

PARLIAMENTARY GATHERING DURING THE VII SUMMIT OF THE AMERICAS

PANAMA CITY, PANAMA

APRIL 10, 2015



Parlamento Latinoamericano






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Written by: Lourdes Li | *Design:* Lisa Temes | *Photography:* © Parlatino | *Printing:* Senate of Mexico

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ABOUT



ParlAmericas — the network of national legislatures of the Organization of American States (OAS) — serves as an independent forum for parliamentarians of the Americas committed to cooperative political dialogue and participation in the inter-American system. Since 2001, ParlAmericas has created a supportive professional community for parliamentarians through regional forums, training opportunities, year-round discussions and follow-up actions. ParlAmericas is a space to share experiences and best practices on issues of hemispheric concern and to strengthen the ties between the countries of the hemisphere through parliamentary diplomacy.



Parlamento Latinoamericano

The Latin American Parliament (Parlatino) is a permanent, unicameral regional organization, comprising the democratically elected congressional and legislative bodies of the participating Latin American member States, who are represented by formalized, pluralistically-composed delegations. Parlatino thus represents the full spectrum of political leanings currently found throughout the legislative bodies of the Americas. It promotes, harmonizes and directs the movement towards integration. The institution's official languages are Spanish and Portuguese.

OPENING SPEECHES

The Parliamentary Gathering, co-organized by ParlAmericas and Parl Latino, took place on April 10, 2015, during the VII Summit of the Americas.

As representatives of the legislative branch — a pillar of democracy — the gathering was

attended by parliamentarians from 26 countries of North America, Central America, South America and the Caribbean. The participants shared legislative experiences and knowledge related to national and regional commitments on transparency, with a focus on democratic innovations and parliamentary ethics.





ADOLFO VALDERRAMA

President of the National Assembly of Panama

“We have to fight to ensure that state resources are equally distributed and not solely in the hands of a few. We have to bridge the disparity gap and guarantee legal security, promote transparency and respect freedom of expression.”



BLANCA ALCALÁ

Senator of Mexico and Secretary General of Parlatino

“The ideas brought forward today will surely allow us to refine solutions to improve the living conditions in all our communities, but above all, they will motivate us to ensure that we share with the public -- in a transparent way -- what we are doing as political representatives, how we go about our work and why we do it.”



MARCELA GUERRA

Senator of Mexico and President of ParlAmericas

“I hope that this gathering serves to remind us that we are directly responsible for the promotion and creation of democratic governments. I trust that by convening we will devise proposals and recommendations to promote legislative transparency across the Americas.”



ROB NICHOLSON

Minister of Foreign Affairs of Canada

“A healthy democracy is not possible without openness or transparency, and both are linked to the right to information and the freedom of expression. Democracy is both a journey and a destination. It is not enough to set rules and pass laws, it is not enough to build institutions, it is not enough just to have elections.”



ELÍAS CASTILLO

Member of the National Assembly of Panama and President of Parlatino

“It is crucial to be aware that governmental affairs are of public interest and that it is our moral responsibility to keep voters fully and continually informed. It is clear that our jointly coordinated initiatives will bring about benefits not only for our institutions, but for all of the people of the continent.”



RODOLFO NIN NOVOA

Minister of Foreign Affairs of Uruguay

“I defend parliamentary action. I congratulate you for these joint initiatives, meetings and exchanges between the American parliaments, and I wish you success in the work ahead of you today.”

MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING

Following the opening speeches, ParlAmericas and Parlatino signed a Memorandum of Understanding in which both bodies agree to increase mutual cooperation and joint initiatives. To formalize this important moment, Parlatino's President Elías Castillo, and ParlAmericas' President Marcela Guerra, signed the memorandum. Parlatino's Secretary General Blanca Alcalá also signed as witness.

This moment was significant for both organizations, as it marked the beginning of a new era of cooperation to develop activities and projects of benefit to the entire region of the Americas.



KEYNOTE SPEECH

“I hope that these partnerships become the norm, and that consultations and dialogue serve as a source of ongoing inspiration to us.”

