



Legislators met in Bogotá, Colombia, for Fifth FIPA Plenary Meeting

Debates over a cup of coffee

Warm Colombian hospitality set the tone at the Fifth Plenary Meeting, which gathered representatives from 19 countries of the Americas together in Bogotá.

From the 19th to 21st of November, 2006, legislators met in a relaxed and friendly atmosphere to discuss issues pertaining to the hemisphere, to re-elect part of the Executive Committee, and to elect a new president for the organisation, Brazilian parliamentarian Luiz Carlos Hauly. The balance the organisation seeks between political, economic and social issues was once again exemplified by the choice of themes covered: the struggle against drug trafficking, trade integration policies, and strategies for alleviating poverty. In addition to adopting recommendations in connection with these themes, participants expressed support for the UNESCO Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions, and agreed to form a joint working group between FIPA and the Parliamentary Confederation of the Americas (COPA) in order to consider a possible merger between the two. The Group of Women Parliamentarians of the Americas also elected its new President, Colombian senator Cecilia López Montaña. With

the amendment to the FIPA Regulations approved by the Plenary Assembly, both the president of the Women's Group and the out-going president of FIPA are now members of the Executive Committee.

At the beginning of deliberations Víctor Rico, a representative of the OAS,



A Colombian flag flies in the wind on top of the Congress.

urged participants to "formulate proposals and measures geared to the needs of citizens", and Senator Céline Hervieux-Payette urged them to "seek innovative solutions". Senator Nancy Patricia Gutiérrez from Colombia, who was in charge of organizing the event, emphasised "the need for common tools".

A rare occurrence marked the second day: Accustomed to listening passively during presidential addresses,

parliamentarians were delighted when the President of Colombia, Mr. Álvaro Uribe, opened the floor to an exchange of ideas after his speech. Parliamentarians were thus afforded the opportunity to express their concerns and opinions and to raise questions to which Mr. Uribe responded readily, and with

Photo: FIPA

president of the Colombian Congress, presented the outgoing president of FIPA, Senator Céline Hervieux-Payette, with the Colombian Congressional Order of the Great Gold Cross (la Orden del Congreso Gran Cruz con Placa de Oro). Toro Torres, the first woman to hold this position in Colombia, presented the distinction to Hervieux-Payette on behalf of the people of Colombia "in recognition of her contribution towards strengthening the ties of friendship and cooperation among peoples".

The meeting ended on a high, and with a thunder of applause. In Colombia, legislators experienced the many facets of FIPA, going beyond discussions and exchanges of ideas, to explore other cultures and new ways of seeing the world.

conviction.

As the meeting came to a close, legislators had the opportunity to choose a new president for FIPA, and Brazilian parliamentarian Luiz Carlos Hauly, a founding member of the organization, was elected by acclamation for a term of two years.

The big surprise of the event came during the closing ceremony, when Senator Dilian Francisca Toro Torres,

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Recommendations of the Fifth Plenary Assembly

The National Capitol in Bogotá, with its impressive ionic columns, bore witness to the hard work carried out by legislators at the Fifth Plenary Assembly of FIPA.

The working groups made recommendations, which were unanimously endorsed by the Plenary Assembly. The following is a summary of the recommendations:

The Trade and Integration Working Group

Chairman: Mr. James Bezan, Canadian Member of Parliament

Speaker: Paolo Giordano, Inter-American Development Bank (IDB)

In drawing up their recommendations, the group highlighted the need to maintain a balance between eliminating trade barriers and promoting trade policies that contribute to achieving greater equality in order to alleviate poverty. The group recommended pursuing the integration agenda of the Americas while strongly encouraging a hemispheric agreement that would bring together all bilateral agreements. Similarly, members of the World Trade Organization (WTO) were urged to resume multilateral negotiations to conclude the Doha Development Round and to eliminate international trade barriers.

In addition, the Working Group recommended adopting complementary domestic policies designed to foster entry into international markets, and the creation of sustainable development programmes, as well as programmes to alleviate poverty and improve living conditions.

