THE ORGANIZATION OF AMERICAN STATES AND ITS QUEST FOR DEMOCRACY IN THE AMERICAS

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Abstract—The history of the Organization of American States (OAS) mirrors that of its member states and their sixty-four-year-old struggle to balance the principle of non-intervention with exceptions to it in the name of democracy and human rights. With decisions based on consensus, that struggle now focuses on how best to apply the 2001 Inter-American Democratic Charter.

FROM THE WAR TO END COLONIAL DOMINATION in the United States of America to the wars of independence in South America and the fights for independence in Central America, the notion of democracy has constantly driven the aspirations of the peoples of the Americas. It therefore came as no surprise that when representatives of the Americas founded the Organization of American States in 1948, as the successor to the Pan American Union, they included this powerful statement in what is now Article 3 of its founding Charter:1 “The solidarity of the American States and the high aims which are sought through it require the political organization of those States on the basis of the effective exercise of representative democracy.”

Ever since then, that aspiration has had its ups and downs in the history of the region. In this article, I review the six and a half decades from the time of the adoption of the Charter of the Organization of American States to the present. My purpose is not solely to recall historical facts but also to reflect on the circumstances driving democracy forward, the mechanisms put in place to defend it, and the real-world challenges we face when it is threatened.

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Throughout the article, I will focus on the evolution of the concept of “democracy” in the hemisphere and on the various occasions on which the OAS member states have acted collectively to defend it.

THE FIRST TWENTY YEARS

At the end of World War II, Truman and Eisenhower confronted a world fraught with tension between two diametrically opposed visions of society, in which they feared the Soviet Union and its allies would increase their influence in the Americas. They concluded that one of the chief responsibilities of the United States was to protect the countries of the Americas from communist expansion. To achieve this goal, they supported groups that sought to crush revolutionary movements considered to be communist-inspired. This strategy would entail frequent interventions in, and even occupations of, various countries in the region, all in the name of defending democracy.

It was in this regional scenario, in 1948, that the OAS Charter was adopted by twenty-one countries. Interestingly, one of the core principles of that Charter was non-intervention in the internal affairs of member states. The inclusion of this provision can be read in two ways. The first indicates a desire to limit the ability of the United States to intervene in national affairs. The second is that the doctrine was yet another U.S.-backed mechanism for combating communist expansion. Because any action by a communist country to further its interests could be construed as intervention in the internal affairs of a member state, such action could, therefore, prompt collective defense under the OAS Charter. Ideologically, however, the common denominator was the assumption that the countries of the Americas that founded the OAS were, as its Charter asserted, organized on the basis of democracy and its defense. That is why, on several occasions, in South and Central America, the OAS acquiesced to coups d’état: in defending a country from communist advances, they were strengthening democracy.

As part of that anti-communist struggle, the inter-American system was also used to build a regional security framework aimed at halting the expansion of totalitarian ideologies while at the same time supporting U.S. interventionism. Thus “national security” doctrines emerged, along with instruments and bodies designed to disseminate them in the Hemisphere: the Inter-American Treaty of Reciprocal Assistance (commonly known as the “Rio Treaty”), the Inter-American Defense Board, founded already in 1942, and, in particular, the Inter-American Defense College (1962). That meant...
that not only was a political framework in place; there was also a military framework for swift action every time the need arose. Promulgation of the 1951 Mutual Security Act in the United States reinforced those arrangements by authorizing the delivery of economic, technical, and military aid to friendly countries in order to strengthen security and the “Free World.” According to the Second Report to Congress by the U.S. Mutual Security Agency, in 1952, direct military assistance to the region totaled $38.2 million. In the 1950s, the United States signed mutual defense assistance agreements with sixteen Latin American countries: Ecuador, Cuba, Colombia, Peru, and Chile (1952); Brazil, the Dominican Republic, and Uruguay (1953); Nicaragua and Honduras (1954); Guatemala and Haiti (1955); Bolivia (1958); El Salvador, Panama, and Costa Rica (1962); and Argentina (1964). In that way, it acquired allies formally committed to its struggle to combat the expansion of communism.