Luis Almagro, Secretary General Elect of the OAS, began his keynote speech by highlighting the need to work towards legislative transparency at all levels. He stressed that ongoing communication between elected officials and citizens, as well as accountability are key to democracy. Almagro expressed his

enthusiasm for the creation of a joint agenda for ParlAmericas and Parlatino, promoting dialogue, finding solutions to social conflicts and increasing participation, efficiency and effectiveness in parliamentary management. He put forth his commitment to this work on legislative transparency, and stressed the connections among the values and principles of transparency and ethics, the accountability of public powers in the hemisphere, and the increasing collaboration with traditional media outlets to disseminate parliamentary activities.



PANEL 1:
**“DEMOCRATIC
INNOVATIONS”**
PARLIAMENTARY
PERSPECTIVES
FROM ACROSS
THE REGION

In light of the major changes occurring in parliaments and societies at large, the parliamentarians in attendance explored the opportunities that new technologies present for democratic innovation and citizen participation.

This panel was moderated by Luis Eduardo Quirós, Member of the National Assembly of

Panama, and featured the following panellists: José Roberto Alejos, Member of Congress of Guatemala; Gina Godoy, Member of the National Assembly of Ecuador; Earl Dreeshen, Member of Parliament of Canada; Domingos Neto, Member of the Chamber of Deputies of Brazil; and Alejandro Encinas, Senator of Mexico.





PRESENTATIONS

The delegates began the session by commenting on access to technology and its role in improving transparency in the Americas. They stressed that work in this area is ongoing and difficult given that the legislative branch receives much public criticism regarding transparency. Citizens are entitled to information, transparency and accountability, they stated, and the executive, legislative and judicial powers must defend these rights.

The panellists focused on the need to legislate so that it is neither the State nor its institutions that monitor congress but rather civil society

— and that civil society is given adequate resources to do so. They explained that in some countries in the region, there are digital platforms that provide abundant information about parliamentarians and their political activities. This helps transform the public's negative view of the financial management of congress. The necessity of citizen participation in all parliamentary matters was a key point in all interventions; there was also agreement about the need for political will to develop initiatives that foster citizen engagement as well as collaborative work among legislators. The

panellists also highlighted that while technology is important for facilitating communication, we must not forget face-to-face interaction, which is just as important. The panel concluded with a proposal to create a framework law on transparency and access to information, which would serve as a reference document to harmonize legislation across the hemisphere.

The creation of a microsite to be included on all parliaments' official websites was also proposed, which would provide information on transparency in all countries of the region.

QUESTION AND ANSWER PERIOD

During the question and answer period, parliamentarians and civil society representatives shared insights on the activities being carried out in their respective countries related to democratic innovations. The majority of participants agreed that there is a major lack of trust by citizens towards parliamentarians and that action must be taken to minimize this gap; broad political reform is necessary to bring together the political class and citizens.

It was agreed that media outlets can serve as tools to share information about and promote the initiatives being undertaken. The better informed citizens are, the stronger their relationships with political representatives will be. The delegates also agreed that education on democratic and constitutional principles should increase as well. Relationships between political parties and with media outlets are crucial in order to present a united front with regards

to transparency. It is also necessary to have a space in which citizens can evaluate legislative performance. Examples were shared from certain countries in which mechanisms exist for citizens to remove legislators or other elected officials from office upon failure to fulfill the political agenda set forth upon their candidacy. The panellists concluded that communication must go beyond traditional outlets if parliamentarians want to achieve greater citizen engagement.

