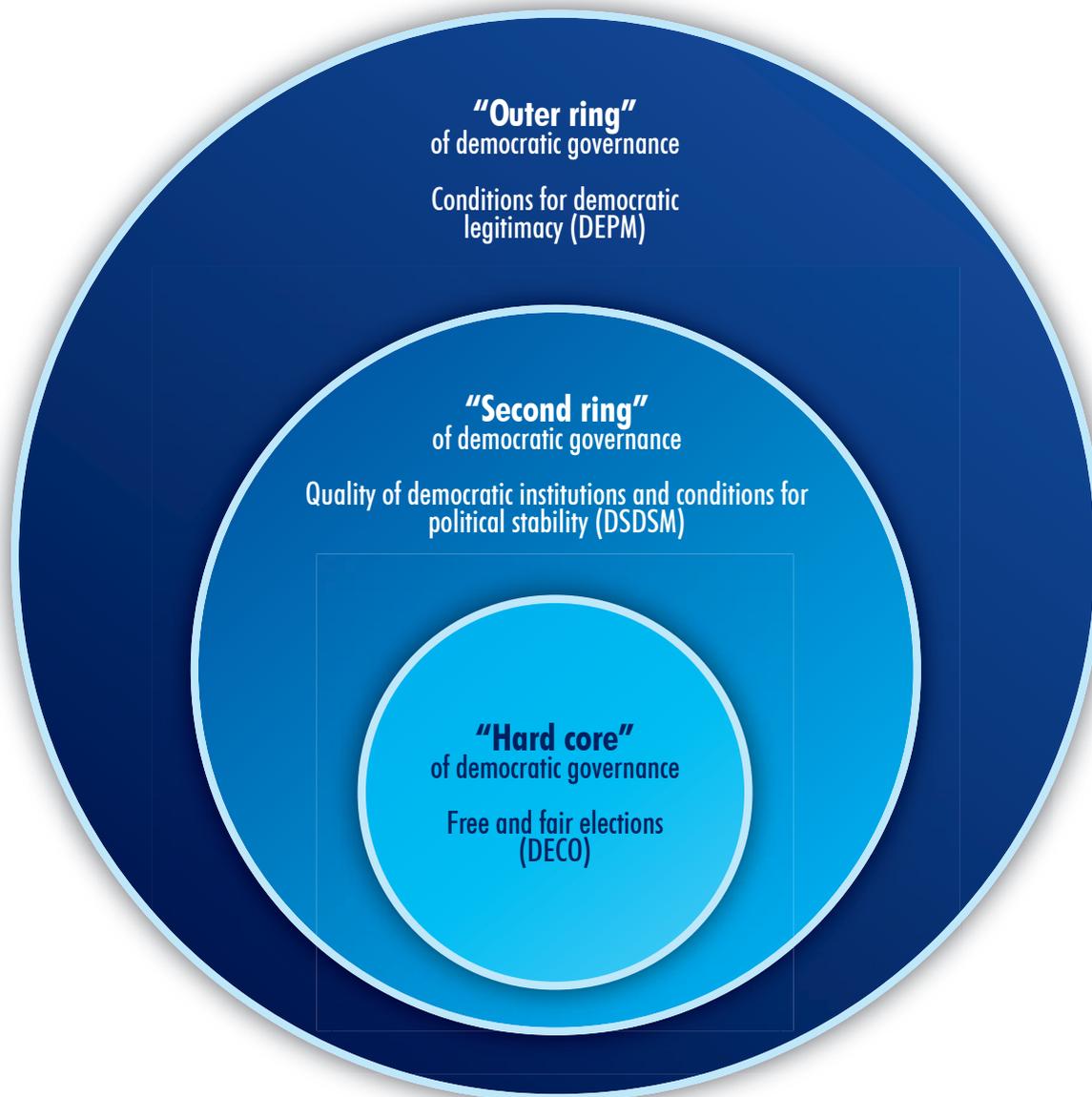
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The work of the Secretariat for Political Affairs (SPA) is essential to defend and promote democracy, one of the pillars that characterize our organization. Electoral observation missions, electoral technical cooperation, crisis prevention efforts, a civil registry program that enables individuals to enjoy their political and civil rights, and projects to strengthen institutions and improve their effectiveness, are some specific examples in which the SPA contributes to deepen democracy in the Hemisphere. Its job is not only achieved from the perspective of the minimum definition of democracy of free and fair elections, but from a broader understanding of democracy as a right of every citizen.