THE SEVENTIES

It was only in the 1970s that the first cracks began to appear in that political-theoretical construct in which democracy was conceived first and foremost as a system opposed to communism. They appeared mainly because several of the dictatorships of the 1960s and early 1970s, in South America especially, were weakening and eventually fell. Parallel to those developments, in the United States under the presidency of Jimmy Carter, there was a surge in the awareness and defense of human rights. In that context, non-intervention became a relative principle. People began to accept the idea that, in the name of the defense of human rights, it was legitimate to adopt decisions going beyond the national sphere of competence and to defend human rights wherever they are violated. That was happening just as the first movements towards restoration of democracy emerged in the South. Nevertheless, at the same time, internal conflicts emerged in the Central American countries, most of them triggered by the ongoing global struggle for geopolitical dominance.

Just prior to the 1970s, in November 1969, there was a major turn of events with the signing of the American Convention on Human Rights, in which state parties codified and pledged to defend a series of rights. In so doing, they lent the force of a Convention to the work of the Inter-American Commission and established the Inter-American Court of Human Rights, and from a juridical point of view, consolidated the thesis that the defense of those rights justifies collective action and is not a violation of the principle of non-intervention.

That was the start of a regional trend in which the collective defense of human rights began to be regarded as a legitimate topic on the agenda. The Inter-American Commission on Human Rights would step up its reports on the human rights situation in certain countries, conduct on-site visits, publicly denounce human rights violations, and begin to confront governments, who, in turn, would claim that the actions of the Commission constituted intervention in the internal affairs of countries. That triggered a movement by civil society organizations in support of the Commission’s work, which would then allow the Commission to gradually expand its operations to the point where its complaints began to resonate abroad.
THE EIGHTIES

Despite these developments and trends, it was not until the late 1980s that the region would witness a renewed impulse for the defense and promotion of democracy and, with it, a second phase in the relativization of the principle of non-intervention. A number of turning points converged:

- The definitive end of some dictatorships in the region and the beginning of a trend toward democratic consolidation, especially in South America.
- The internal conflict in Central America and its escalation.
- The effect of the U.S. involvement in the Central American war that led to a confrontation between the Executive and the Congress.

The Central American conflict, one of the bloodiest in the region, is a good example of the contradictions spawned by developments in the inter-American system. It was acted out in countries confronting devastating circumstances, amidst endemic poverty, military and paramilitary violence, and armed insurrections so grave that they were used as a pretext to justify U.S. interventionism under the Reagan administration. That intervention centered on Nicaragua. Following the triumph of the revolution in July 1979, the United States organized and funded a military “Nicaraguan Resistance” force, known as “the Contras.”

It is said that “official” U.S. Government funding of the “Contras” between 1981 and 1988 amounted to approximately $278.85 million. Eventually, that drain of resources and the United States’ subsequent decision to become directly involved in the war in Central America sparked intense controversy in the United States, especially when the “Iran Contra” scandal broke.

The U.S. involvement in the name of the defense of democracy and the “Free World” caused severe imbalances in regional relations by plainly embedding ideological strife in the region.

The exacerbation and regionalization of the conflict in Central America and the resulting realization by the Central American countries that the conflict could expand prompted a Latin American reaction designed, among other key objectives, to contain the interventionist interests of the United States. In 1983, Mexico, Colombia, Venezuela, and Panama convened and launched the “Contadora Process.” In 1985, four more South American countries—Argentina, Brazil, Uruguay, and Peru—joined what then became known as the “Support Group.” The process headed by those countries had its ups and downs but succeeded in sowing the idea that it was essential to stem U.S. intervention and seek unarmed solutions to the bloody conflict in Central America. While that process was unfolding, the United States blocked any initiative in the
OAS that might restrict its room for maneuver. In the long run, the Contadora Process and its support group were unable to forge a viable option for lasting peace.

Nevertheless, these first joint Latin American moves initiated a long process of more robust unity and political resolve which, over time, significantly increased Latin America’s weight and clout in regional affairs. Thus, the Contadora and its Support Group evolved into the “Rio Group” and what is now the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC).

In a new phase and with strong Latin American support, a second multilateral initiative emerged from within the conflict torn countries in the form of the first Central American Presidential Summit, known as Esquipulas I, which was held in May 1986 to evaluate the Central American situation and the status of the Contadora Process. The Summit restored dialogue among the Central American countries and adopted the Esquipulas I Declaration, in which it was agreed to formalize presidential meetings and to reiterate the willingness of the authorities to sign the Contadora Act on Peace and Cooperation in Central America. However, once again, those hoped-for outcomes did not materialize.