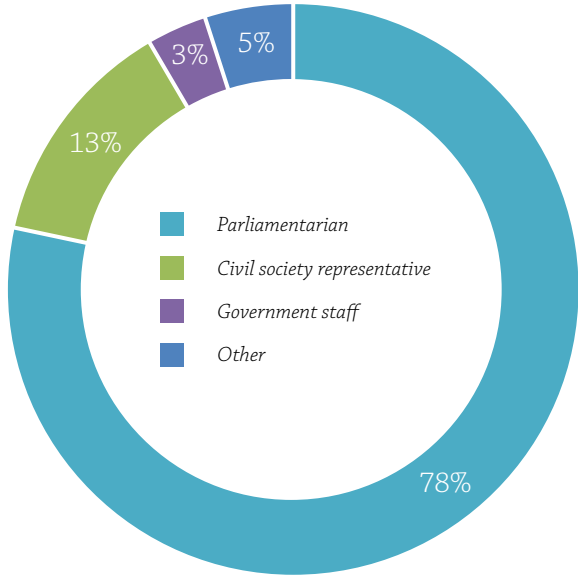


SURVEY: DEMOCRATIC INNOVATIONS

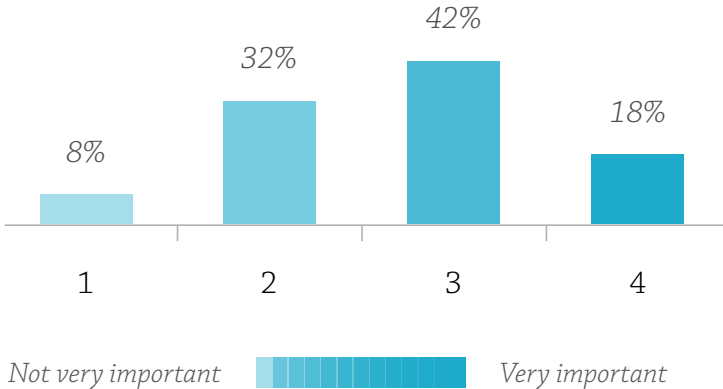
A survey was administered to the delegates with the objective of gathering their perspectives on democratic innovations.

The survey results below are based on a scale of 1 to 4, with 1 being the lowest and 4 the highest.

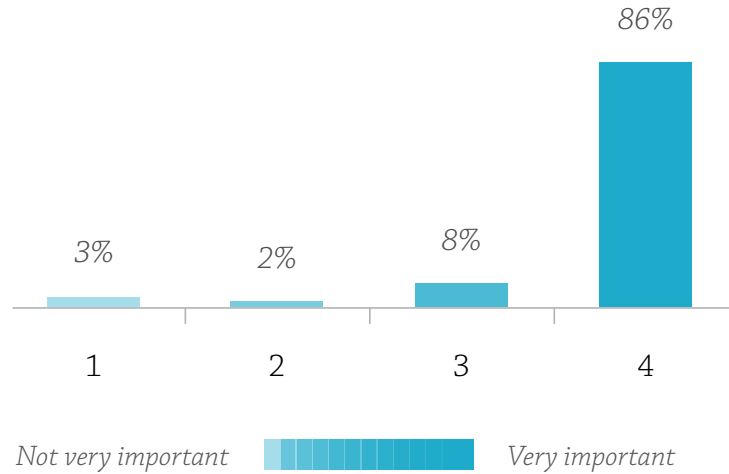
1. Profile



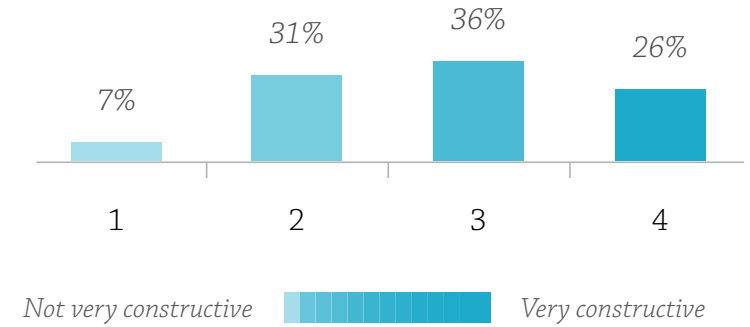
2. How transparent is your country's parliament?



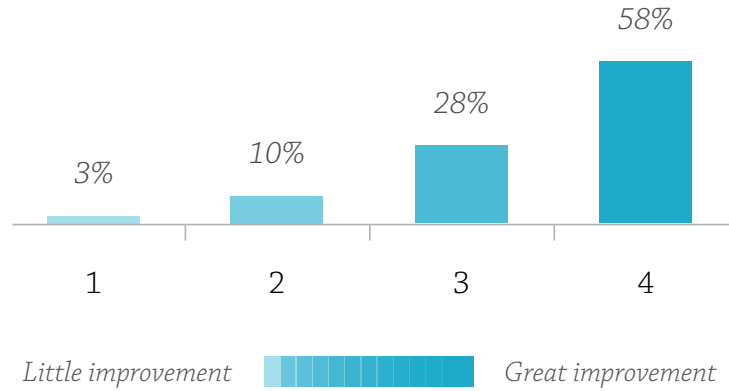
3. How important is technology in improving legislative transparency?