- José Miguel Insulza, Secretary General, OAS

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SPA: A GRAPHIC REPRESENTATION



DEPARTMENT OF ELECTORAL COOPERATION AND OBSERVATION (DECO)

DECO's mission is to contribute to the strengthening of democracy and the promotion of inclusive and competitive elections through technical cooperation, Electoral Observation Missions (EOMs), and the production, transfer and diffusion of knowledge on key areas of the electoral cycle.

The objectives of DECO are the following:

- Develop and provide technical cooperation to governments and electoral authorities in the Hemisphere.
- Foster horizontal cooperation between the electoral authorities in the region, serving as a facilitator of mutual learning through the exchange of information and experts.
- Organize, coordinate and deploy EOMs as requested by member States; and deploy technical electoral and extra-regional visits to promote the exchange of best practices in electoral observation.
- Strengthen the professional and institutional abilities of electoral authorities and of DECO staff through the production, transfer and diffusion of electoral knowledge.
- Generate spaces of exchange for the improvement of institutions and processes of the electoral cycle in the region.

DECO maintains a presence in all phases of the electoral cycle through the work of its three sections:

1. Electoral Technical Cooperation: contributes to the modernization and improvement of the quality of services provided by electoral authorities to key actors of an electoral process through institutional strengthening. The section focuses on areas such as:

- Electoral Technologies
- Registration/Electoral Registry
- Electoral Mapping
- Legislative Reform
- Electoral Organization and Logistics
- Electoral Administration
- Quality Management and Certification in Electoral Processes
- Promotion of Citizen Participation

2. Electoral Observation: Responsible for organizing, implementing, and following up on all EOMs through five strategic actions:

- Organization and implementation of OAS/EOMs
- Systematization of the information gathered by OAS/EOMs
- Follow-up of the recommendations emitted by OAS/EOMs
- Inter-institutional exchanges with organizations involved in international electoral observation
- Promotion and diffusion of the work of the OAS in electoral observation throughout the region

3. Electoral Studies and Projects: Strengthens professional and institutional abilities of electoral authorities and of DECO officials. The section works on the following areas:

Development of methodologies to observe key aspects of the electoral cycle:

- Gender equality in the electoral process
- Campaign finance
- Equal access to the media
- Use of electoral technologies
- Electoral participation of vulnerable groups

Research and publications:

- Funding of Political Parties in Latin America
- Participation of Women and Men in Elections
- Use of Electoral Technologies in the Americas
- Best Practices of Electoral Observation

Exchange of Experiences:

- Inter-American Meeting of Electoral Authorities
- Inter-American Electoral Training Seminars
- Certificates in Electoral Processes in the Americas
- Online courses on political financing, electoral participation, and electoral registers



Photo: Michel Huneault

DECO'S ACHIEVEMENTS

- More than 200 EOMs organized since 1962 in 26 of the 34 OAS member States, deploying more than 5,000 international observers.
- Proclamation of February 4th as “OAS Electoral Observation Day” by the OAS Permanent Council.
- First joint EOM deployed by the OAS and CARICOM for the elections in Haiti in 2010 and 2011.
- Launch of the first Electoral Observation School.
- Adoption of a gender observation methodology has allowed OAS/EOMs to position the topic of women’s electoral participation as a key electoral issue. The implementation of the methodology has resulted in a significant increase in the EOM recommendations on this topic: The percentage of reports including recommendation on gender issues has increased from 10% (2000-07) to 88% (2010-13).
- Increase in the number of women acting as Chief of Mission (2005: 2% and 2012: 35%) and as Deputy Chief of Mission (2005: 3% and 2012: 60%) in EOMs.
- Implementation of 23 technical cooperation projects in 11 countries of the region, including five audits of electoral registers in Latin America, and implementation of Quality Management Systems in Electoral Authorities.
- Development of the first ISO International Standard (17582), and certification of two regional Electoral Authorities in the Quality Management Standard ISO 9001.
- Training of more than 200 officials from Electoral Authorities in the region, and more than 500 individuals through online courses.