In early 1987, Central America was in dire straits. After exhausting negotiation options, Oscar Arias, the President of Costa Rica, organized a Summit of Central American Presidents (excluding Nicaragua) on February 15, 1987, in San José. At that meeting, Arias presented what came to be known as the “Arias Plan,” as the basis for negotiations that culminated on August 7, 1987, in the signing in Esquipulas of the document entitled “Procedure for the Establishment of a Firm and Lasting Peace in Central America” (Esquipulas II). That process advanced until, in 1989, the Central American presidents decided to resort to the joint assistance of the OAS and the United Nations, which, in unprecedented fashion, joined forces to provide the support needed to finally bring that initiative to a successful conclusion. The OAS contribution was primarily in Nicaragua through the establishment of the International Support and Verification Commission (CIAV), set up to verify the disarming of the Contras, and through its observation of the general elections that ended with the victory of Violeta Chamorro and the departure from power of the Sandinistas. The United States vehemently resisted OAS involvement but the Latin American countries resolutely supported the Organization’s stance.

An important by-product of this process was a change in the way the United States and Latin American countries would interact in the face of regional crises. Underlying the new approach was the conviction that interventionism was on the wane and that, at the same time, the defense of democracy and human rights constituted a legitimate exception to the principle of non-intervention.

This change and specially its experience drawn from the Central American peace process were reflected in the Organization’s legal instruments. Amendments to the OAS Charter were passed and major resolutions on democracy were adopted.

To view them in context, however, it is worthwhile recalling some earlier efforts to make collective references to democracy. As mentioned above, the 1948 Charter referred to it, as did the 1959 Declaration of Santiago, which spelled out the attributes of
“representative democracy.” Despite these clear references, neither of them envisaged granting the OAS competence or a mandate to actually act in defense of democracy because most of the member states continued to uphold the ongoing validity of the principle of non-intervention.

It was the Protocol of Cartagena de Indias7 as late as 1985, that first included, among the essential purposes of the OAS, the promotion and consolidation of representative democracy with due respect for the principle of non-intervention. In addition, Article 110 of the OAS Charter gave the Secretary General the authority to draw to the attention of the Permanent Council of Ambassadors to the OAS issues that could affect peace and security or development in member states. That was a fundamental change in the OAS because, by being declared one of its essential purposes, representative democracy became one of the raisons d’être of the Organization. Combined with the Secretary General’s new powers, the change meant that the head of the Organization ceased to be essentially just its administrator and became an active player, with the right to take the initiative, in matters of the utmost importance to the member states. This reform of the Charter converted the already relativized principle of non-intervention into a now definitely “nuanced” principle.

Shortly afterwards, in 1989, with the idea of promoting and consolidating representative democracy still fresh in their minds, the member states adopted Resolution “Human Rights and Democracy—Electoral Observation,”8 which granted the Secretary General of the OAS a mandate to conduct regular Electoral Observation Missions at the request of countries in which elections are to be held. The idea was that democracies had to establish their initial credentials by holding free and fair elections that abided by the established rules and were open to international inspection: another nibble at the principle of non-intervention.

THE NINETIES

It was in this new era and pursuant to the aforementioned resolution that the first modern OAS electoral observation mission took place. In 1990, the OAS would deploy four hundred observers for a period of four months to Nicaragua. This was the first of many such missions, which have now observed elections in practically all the countries of the region and which have become one of the Organization’s most outstanding and appreciated activities.

That same year, the “Unit for the Promotion of Democracy”9 was established in the OAS General Secretariat, to oversee the hemispheric Organization’s new responsibilities. The Unit was charged with developing medium and long-term policies on the promotion and consolidation of democratic institutions. In 1991, the Declaration of Santiago10 (the “Santiago Commitment to Democracy”) renewed support for democracy and laid the groundwork for a major agreement among the countries to address the protection of democratic rule: Resolution 1080, “Representative Democracy,”11 which for the first time incorporated sanction mechanisms for cases of abrupt or irregular interruption of the democratic institutional political process. This was complemented by the Protocol
of Washington of 1992\(^1\) that amended the OAS Charter to allow collective action to oust a country from the OAS if its government is toppled by force.

These changes amounted to a clear demonstration of the common will of the countries of the Americas to promote democracy and, if need be, act collectively to restore it. Juridically and politically, a second exception to the principle of non-intervention was being consolidated, in the name of the defense of democracy.

It is worth underscoring some of the factors that underlie this change of tack. First there was the “proven effect” of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, whose efforts for more than a decade to defend human rights in the region had reliably demonstrated that international collective action can indeed have an impact that is, moreover, positive.