4. How constructive is civil society in relation to accountability in your country?



5. To what extent do you feel that cooperation (or better cooperation) with civil society can improve legislative ethics?



PANEL 2:
“PARLIAMENTARY
ETHICS”

PARLIAMENTARY
PERSPECTIVES
FROM ACROSS THE
REGION

The second panel took place in the afternoon and was moderated by Ana Matilde Gómez, Member of the National Assembly of Panama, and featured the following panellists: Miguel Edgardo Martínez, Member of Congress of Honduras; Wade Mark, Speaker of the House of Representatives of Trinidad and Tobago; Epsy Campbell, Member of the Legislative Assembly of Costa Rica; and Jorge Pedraza, Senator of Colombia.

During the panel discussion, the parliamentarians shared their experiences with parliamentary openness, transparency and ethics agendas.

The delegates began by discussing codes of ethics. Several put forth examples from their countries, explaining that parliamentarians sign a code of ethics, which obliges them to comply with their electoral agenda once elected to public office.





PRESENTATIONS

Delegates expressed that they generally have access to the necessary tools to keep citizens informed, such as “Ethics Offices.” They also pointed out that while some countries lack established legislative codes, they do have codes of ethics concerning day to day conduct. However, they acknowledged that often these codes are not well-known or abided by, which may give rise to instances of corruption, widening the gap between ethics governing private and political conduct, and

between citizens’ expectations of their political representatives and the latter’s actual behaviour, resulting in a loss of political credibility. As corruption tends to result in significant media exposure, parliamentarians’ public images may be especially affected by such cases; however, delegates stressed that loss of political credibility is not due to media exposure, but rather to the negative behaviour of public officials and former public officials. The panellists concluded by proposing a series of specific actions to resolve

these problems, including instilling public morals and ethics in educational curriculum, creating laws that establish open parliaments and governments and promote transparency in public processes, and imposing restrictions with respect to lobby and penal laws, harmonizing standards across the continent. Afterwards, the floor was opened to all participants, giving way to a discussion concerning civil society.

QUESTION AND ANSWER PERIOD

Delegates all agreed that citizens do not feel that parliamentarians debate issues pertinent to their day to day lives. In addition, economic inequality and the salary gap between politicians and the average citizen in many countries further contributes to the distance and mistrust between legislators and citizens. Continuing this discussion on ethics, delegates stated that the first step was ensuring that politicians follow through on their ballot-box promises. It was agreed that deteriorating political credibility is due in large part to the disconnect between electoral campaign agendas and the activities

actually undertaken by parliamentarians -- in other words, broken promises coupled with corruption and abuses of power. They also specified that ethic conduct should stem from both a political and a personal commitment, and that ethics are built from consistency, professionalism and follow-through. Delegates affirmed that in order for parliamentarians to promote and abide by ethical standards and behaviour, governments must provide strong political leadership on the basis of integrity and honesty. They noted that strong parliaments form the basis for a strong democracy, and

therefore it is important that legislative information is accessible and that civil society participates in legislative debates and law making. Finally, the panel concluded with reflections on the importance of constantly evaluating parliamentarians' capacity to faithfully represent the public interest, noting that at times conduct viewed as acceptable in political circles is in fact unethical. A proposal was put forth to create a document outlining standardized codes of conduct to be implemented across the region.



DECLARATION OF THE ASSEMBLED PARLIAMENTARIANS OF THE AMERICAS ON THE OCCASION OF THE VII SUMMIT OF THE AMERICAS

PANAMA CITY, PANAMA

The Government of Panama is hosting the VII Summit of the Americas from April 10 to 11, 2015, to serve as a platform for the heads of State and Government from across the hemisphere to hold debates under the theme of “Prosperity with Equity: The Challenge of Cooperation in the Americas” – including the sub-themes of democratic governance and citizen participation.