DEPARTMENT OF SUSTAINABLE DEMOCRACY AND SPECIAL MISSIONS (DSDSM)

The Department of Sustainable Democracy and Special Missions (DSDSM) of the Secretariat for Political Affairs supports the General Secretariat in the promotion, protection and defense of democracy through the monitoring of political, social, and institutional conflicts, and the strengthening of representative institutions in the region.

DSDSM promotes democratic values and principles through the work of its five sections:

1. Political Analysis

- Systematic monitoring of the political situation of countries in the region in order to provide quality information to authorities of the General Secretariat. The system works in three modes: monitoring, early warning, and resolution.

2. Special Missions

- Technical support and advices to the Missions established by the Permanent Council and/or the Secretary General.

3. Dialogue and Mediation

- Technical support to member States to improve their institutional capacity in the prevention, management and resolution of social conflicts.

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Democracy is essential for the social, political, and economic development of the peoples of the Americas

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- Title I, Art. 1 of the Inter-American Democratic Charter (IDC)

The DSDSM integrates prevention, management, and conflict resolution.

4. Representative Institutions

- Strengthening of parliaments' institutional capacity.

5. Peace Fund

- Provides support for the peaceful resolution of territorial disputes.
- Through the Inter-American Peace Forum, fosters programs aimed at strengthening institutional capacity and experience in the peaceful resolution of international controversies.





DSDSM'S ACHIEVEMENTS:

- Support of 4 GS/OAS Special Missions: Bolivia (2008), Colombia-Ecuador (2008-10), Honduras (2009-11) and Paraguay (2012-13).
- Systematic monitoring and analysis of the political context of the countries in the region, to provide relevant and high-quality information to the decision-making processes of the Organization and to the efficient implementation of political and diplomatic actions.
- Support to the negotiation process to peacefully solve the territorial dispute between Belize and Guatemala.
- Implementation of Confidence Building Measures between Belize and Guatemala. Since 2005, the OAS Office in the Adjacency Zone (AZ/OAS) has completed 500 verifications and has organized more than 50 Field Commander coordination meetings of the armed forces of both countries.
- In the context of the Mission to Support the Peace Process in Colombia (MAPP):
 - More than 100 officers have been deployed in 15 offices throughout Colombia, verifying and monitoring the implementation of the Justice and Peace, and Resettlement laws, as well as working with communities and victims, disarmament/demobilization/reintegration (DDR) and monitoring of security conditions in the field.
 - Verification of the demobilization of more than 30,000 combatants; 18,000 arms destroyed; 27,940 victims assisted with the Justice and Peace process, and 234 community leaders trained on the Justice and Peace Law.
- Training of more than 300 officials from the OAS and the governments of Central America, Haiti, and the Andean Region in the prevention, management, and resolution of social conflicts.
- Promotion of technical cooperation and exchange of experiences between parliaments in more than 20 member States; and strengthening of the individual capacities of hundreds of legislators, advisors, and technocrats.

DEPARTMENT OF EFFECTIVE PUBLIC MANAGEMENT (DEPM)



Effective public management contributes to the legitimacy of democratic governance, which is strengthened if elected Governments depend on a state apparatus that can address citizens' demands in a transparent, effective, and sustainable manner. Nevertheless, it is also needed that citizens are active participants in the construction of a democratic society. In that regard, the mission of the DEPM is to contribute to a more effective, transparent, and participative public management for the *effective exercise of democracy*.

The objectives of the DEPM include:

- Incorporate public management as a priority on the political agenda of member States.
- Support countries in identifying best practices and challenges in public management to promote horizontal cooperation through mechanisms of dialogue and technical assistance.
- Promote mechanisms within public management for the access to information, transparency, and citizen participation.
- Contribute to the inclusion of benefits of a knowledge based society in public institutions.
- Generate knowledge in key topics of public management.
- Promote a comprehensive program to strengthen the management capabilities of municipalities.

“ Transparency in government activities, probity, responsible public administration on the part of governments, respect for social rights, and freedom of expression and of the press are essential components of the exercise of democracy

- Title I, Art. 4 of the Inter-American Democratic Charter (IDC). ”

The objective of the DEPM is to achieve public management while engaging civil society.