The Poverty Reduction Working Group

Chairman: Deputy Iván Moreira Barros, Chile
Speakers: Ana Lucía Muñoz, Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) and Amelita Armit, Parliamentary Centre, Canada

The group favoured the consolidation of growth strategies with increased effectiveness of social spending and improved international cooperation among countries. In like



FIPA meeting participants at the grand staircase of the Colombian Congress.

manner, it also recommended setting up a political component to reduce poverty, as well as an economic component to include a greater tax levy on those with higher taxable incomes. In this context, it was further recommended that a working group from FIPA be devoted exclusively to studying the impact of the tax burden on the socioeconomic development of the economies of member states.

The group deemed it necessary to encourage Parliaments to propose transparent laws in their countries, in order to fight corruption and make better use

of the resources of the State. Furthermore, it proposed investment in science and technology, the promotion of universal education, and training in new areas of employment.

The Fight against Drug Trafficking Working Group

Chairwoman: Senator Sandra Husbands, Barbados

Speaker: Sandro Calvani, United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC)

international court against drugs.

The Group of Women Parliamentarians of the Americas

Chairwoman: Senator Cecilia López Montaña, Colombia

During this, their fourth meeting during an annual Plenary Meeting, this permanent FIPA work group approved its work plan for 2007-2008, which includes five potential projects.

Photo: Kerrie Rodier/Canadian section of FIPA

Taking into account the economic, social, political and legal aspects of the fight against drugs, the group recommended, among others, that countries establish crop-substitution and employment-promotion programmes, as well as educational programmes imparting new values to prevent drug consumption. They called for an international forum to address the role of the media in imparting these values. The Group encouraged member states to convene a meeting within the framework of the Organization of American States (OAS) and the United Nations (UN) to discuss creating an inter-American and

Two of the projects are intended to encourage women's involvement in politics through engagement and education. To this end, the group proposed sharing of experiences and providing advice through the Virtual Parliament and a project to be carried out during International Women's Week. Other projects include a Mentorship programme, a workshop on practical applications of the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW); and a workshop on methods for improving gender equality, inspired by the Bolivian experience.



The Legislature in Brazil

Photo: Bernardo Hélio

The Federal Republic of Brazil is a democratic State founded upon three Powers – Executive, Legislative and Judiciary.

The duty of the Legislature is to represent Brazilian citizens, to legislate on National matters, and to control the use of public resources. The National Congress is made up of representatives from all States, as well as the Federal District, the result of which is a Parliament with diverse and pluralistic ideas, in the service of Brazilian society.

The Chamber of Deputies is composed of 513 Deputies elected for a four year term, in accordance with a system of proportional representation based on the population of each State and that of the Federal District. A minimum of 8 and maximum of 70 Deputies represent the population of each part of the Federation.

The Federal Senate is made up of 81 Senators elected for an eight year term, according to a majority system. Each State, as well as the Federal District, is represented by three Senators. Representation is renewed, alternately, every four years by one and two thirds accordingly.

The organisation of the Legislative Power into two Houses, known as bicameralism, is a Brazilian constitutional tradition that has been in force since monarchical times (1822-1889). One of its main duties is to allow the Houses to revise and improve each other's proposals, through discussions of the issues and normal procedures in the Chamber of



Interior of the Brazilian Congress, Brasilia

Deputies and in the Senate. Parliamentarians may be elected for an indefinite number of terms.

Proposals are initially debated by the Permanent and Thematic Commissions of each House responsible for issues of National interest. Special commissions, such as Inquiry Commissions, can also be created. In order to support the Legislative's activities, the organizational structure includes a General Directorate that oversees the planning, coordination, and control of the managerial activities and is supported by the departments and sub-departments of management, human resources, and legislation. A permanent body of staff consultants supports Parliamentarians in their activities.

It is important to mention that the 1988 constitution —

created following the dictatorship — suspended the restrictions under which the Brazilian Legislature operated, widening its role in society. Currently, the new legislature to be inaugurated on February 1st has a strong representation

from the business and professional sectors. However, this legislature still maintains the tradition of representation from sectors such as traditional agriculture and religious protestant groups.

