



Organization of
American States
More rights for more people



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EDITORIAL

Editorial

Jeanelle van GlaanenWeygel
Jacynth Henry-Martin

Organization of American States

In marking its 70th Anniversary, the OAS is proud to collaborate with the University of the West Indies through its Institute of International Relations (UWI/IIR) to commemorate this historic milestone with the publication of a special issue of the Caribbean Journal of International Relations and Diplomacy (CJIRD). This special commemorative edition seeks to reflect on the past achievements and shortfalls of the Organization, and to contemplate its outlook beyond the first 70 years, even as it strives to fulfill its mandate in the face of multi-pronged challenges to its institutional foundation.

Over 200 years after Simon Bolivar expressed his vision of a unified hemisphere in his famous “Letter from Jamaica”, the Organization of American States, which was eventually established to pursue Bolivar’s vision of unity, celebrates its 70th anniversary. Dr. Alberto Lleras, the Organization’s first Secretary General, in May 1948, explained that he was wholly convinced to accept such a position based entirely on his conviction that “the modern course of inter-American relations represents humanity’s most extraordinary and successful experiment by a group of nations living together in dignity and peace”¹.

Since its establishment in April 1948 with 21 signatory states, the OAS has expanded to include all 35 independent countries in the Western Hemisphere, which strive as a primary objective through the OAS to maintain peace and security, and to strengthen solidarity and collaboration among Member States. In a region which lays claim to the highest level of income inequality and the highest murder rates per capita in the world, and in which we co-

exist within the ambit of many conflicting ideologies, this is no mean feat.

The first Secretary General alerted his contemporaries to the dangers which inequality and abject poverty posed to stability in the hemisphere, and ultimately to hemispheric security². Carlos Fuentes, the keynote speaker at a signal 50th anniversary event, spoke of the major challenge to “finally bring together political democracy, economic growth and social justice”³, which, he opined “at the same time offers a great opportunity for the hemisphere.” Fuentes cautioned that although the hemisphere had made significant strides in its levels of democratic organization, if it did not improve the wellbeing of its citizens, it risked slipping back into the authoritarianism that marked its political history.

To underscore the commitment of the OAS to creating opportunities in support of the development of our people, the current OAS Secretary General, Luis Almagro, selected the theme: “More rights for more people” as the motto and underlying tenet of the Organization’s objectives during his tenure⁴.

THE EVOLUTION OF THE OAS

In 1948, the first major evolution witnessed the transformation of the hemispheric Organization from the Pan American Union, as it was then called, to the Organization of American States (OAS). The signing of various key Inter-American treaties in the initial transition phase contributed to the crucial external defense position of Member States of that era, ensuring through this framework that this hemisphere enjoyed the longest span of uninterrupted peace since World War II, in terms of inter-state conflict. These legal instruments included, among others, the 1947 Inter-American Treaty of Reciprocal Assistance (Rio Treaty), the 1948 American Declaration of the Rights and Duties of Man (the first declaration of its kind, which predated the Universal Declaration), the Pact of Bogota on the Peaceful Settlement of Disputes, and the OAS Charter⁵.

The establishment of the Inter-American Development Bank in April 1959 within the framework of the OAS contributed to a greater focus on development issues, as did the accession to membership of several Caribbean States in the 1960s and 1970s as part of their post- independence geo-political strides.

The role of the OAS in the area of human rights evolved from a primary focus on the promotion of human rights as expressly

articulated in the Charter, to a stronger focus on the defence of human rights, this as the hemisphere grappled with the emergence of dictatorships in South America and the outbreak of civil wars in Central America. The importance of the Inter American Human Rights System increased with the adoption of the Inter American Convention on Human Rights and the establishment of the Inter American Commission on Human Rights in 1959, bolstered by the installation in 1979 of the Inter American Court of Human Rights⁶.

The end of the Cold War, the accession to membership of additional States including Canada and those of the Caribbean, the steady transition from authoritarianism in South America and the end of civil wars in Central America all contributed to the strengthening of democracy in the hemisphere. Important legal instruments in this regard include: Resolution 1080, the Protocol of Cartagena de Indias of 1985, the Protocols of Managua and Washington, which amended the OAS Charter, and the 2001 Inter American Democratic Charter⁷.