As pillars of democracy, parliamentarians from 26 countries of the Americas are convening on the occasion of the Summit, with the purpose of exchanging experiences and knowledge related to national and regional commitments



on transparency, with a focus on democratic innovations and parliamentary ethics. To this end, at the Parliamentary Gathering, organized by the Latin American Parliament (Parlamento Latinoamericano) and ParlAmericas, delegations of parliamentarians committed to the promotion of high standards of legislative transparency:

WHEREAS:

It is an obligation of our parliaments to contribute to peace and to the region's democracy through peaceful and constitutional

avenues, and for this reason it is urgent to actively promote among citizens that would take advantage of new information technologies for education and citizen participation.

Legislatures benefit from a vibrant civil society and from the existence of strong mechanisms for inclusive political engagement of citizens, both in understanding citizen priorities and in helping ensure accountability of parliamentarians to the citizens they represent;

The nature of legislative representation is

evolving, as citizens are able to communicate more easily with each other, and with their representatives, as a result of greater access to mobile communications and the internet, as well as the spread of social media;

The Americas has been a leading region in democratic innovation, from groundbreaking work on participatory budgeting; and through efforts to use new technology to engage citizens;

Latin America has played a leading role globally in sharing information on legislative openness through various organizations, among them the Legislative Openness Working Group of the Open Government Partnership;

New technologies also provide legislatures with increased opportunities to engage citizens in legislative work—including rural populations living in poverty and other marginalized groups—thereby providing an opportunity to strengthen confidence in public institutions;

Advances in digital communications have also helped to increase citizens' expectations of their legislatures, including an increase in said expectations with respect to transparency and ethics;

Leaders of the parliaments of the Americas issued the Lima Declaration in July 2014, through which they made commitments to bring governments closer to the people, support transparency and accountability in parliamentary work, and facilitate social inclusion;

It is the will of the Parliaments of the continent to promote and improve transparency mechanisms, recognizing the work that various organizations carry out on this issue, among them the *Red Latinoamericana por la Transparencia Legislativa*;

There exists a growing body of international norms and standards on legislative transparency and ethics, including the Santiago Declaration on Parliamentary Transparency and Integrity in Parliaments and Political Parties, which was signed in Santiago de Chile in January 2012; the Declaration on Parliamentary Openness, which has been endorsed by more than 160 civil society organizations in more than 80 countries, and new standards on codes of ethics for parliamentarians being developed by the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association;

RESOLVE

To support the following recommendations:

1. To commit to the strengthening of regional cooperation and to the exchange of best practices, keeping in mind the evolution of citizen expectations of legislatures with respect to transparency and ethics in our societies, and to utilize the technological advances and the experience of leaders on these themes in the Americas, with the objective of strengthening regional cooperation and the exchange of best practices, including the possibility of developing common benchmarks on openness and parliamentary ethics and conduct. For this reason, the participating organizations at this Gathering invite other forums and legislative assemblies to promote parliamentary transparency and ethics that respond to citizens' expectations.
2. Facilitate collaboration between the Latin American Parliament and ParlAmericas, with the Legislative Openness Working Group of the Open Government Partnership and other stakeholders to work on legislative

transparency that would lead to regional cooperation.

Adopted on April 10, 2015 in Panama City, Panama

3. Foster among member parliaments of the organizations mentioned above to collect and share information on codes of conduct and codes of ethics, as well as best practices on disclosure of interests, with the possibility of developing regional and sub-regional initiatives on parliamentary ethics and transparency.
4. Encourage the opening of the legislatures of the region so that they may collaborate with civil society groups, technologists and citizens with the objective of improving the capacity of parliaments in the digital era.

Parliamentarians expressed their satisfaction with and approval of the agenda of the VII Summit of the Americas which convenes the Heads of State and Government of our countries and agree with the necessity of achieving true regional integration, the only path for countries to achieve sustainable development on central issues such as education, health, energy, the environment, migration, security, citizen participation and democratic governance.



Parliamentarians for the Americas

International Secretariat of ParlAmericas
710 - 150 Wellington St., Ottawa,
Ontario, K1P 5A4 Canada

Telephone: + 1 (613) 594-5222

Fax: + 1 (613) 594-4766

www.parlamericas.org

info@parlamericas.org