Second, an important change in the political equation was the entry of Canada into the OAS in 1990, a country with a longstanding democratic tradition, which brought to the OAS a new level of determination to strengthen collective action on democratic issues.

Third, at that stage, there were a number of crises that put the recently espoused principles and commitments to the test. The regional Organization was asked to take a stand, precisely on the basis of the new agreements.

It was then that the OAS did indeed take a stand, actively intervening in instances in which democratic processes were interrupted in Haiti (1991), Peru (1992), Guatemala (1993), and Paraguay (1996). In each of those instances the mechanisms envisaged in the above mentioned General Assembly resolution 1080 were applied.

In all of these crises, the OAS played a major role, exerting real influence in the hemisphere, specifically in the so-called “democratization wave of the region,” but, as in all processes in international organizations, there have been setbacks. Those significant acts of collective defense of democracy revealed certain lacunae and, above all, demonstrated that the collective commitments were not yet enough. What happened in Peru in the mid-1990s was especially revealing. Shortly before, in 1992, the Legislature and the Judiciary had been declared “dissolved” by the Executive, triggering a serious political crisis. The OAS intervened in a process that culminated, one year later, in the convocation of elections for a Constituent Assembly, which approved a new Constitution, thus allowing President Fujimori to be re-elected for the first time. However, in 2000, the President sought a second re-election through an interpretation of the Constitution that was rejected by a majority within Peru and abroad. Elections took place and were observed by the OAS, whose electoral observation mission declared that they had not been conducted according to international standards. The OAS intervened again to promote national dialogue. Finally, at the end of the process, the President resigned.

Those significant acts of collective defense of democracy revealed certain lacunae and, above all, demonstrated that the collective commitments were not yet enough.
This involvement was a turning point: an understanding emerged that the commitments undertaken were not enough to prevent rising threats to democracies.

Mechanisms had been created based on the generalized perception that threats to democracies came only from military coups, without taking other types of danger into account.

Events. Some cases, among them the one in Guatemala in 1993 -with the dissolution of the Congress and the closing of the Supreme Court of Justice by a democratically elected President- made clear that new dangers lurked that would begin to prey upon the region’s democracies and that the instruments at hand were too frail to handle the new challenges.

THE 2000s

This growing collective commitment to strengthen democratic provisions was officially expressed at the Summit of the Americas held in Quebec City, Canada in 2001. On that occasion the “Democratic Clause” was established and the idea of drawing up a Charter on Democracy for the Americas took form. The Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the member states were charged with adopting an Inter-American Democratic Charter at their next encounter.

That Inter-American Democratic Charter (IADC) was adopted at a special session of the General Assembly held on September 11, 2001, in Lima, Peru. The IADC:

- Lists the elements that make a government democratic and establishes the member states’ commitments to defending that way of life if it is jeopardized. In that sense, it constitutes a kind of government program for a democratic republic.
- Serves as an example of shared —pragmatic, not ideological— political will to deepen democratic principles and to act in accordance with them.
- Systematically compiles previously expressed concepts in various other instruments and at the same time introduces new concepts such as “the right to democracy” of the peoples of the Americas; the obligation of their governments to promote and defend democracy; the definition of the essential elements of representative democracy; and the explicit link between democracy and respect and promotion of human rights, among others.
• In this context, establishes the “defense of democracy” as a second (defense of human rights being the first) exception to all-out application of the principle of non-intervention.

The Democratic Charter does not only that. It also establishes specific measures and decisions to be taken by the member states in a given situation that could affect the democratic order. These measures go from visits to the concerned country to analyze the situation, reports to the Permanent Council, good offices, diplomatic initiatives to the suspension of a member state from its participation in the OAS.


Of these nine cases over the eleven-year life of the IADC, Venezuela (2002) and Honduras (2009) were considered to be disruptions of the democratic order. In the remaining seven cases, the Democratic Charter was applied preventively—to avoid escalation of political and institutional crises that could have jeopardized continuity of the democratic process.

In Venezuela, in 2002, the President was overthrown and arrested by the military. A Head of State took over who dissolved Congress and the Judiciary. The OAS Permanent Council met immediately and, pursuant to Article 20 of the IADC, dispatched a mission headed by the Secretary General to investigate the facts and engage in diplomatic moves aimed at restoring normalcy. The Secretary General performed the Mission, reported back to a session of the General Assembly, and the crisis was over a few days later with the President returning to office.