In the area of security, the Organization's focus changed from collective security towards external threats to a multidimensional approach to security, prioritizing hemispheric cooperation to address more imminent threats from within the hemisphere, such as transnational organized crime, drug and human trafficking, natural disasters and pandemics. With the shift in focus in the area of security came the establishment of the Inter American Drug Abuse Control Commission (CICAD) in 1986, the Inter American Committee against Terrorism (CICTE) in 1999 and the Secretariat for Multidimensional Security⁸.

Although the fundamental name ascribed to the Organization's four main pillars (democracy, development, human rights and security) have remained the same, the scope of their focus has evolved over time in response to the changing needs of Member States, and in line with contemporary international relations and the availability of resources. As the OAS celebrates its 70th anniversary in 2018, the many achievements of this Organization must be recognized and applauded, even as we remain cognizant that the road towards sustained solidarity and cooperation for the betterment of the peoples of this hemisphere remains a work in progress.

In this special commemorative issue of the CJIRD, Ambassador Anthony W.J. Phillips-Spencer gives an *Assessment of the Role of the OAS in Promoting Multidimensional Security in the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) 2002-2017*. He discusses the CARICOM

promoted concept of multidimensional security that emerged as a priority for the OAS, the challenges faced by OAS Member States in incorporating this new concept into the OAS security agenda, as well as the results and opportunities of the continued promotion of multidimensional security for the Caribbean Community. Ambassador Phillips-Spencer completes his assessment with a look at the future role of the OAS in its multidimensional approach to security, and stresses the need for a more integral and inclusive approach to OAS support to the Caribbean Community, particularly the quality and quantity of support, considering the reality of severe resource constraints.

Professor Rose-Marie Bell Antoine's paper: "*Access to Rights for Vulnerable Groups: LGBTI, Children, Afro-descendants, Indigenous people, Women, Persons with Disabilities in the Inter-American Human Rights System*" provides an overview of the special human rights organs of the OAS and their evolution, including challenges and successes in ensuring and improving access to rights for the citizens of the Americas, particularly vulnerable groups. She gives a brief history of the Inter American Human Rights System, its tools and principles, and speaks to how it addresses the rights of vulnerable groups. She highlights some of the most significant human rights developments of the most vulnerable groups in our societies and hemisphere. She concludes by highlighting the importance of economic, social and cultural rights, and how access to and the protection of the rights of vulnerable groups have been considerably broadened and strengthened, providing in the process pathways for equity and increased access to fundamental rights for citizens of OAS member states.

In "*The Organization of American States: Evolution of the Election Observation in the Inter-American System 1962-2017*", Dr. Lisa Vasciannie discusses the evolution of election observation by the OAS, through a timeline starting with the Organization's first electoral observation mission in Costa Rica in 1962, to regional support to the United Nations in 1989 in Nicaragua, and the historic first invitation to the OAS to observe a Presidential Election in the United States of America in 2016. She describes the measures taken by the OAS to improve the quality of its electoral observation missions, and which have ultimately strengthened the operations and professionalism of the Organization. Dr. Vasciannie also highlights the financial challenges faced in executing such missions, and touches on new opportunities to execute such missions which position the OAS to fulfil its mandate to strengthen

democracy in the Americas. She speaks to the role of OAS observers in improving the quality of elections and concludes that despite the many challenges throughout its evolution, the Organization's overall international election observations have improved in significant measure.

From the perspective of Mexico's historical and recent involvement in the OAS, Dr. Natalia Saltalamacchia Ziccardi, discusses the relevance of the OAS in her paper: "*Mexico and the OAS: A Growing Relationship*". She describes Mexico's attitude towards the OAS as evolving from a more cautious one during the Cold War period, to a more committed position in the post-Cold War international order. The cooperative environment in the Americas paved the way for Mexico's active involvement in addressing pressing transnational issues at the hemispheric level by hosting significant OAS Conferences, including the 47th General Assembly in 2017. Dr. Saltalamacchia Ziccardi describes Mexico's efforts, at the 47th General Assembly, to address some of its multilateral priorities and to strengthen the OAS. She concludes her policy paper by stressing Mexico's commitment to the OAS, amidst contemporary challenges, and she underscores the need for the OAS to improve its reputation and to keep proving its relevance as it continues to respond to the demands of the peoples of the Americas.