The DEPM is composed of 4 sections:

1. E-Government

- Network of e-Government Leaders of Latin America and the Caribbean (Red GEALC)
- Inter-American Government Procurement Network (RIGC)
- MuNet (Efficient and Transparent Municipalities)
- Virtual Campus (Courses on public management)
- Cadastre

2. Civil Registry

- Birth registration systems in hospitals
- Mobile registration and public awareness campaigns
- Recovery of destroyed records
- Institutional interoperability and database security
- Promotion of regional/international cooperation
- Identification and dissemination of best practices and successful experiences
- Analysis of under-registration
- Latin American and Caribbean Council for Civil Registration, Identity and Vital Statistics (CLARCIEV)

3. Innovation and Modernization for Public Management

- Space for mutual learning and exchange of experiences
- Guides of Strategies and Mechanisms for Public Management
- Inter-American program for Political and Public Management

4. Transparency and Access to Information

- Strengthening Institutions and/or Units in charge of the access to public information
- Annual Meeting of Transparency and Access to Public Information
- Annual Regional Report of Transparency and Access to Public Information
- Training of public sector employees
- Citizen awareness



- Digitization of more than 17.1 million records in Haiti's National Archives database.
- Civil registration and identity projects implemented in 18 countries
- 5.1 million adults registered in Haiti's National Identification Office
- Regularization of 9 million registries in Paraguay
- 600 employees trained in government procurement
- 10,000 employees trained in public administration through the Virtual Campus
- 120 municipalities participated in the Efficient and Transparent Local Governments Program.
- 15 projects on cadastre modernization implemented
- 21 courses available in public management through the Virtual Campus
- 200 public employees of El Salvador trained in management and institutional strengthening processes.

PROJECT PORTFOLIO AND CALL FOR ACTION

Let us work together to strengthen the role of the SPA to assist member States in the process of improving the quality of democracy in the Hemisphere. We need your support.

SPA PROJECT PORTFOLIO

- » Modernization of Haiti's civil registry system.
- » Technical support to e-government agencies in the region.
- » Strengthening of representative institutions in Central America.
- » Online course to strengthen the capacities of the OAS international election observers.
- » Capacity building to address social conflicts through mediation and dialogue.
- » Support of the Peace Fund and its principal activities (Belize-Guatemala Adjacency Zone and Inter-American Peace Forum).
- » Strengthening and modernization of the birth registry system in Paraguay.
- » From recommendations to action: improving the quality, impact of the data and recommendations derived from Electoral Observation Missions (EOMs).
- » Implementation of Quality Management Systems by the electoral authorities.
- » Training of public officials through the OAS Virtual Campus.
- » Development and implementation of an Identification System for Refugees in Ecuador.
- » Reconstruction of destroyed Civil Registers and regularization of affected populations in Peru, Colombia and Guatemala.
- » Institutional strengthening to the Government of El Salvador.
- » Launch of regional awareness campaigns on the right to access public information.



Contact us for more information: sap@oas.org

- » Preparation of a hemispheric annual report on the status of the implementation of access to public information laws.
- » Methodology to observe electoral participation of vulnerable groups.
- » Strengthening the Inter-American Political Analysis and Prospective System (SAPPI, by its Spanish acronym).
- » Contribute to a stable and lasting peace through the Mission to Support the Peace Process (MAPP/OAS) in Colombia.
- » Assessment of electoral participation in Latin America: proposal to establish the socio-demographic profile of voters.
- » Inter-American Meeting of Electoral Authorities to promote the exchange of hemispheric experiences.
- » Inter-American Electoral Training Seminars.

- » Improvement of the birth registry system in Central America.
- » Annual organization of the “Latin American Democracy Forum”.
- » Strengthening equity and transparency in political and electoral financing through the creation of a “toolbox” for electoral authorities.
- » Systematization of Judicial Decisions on Electoral Matters to Facilitate the Work of Institutions with Jurisdiction in Latin America.
- » Improving the quality of public administration through a hemispheric mechanism of exchange of perspectives of public management (MECIGEP, by its Spanish acronym).
- » Strengthening of technical capacities for an accurate re-registration of voters through a georeferenced address system in Antigua and Barbuda.