In Honduras, in 2009, a coup d’état overthrew the President. The Permanent Council immediately instructed the Secretary General to make diplomatic moves and convened a special session of the General Assembly. The General Assembly condemned the coup and the Secretary General continued efforts to pave the way to a restoration of democracy. They failed to produce a return to normal conditions and the General Assembly was so informed. It decided, under Article 21 of the IADC, to suspend Honduras from the exercise of its right to participate in the OAS and gave instructions for diplomatic gestures to continue aimed at restoring normal democratic conditions. Several missions to Honduras were conducted for various kinds of talks and finally elections were held that brought a new government to power. Later, in June 2011, almost two years after it had been imposed, the suspension of Honduras was lifted and that country was once again represented in the Organization.

When confronted with the issue of the application of the IADC one inevitably must refer to the Cuba discussion within the organization.

In 2009, for the first time in almost fifty years, the OAS discussed the subject of Cuba’s 1962 suspension. At the height of tensions with the communist powers, it had been decided at a Meeting of Consultation of the Ministers of Foreign Affairs to exclude the Government of Cuba from participation in the inter-American system, because, it was said, Cuba had adhered to “Marxism-Leninism,” was aligned with the communist
bloc, and had been engaging in actions that were incompatible with the principles and purposes of the OAS Charter.\textsuperscript{15}

The wording of the resolution was clearly a demonstration of the weight the United States had acquired in the hemispheric Organization at that time.

Years later, however, nearing the end of the first decade of this century, much had changed in the OAS and an ample majority of the member states had ceased to support Cuba’s isolation. The subject had already been discussed in the Permanent Council and it dominated debate at a Meeting of Ministers of Foreign Affairs during the regular session of the General Assembly held in San Pedro Sula, Honduras, in 2009. There was fierce opposition from the United States and a few other countries, but in the end, the majority prevailed and a decision was adopted setting aside the 1962 resolution, thereby removing the impediment to Cuba’s return to the OAS. However, “Cuba’s return to the OAS” was not envisaged as automatic or unconditional: much had happened in the OAS in the meantime, including adoption of the IADC. That is why there is a second paragraph in the resolution stating that Cuba’s participation will be the outcome of a process of dialogue initiated at the request of the government of Cuba and in conformity with the practices, purposes, and principles of the OAS including now, obviously, the Democratic Charter.\textsuperscript{16}

Since then, the reintegration of Cuba into the Inter-American system has been a source of continuous debate. In 2012, amidst the arrangements for the Sixth Summit of the Americas in Cartagena de Indias, Colombia the issue was brought up for discussion once more. The aftermaths of the consultations held on that occasion regarding Cuba’s participation remain to be seen as the time for the next Summit—Panama 2015—approaches.

\textbf{THE SECOND DECADE OF THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY}

The member states of the OAS took the opportunity, in 2011, on the 10th anniversary of the adoption of the Inter-American Democratic Charter, to undertake a critical assessment of how it has been applied.

The clearest outcome of that interesting process of evaluation was the realization that the region’s political landscape has changed and that the consensus that gave birth to the Inter-American Democratic Charter is, to say the least, being called into question.

The Permanent Council issued a final report on that dialogue. Its principal conclusions follow:

a) It was decided not to change the text of the IADC.

b) Member states need to find ways and mechanisms of improving the way it is applied and making it more effective.

c) The Charter’s comprehensive approach to democracy is important.

d) Adoption of a Social Charter should be expedited, as a complement to the IADC.\textsuperscript{17}
e) Various specific proposals as to how to promote democracy and prevent the danger of an interruption of the democratic institutional order were put forward but no agreement was reached on any of them.

This lack of agreement in the Permanent Council is symptomatic: it reflects the existence in the region, today, of differing points of view regarding the concepts contained in the Inter-American Democratic Charter. Let’s analyze what is going on.

Member states have formally reached consensus around traditional democratic principles, particularly in terms of the origin of its legitimacy: accessing power through popular elections, which are by nature competitive and multiparty.

The “exercise of governance” within states is where new concepts begin to appear. A new definition of democracy, coined as “participatory democracy” by the ALBA countries, has emerged to change and challenge the “representative democracy” paradigm.