Former Jamaican Prime Minister Bruce Golding starts by assessing the challenges to integration in his analysis of "*The future of regional integration and particularly political dialogue in the Western Hemisphere*". He describes the difficult path for the OAS to hemispheric unity from its establishment during the Cold War and beyond. The post-Cold War era brought many positive developments, such as democratic governance and respect for human rights, but Golding opines that old anxieties based on mistrust and insolation continued. He further stresses the need for visionary leadership in this hemisphere with the ability of focusing on the big picture and shared benefits for all in order to progress toward greater integration. The importance of civic engagement in reaching meaningful integration and the challenges in reaching a shared agenda among OAS member states are also highlighted, as well as the avoidance of openly addressing the fear of US hegemony in the hemisphere, which Golding describes as "the most significant impediment to hemispheric integration". The failure of governments to successfully implement economic reforms needed for sustained growth and to improve the quality of life of citizens

also harm the integration process. In assessing the OAS, Golding posits that Cuba's unwillingness to return to the OAS and Venezuela's recent decision to withdraw from the OAS call into question the Organization's effectiveness and relevance. As times and circumstances have changed, Golding believes that a comprehensive review of the OAS Charter, its programs and operating procedures would be appropriate. He states that the OAS should urgently review the scope of its work and redefine its priorities, as well as support the process of deeper integration among groups of countries within the region. He concludes by advising the OAS to take a deep introspective look at itself and become a real agent of change that is more proactive rather than reactive.

OAS Assistant Secretary General, Ambassador Nestor Mendez in his *"Forward looking Vision of the OAS"* highlights some of the main achievements of the OAS in responding to the evolving demands of its Member States and transformative processes in the Americas. He also discusses the OAS as the single most important platform in the hemisphere for political dialogue, consensus building and collective action. The benefits that Caribbean member states derive from their membership in the OAS are highlighted, as well as recommendations in addressing the negative effects of climate change and of the most significant challenges anticipated for the region in the next decade. Ambassador Mendez further describes the Organization's role in supporting member states with the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the Paris Agreement, as well as in addressing the region's great income inequality. He expresses the commitment of the OAS General Secretariat in implementing the mandates of the Member States, the Organization's decision makers. He concludes by sharing his views on the trajectory of the OAS over the next two decades.

The papers in this special commemorative issue of the CJIRD provide a concise overview of some of the Organization's main achievements, as well as constructive criticism and recommendations on the way forward to creating "more rights for more people". It has been acknowledged that this will by no means be an easy task, considering the many challenges facing us in this hemisphere in an era of "fake news" and the re-emergence of authoritarianism in the Americas⁹. Nevertheless, the peoples of the Americas have lived through greater challenges, as has this Organization that has for seventy years sought to strengthen the bond of friendship, peace and goodwill among its members. As

such, the Organization of American States will continue to evolve and to adapt to new challenges and opportunities ahead as it builds on its inspiring legacy and its paramount objective to bring improvement to the lives of the people of the Americas.

Within the OAS, while much organizational effort has been made to meet the needs and special concerns of CARICOM member states to date, principally through the SMS, an improved level of policy integration between the SMS and the other principal agencies and secretariats of the OAS, such as the Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA), the Inter-American Defense Board (IADB), the Executive Secretariat for Integral Development (SEDI), and, the Secretariat for Access to Rights and Equity (SARE), should further increase the governance and effectiveness of the role of the OAS in addressing new, non-traditional and multidimensional security threats and vulnerabilities. The vulnerability-driven character of the Caribbean security environment includes multidimensional security concerns such as climate change, non-communicable diseases, complex humanitarian emergency assistance, food security, and forced migration. Addressing these interdependent challenges requires a coherent approach. Similarly, a greater tendency for inclusive strategy development should serve to increase the strategic guidance, alignment and efficacy in targeting the region's priorities and goals with the Organization's instruments and initiatives.

NOTES

¹ Remarks of Dr. Alberto Lleras, Secretary General of the Organization of American States, at the Pan American Union, on May 24th, 1948.

² Ibid.

³ Keynote Address by Carlos Fuentes, Fiftieth Anniversary of the Organization of American States Special Edition of the Inter American Review of Bibliography, Vol. XLVIII, 1998, No.3.

⁴ Luis Almagro, At his Inauguration, May 26, 2015, Washington DC, http://www.oas.org/en/about/speech_secretary_general.asp?sCodigo=15-0038

⁵ José Miguel Insulza, Secretary General of the Organization of American States, A Strategic Vision of the OAS, Second Presentation, April 17, 2013 - Washington, DC, http://www.oas.org/en/media_center/speech.asp?sCodigo=13-0027

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Americas politics: Another year of deterioration for Latin American democracy, From the Economist Intelligence Unit, February 6, 2018