

# INFORMATION EXCHANGE

## DEPARTMENT OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND INTERNATIONAL TRADE

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 1, 2000

### SUMMARY

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#### INTRODUCTION

The Mexico and Inter-American Division of the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade (DFAIT) held an Information Exchange session with representatives of civil society organizations (CSOs) on Wednesday, March 1, 2000. Ambassador Peter Boehm, Permanent Representative to Canada of the Organization of American States (OAS) provided an overview of recent developments in the inter-American system, with a view to the upcoming April 7 Summit Implementation Review Group (SIRG) and the OAS General Assembly (GA) in Windsor, June 4-6. The session was well attended by a wide range of CSOs in person and via tele-conference.

Michael Brock, Director of the Mexico and Inter-American Division, introduced and welcomed all in attendance and offered the floor to Ambassador Boehm.

#### OVERVIEW

Ambassador Boehm presented a general outline of recent developments within the inter-American system, including a number of Ministerial-level meetings, including Trade Ministers (November, 3-4, 1999); Finance Ministers (February 3, 2000); Ministers of Labour (February 24-25, 2000); and Justice Ministers (March 1-3, 2000). Ambassador Boehm also provided an overview of Foreign Minister Axworthy's speech to Permanent Council on February 11, which highlighted hemispheric human security (available at [www.dfait-maeci.gc](http://www.dfait-maeci.gc) and/or [www.oas.org](http://www.oas.org)).

#### SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON INTER-AMERICAN SUMMITS MANAGEMENT (CEGCI)

Ambassador Boehm outlined the agenda items of the February 18 Special Committee on Inter-American Summits Management (CEGCI) meeting, open to civil society members. The agenda included: indigenous populations, human rights and democracy, financial markets, migrant workers and property registration. The meeting was well attended, both with respect to CSOs and OAS Ambassadors. Representatives of the Assembly First Nations (AFN), Foundation for the Americas (FOCAL) and Canadian Centre for Foreign Policy Development (CCFPD) were among the Canadian participants. Ambassador Boehm emphasized that the discussions resulting from this Committee were particularly important since they will serve as an information tool to enrich the discussion at the April 7 SIRG. A summary of the February 18 meeting will be available on the OAS Web site ([www.oas-americas.org](http://www.oas-americas.org)) soon. As Chair of the CEGCI, Ambassador Boehm will also distribute copies of this summary to Summit National Coordinators.

Briefly highlighting some of the discussion of the agenda items at the CEGCI, Ambassador Boehm commended the Assembly of First Nations (AFN) for delivering a constructive and effective presentation. He also noted the progress made over the last year on the drafting of the *American Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Populations*, and commented on Canada's collaborative efforts with Mexico in considering reform of the Inter-American Indian Institute (III). A representative at the meeting underlined the importance that Inuit perspectives be included in these discussions.

Strong support for strengthening the Inter-American Human Rights System was voiced at the CEGCI. Participants at the Information Exchange session sought clarification on the Ad Hoc Working Group on Human Rights. Ambassador Boehm indicated that a two-day meeting, held in San Jose, Costa Rica in February, enabled government representatives to collectively examine effective means to improve the human rights system. He also indicated that the issue of reform continues to be a key agenda item and that additional resources will be required to fully resolve outstanding issues.

Ambassador Boehm referred to presentations by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and El Salvador on property registration. He noted that progress on this mandate has been constructive, especially as it relates to the advancement of women and Indigenous peoples.

On Financial Markets, Ambassador Boehm referred to the Third Western Hemisphere Finance Ministers meeting in Cancun, Mexico on February 3, 2000. Additional information on the Joint Ministerial is available at [www.shcp.gob.mx/english/3hemisphere/iindex.htm](http://www.shcp.gob.mx/english/3hemisphere/iindex.htm).

Presentations given at the February 18 CEGCI meeting are available on the OAS Office of Summit Follow-Up Web site at [www.summit-americas.org](http://www.summit-americas.org).

#### **CIVIL SOCIETY ACCREDITATION**

Ambassador Boehm advised that the OAS civil society guidelines **B** available at [www.oas.org](http://www.oas.org) **B** were approved by Permanent Council on December 15, 1999. He noted that the OAS Office of Summit Follow-Up is responsible for registration of CSOs under the guidelines.

To participate in OAS Committee and Working Group meetings, organizations are required to send a letter to the OAS Secretary General **B** indicating how they could contribute to the OAS agenda and enclosing a copy of their Annual Report and a summary of the organization's source of finances. Organizations should consult the guidelines directly to see full list of requirements. Upon receiving a critical mass of applications (approximately 20 registration requests) a meeting of the *Committee on Civil Society Participation* will be convened to review the list which will then be sent for approval to the OAS Permanent Council.

Referring to the June, 2000 OAS General Assembly in Windsor, Ambassador Boehm advised that a separate registration procedure was required. Letters to the Secretary General requesting special guest status to observe proceedings of the GA should be sent prior to April 15.

Participants asked how the Canadian government would be consulting civil society on issues to be discussed at the General Assembly and the Summit. Michael Brock said that officials have been receiving input and views, from a variety of sources such as parliamentary hearings, Round Tables organized by the centre for Foreign Policy Development, papers prepared and submitted (such as by the Civil Society Forum in Toronto) and others. This is an ongoing process that will continue and views will be taken in account as positions are developed.

### **GENDER EQUALITY**

Participants inquired as to how to bring gender equality and women's human rights to the forefront of General Assembly and Summit agendas. Ambassador Boehm referred to the upcoming Meeting of Ministers or of the Highest-Ranking Authorities Responsible for the Advancement of Women, to take place for the first time in Washington, DC on April 27-28. He indicated that CSOs may wish to forward their views to the attention of Minister Axworthy or Secretary of State Fry. Ambassador Boehm also informed members of civil society of on-going efforts to revitalize the Inter-American Commission of Women (CIM).

### **PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES**

Participants inquired as to the status of the *Inter-American Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Persons with Disabilities*. Ambassador Boehm indicated that although Canadian ratification of the convention is unlikely prior to Windsor, disability issues could be addressed in the context of human security.

### **HUMAN RIGHTS**

Participants enquired about whether Canada would ratify the American Convention on Human Rights. Michael Brock responded that this issue was under active consideration. At the same time it was important to focus on compliance and on finding ways to improve the functioning of the inter-American human rights systems and on concrete ways to enhance the promotion and protection of human rights throughout the hemisphere.