Another frequent phenomenon among some member states is the increased focus on the person of the president or head of state, whose charisma, forcefulness, and personality may mean that he or she may exert a decisive influence on the life of a country. This strong executive, which frequently seeks to stay in power through re-elections, can weaken democratic institutions and the necessary checks and balances by blurring a clear separation of powers and of administrative spheres of competence.

Some countries of the region have also exhibited a tendency to move away from the consensus that once forged the commitments made in adopting the Inter-American Democratic Charter, or at least with respect to the manner in which that instrument should be applied. Consequently, the member states are divided as to what democracy is, what its defining elements are, and how it is to be defended.

These ideological differences have practical consequences because the Organization’s *modus operandi*, its preferred decision-making mechanism, is the search for consensus. That is particularly problematic when it comes to applying the IADC. Often it means that no decision can be reached and a kind of organizational paralysis sets in, making action much more complex.

In practice, one is forced to conclude that what is needed is clearer thinking, additional clarifications of existing rules, and the introduction of mechanisms to respond to new threats to democracy, supplementing those already in the IADC.

The paralyzing effect of ideology on consensus, particularly as regards application of the IADC, has been especially obvious in the Permanent Council’s discussions of the region’s most recent
crises in Honduras (2009) and Paraguay (2012). In each of those cases, positions are aligned more as a function of ideology rather than based on application of the principles of the Inter-American Democratic Charter.

A common feature of the ideologically-divided regional landscape is the widespread perception in some quarters that the Organization is motionless, that it does not work, that it is a tool of U.S. imperialism, and that it would be best to look to other regional association bodies. However, taking a closer look at the democracy related provision of these entities, their “democratic clauses” all basically say that any attack on the Executive is an alteration of the democratic process. Nothing is said about what happens when other kinds of problems or threats arise.

WHAT CAN BE DONE AT THE OAS?

With this situation in mind, what should be done at the OAS, and more specifically, what should be done with the IADC in the current regional political climate?

• First, it would be worth focusing our efforts on achieving a clearer, more precise definition of IADC concepts used, such as “alteration of the constitutional order” or “serious impairment of the democratic order.” Every time a specific event occurs, this lack of collectively accepted definitions hampers the Organization’s response. A definition adopted in advance, without reference to any particular case or country, would boost the Organization’s response capability when the time comes to act.

• As the member states themselves concluded in their assessment of the first ten years of the IADC, “prevention is better than a cure.” Thus, one important goal is to further explore possibilities for preventive action under the IADC. This task should not be envisaged solely in terms of problem prevention. Its positive angle is clarifying the possibilities for educational and promotional actions for democracy that strengthen democratic institutions and make them less vulnerable to alteration or disruption. Both of these facets are clearly addressed in the IADC, so that their scope and the political groundwork for them have already been worked out.

• Within the Organization, it is clear that the appropriate body to develop preventive activities and set in motion an early warning system in time to avoid alterations of the democratic order is the General Secretariat. So we also need precisions and specifics of the General Secretariat’s follow-up mechanisms.

If progress could be made in these areas as well as voting in lieu of constant search for consensus, when need be, we would be taking real and practical steps to make application of the IADC more effective and increase the OAS’ response capability. But that is only feasible if we act together.

I believe it is possible to assert that the OAS has been and is still relevant in the hemisphere. But to think that it has remained immune to the ideological divisions of the region would be naïve. I believe that it is also naïve to keep thinking in terms of the past; the idea that the United States is still the dominating force at the OAS is simply not true. On the contrary, it would be desirable to have more involvement and initiatives presented by U.S. officials at the Organization.
The OAS is an organization that is based on the principles that forged the Pan American Union and are the cornerstone of the development of international law in the Americas. As this article has stressed throughout, the notion of democracy has always been present in the aspirations of the peoples of the Americas, and it has been addressed by several of the Organization's principal legal instruments. In particular, and after numerous ups and downs, this yearning of the peoples of the Americas was established as a right in the Inter-American Democratic Charter.

Today this right to democracy confronts a series of challenges. Our response should be to redouble our efforts to strengthen the OAS and the IADC. But for that process to succeed, we need to start from within the member countries themselves, because, in a phrase, the OAS is a reflection of the political will of its member states, which, in turn, should also be a reflection of the aspirations of the peoples of the Americas.

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NOTES

1 Charter of the Organization of American States, as subscribed at the Ninth International American Conference, Bogota Colombia March 30–May 2, 1948, Published 1957, Reprinted 1959, Pan American Union, General Secretariat, Organization of American States, Washington, DC.


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