Chamber of Deputies (2007–2011)

- ◆ 513 deputies
- ◆ 45 women
- ◆ 468 men
- ◆ Main parties:
 - Brazilian Democratic Movement 17.3 % (centre-right)
 - Workers Party 16.1 % (centre-left)
 - Social Democracy 12.8 % (centre-left)
 - Liberal Front 12.6% (centre-right)
 - Others 41.1 %

Federal Senate (2007–2011)

- ◆ 81 senators
- ◆ 11 women
- ◆ 70 men
- ◆ Main parties:
 - Liberal Front 22.2 % (centre-right)
 - Brazilian Democratic Movement 20.9 % (centre-right)
 - Social Democracy 17.3 % (centre-left)
 - Workers Party 12.3 % (centre-left)
 - Others 27.3 %



Our new president

Photo: FIPA

The process of integration of the Americas is a commitment undertaken by Senators and Members of Parliament who participate in FIPA as representatives of their countries. It is for this reason that, today, as President of this Forum, I would like to reiterate my desire to seek integration with the Parliamentary Confederation of the Americas—COPA—so that this union may strengthen all Parliaments, in the spirit of fraternity and reinvigorated democracy.

We have made great progress since the creation of FIPA. From humble beginnings we have developed a greater understanding of the functioning of our legislatures; we have shared our uncertainties and our aspirations as we face economic globalization and its troublesome side effects, such as wealth concentration, with their

negative effect on development.

The road is long, but our steps grow longer and we move forward towards eliminating the barriers to the free movement of people and to the observation of the rules of good citizenship and respect to human rights. Our challenge now is to organize ourselves, within our community, so that our countries may be integrated into the international context, as partners.

Our next meeting will take place in March — when we will work to organize our agenda for the coming years. I would like to encourage everyone to work towards our increased representation, so that our ongoing efforts might result in the transformation of FIPA into the future Parliament of the Americas.

Deputy Luiz Carlos Haully, Brazil, President of FIPA 2006-2008



Deputy Luiz Carlos Haully, President

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.

Trade workshop in Ottawa

The Canadian Section of FIPA invites legislators of the Americas to participate in a workshop on **strengthening knowledge and skills for trade**, to be held the **18, 19 and 20 of March 2007**, in **Ottawa**. The workshop will cover themes such as:

- Trade rules and politics
- The role of parliament and the consultation process
- The links between trade, poverty reduction and gender equality

For more information or to register, please contact Sabra Ripley at the FIPA Technical Secretariat.

United for Cultural Diversity

The UNESCO Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions will enter into force on March 18, 2007, three months after the date of deposit of the thirtieth instrument of ratification.

Adopted in October 2005 by the UNESCO General Conference, the objectives of the Convention are, among others, to reaffirm “the importance of the link between culture and development” and “the sovereign rights of States to maintain, adopt and implement policies and measures that they deem appropriate for the protection and promotion of the diversity of cultural expressions on their

territory”.

Representatives of the legislatures in attendance at the Fifth Plenary Meeting in Bogota reiterated their support for the Convention by recommending to the Parliaments of the Americas to take steps as quickly as possible to join the ranks of those countries who have become parties to the convention. They urged governments in the region to adopt policies for implementing provisions of the treaty. So far six countries of the Americas have become parties to the Convention: Bolivia, Canada, Ecuador, Guatemala, Mexico and Peru.

FIPA EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

President

- Deputy Luiz Carlos Haully, Brazil

North America

- James Bezan, MP, Canada
- Senator Ricardo García Cervantes, Mexico

Central America

- Deputy Gudy Rivera Estrada, Guatemala
- Stanford Callender, MP, Trinidad and Tobago

Caribbean

- A representative of the Dominican Republic, to be confirmed
- Senator Brenda Hood, Grenada

South America

- A representative of Colombia, to be confirmed
- Deputy Iván Moreira Barros, Chile

Former FIPA president

- Senator Celine Hervieux-Payette, Canada

President of the Group of Women Parliamentarians of the Americas

- Senator Cecilia López Montaña, Colombia

Plenary Meeting host country

- To be confirmed

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