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United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN RELATIONS

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6225

March 13, 2024

Secretary General Luis Almagro
Organization of American States
1889 F Street N.W.
Washington, DC 20006

Dear Secretary General Almagro and Member States of the OAS,

We are glad to see today's special session on legislative cooperation, and we are grateful to those who organized it – both the Committee on Judicial and Political Affairs and the Committee on Inter-American Summits Management and Civil Society Participation in OAS Activities.

Strong parliaments are a critical component of functioning democracies. Throughout history, elected national legislators have played an integral role in the exercise of representative democracy. This is true in the Americas, where parliaments have promoted economic freedom, defended the rule of law and human rights, and advanced the principles and practices expressed in the Charter of the Organization of American States and in the Inter-American Democratic Charter.

Our nations are working together to respond to 21st century challenges. That makes it more important than ever that we not only bolster cooperation between heads of states and governments but also between democratically elected national legislators who can better ensure their constituents are represented.

We know that strengthening inter-parliamentary cooperation in this manner at the OAS can strengthen the organization's ability to address pressing regional and global challenges. We have seen this first-hand through our work at the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly and the Helsinki Commission. There, for example, parliamentarians helped elevate efforts to combat trafficking in persons and helped shepherd the Global Magnitsky Sanctions Act. The OAS General Assembly has also recognized the need to strengthen inter-parliamentary cooperation through multiple resolutions over the course of more than two decades, including AG/RES. 1599 in 1998, AG/RES. 2119 in 2005, and AG/RES. 2989 in 2022.

ParlAmericas has laid a foundation for advancing parliamentary participation in the OAS in the immediate future. This week, we were heartened to hear members present a proposal they hope will integrate such participation into this institution. We welcome their proposals: to make an annual presentation to the OAS Permanent Council, to help convene an annual inter-parliamentary meeting to debate issues on the OAS political agenda, and to establish a parliamentary liaison office at the OAS. These ideas form good starting points to implement our

vision of a hemispheric parliamentary assembly as articulated in the OAS Legislative Engagement Act.

We believe two additional elements are critical for this success.

Through its organizational structure, the OAS at its highest levels must embrace and encourage the establishment of procedures and mechanisms to support the participation of democratically elected national legislators from OAS member states in OAS activities. The Secretary of State – working through the U.S. permanent mission to the OAS – is statutorily required to embrace this effort, and we expect that our Ambassadors throughout the hemisphere will do so. It is our sincere hope that the OAS and OAS member states will rally together to provide the financial resources necessary to support the greater institutional integration ParlAmericas is seeking.

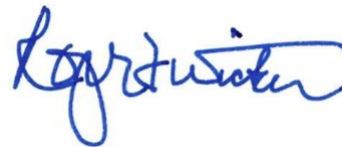
The next step necessary to increase parliamentarian participation within the OAS must be for ParlAmericas to expand its mandate beyond climate change, gender equality, and open government. It must also align with the OAS mandate and its four thematic pillars: democracy, human rights, integral development, and hemispheric security.

Through these efforts, we hope to see the OAS regard increased parliamentary cooperation as a means of further strengthening its mandate and the incorporation of parliamentarians as an integral part of its system. We believe doing so would allow the OAS to confront more efficiently the complex regional challenges it faces and help it strengthen democratic culture in the Western Hemisphere.

Sincerely,



Benjamin L. Cardin
Chairman
Senate Foreign Relations Committee



Senator Roger F. Wicker
Ranking Member
Senate Armed Services Committee