

**Organization of American States (OAS)**

**DECLARATION OF SANTIAGO ON DEMOCRACY AND PUBLIC TRUST: A  
NEW COMMITMENT TO GOOD GOVERNANCE FOR THE AMERICAS**

**AG/DEC. 31 (XXXIII-O/03)**

(Declaration adopted at the fourth plenary session, held on June 10, 2003)

The Ministers of Foreign Affairs and Heads of Delegation of the member countries of the Organization of American States, assembled in Santiago, Chile, on the occasion of the thirty-third regular session of the OAS General Assembly,

RECALLING that, 12 years ago, the OAS adopted the Santiago Commitment to Democracy and the Renewal of the Inter-American System and resolution AG/RES. 1080 (XXI-O/91), "Representative Democracy";

BEARING IN MIND that the course charted by the Heads of State and Government at the Third Summit of the Americas entrusts us with tasks that require the ongoing strengthening of democracy;

REAFFIRMING that, from that perspective, the adoption of the Inter-American Democratic Charter reinforced the commitment of the Americas to democracy, freedom, and development;

RECOGNIZING that democratic governance requires the responsible participation of all social actors in building the necessary consensus to strengthen our democracies;

RECOGNIZING that multilateralism and multilateral cooperation play an important role in supporting national efforts to promote good governance and the principles of democracy, and facilitate dialogue and cooperation in the political, economic, social, and cultural arena;

EMPHASIZING that, during the last two decades, the peoples of the region have undergone the most comprehensive and intense democratization process in their history, even when some countries have been obliged to confront serious problems affecting good governance, aggravated by poverty and social exclusion in the context of the difficult economic circumstances in recent years;

RECOGNIZING the need to strengthen credibility and public trust in democratic institutions;

NOTING that the use of violence as a political tool fundamentally affects democratic governance and seriously jeopardizes democracy and its institutions;

BEARING IN MIND that the existence of multidimensional threats, concerns, and other challenges to peace and security affects the enjoyment of the rights of all individuals and democratic stability;

RECOGNIZING that democracy is strengthened by the full respect for freedom of expression, access to information, and free dissemination of ideas, and that all sectors of society, including the media through the diverse information it provides to citizens, can contribute to an environment of tolerance for all opinions, promote a culture of peace, and strengthen democratic governance; and

TAKING NOTE of the Consensus of Cuzco, recently signed by the Heads of State and Government of the Rio Group, on strengthening democratic governance,

DECLARE:

The Inter-American Democratic Charter constitutes the principal hemispheric benchmark for the promotion and defense of shared democratic principles and values in the Americas at the start of the 21st century. Its effective implementation poses an ongoing challenge to both peoples and governments of the Americas.

The need to define an agenda for good governance for the Hemisphere that addresses political, economic, and social challenges and fosters credibility and public trust in democratic institutions.

In order for that agenda to promote trust and full citizen participation in the democratic, representative form of government, it is essential to strengthen inter-American cooperation and partnership.

Strengthening political parties as intermediaries for citizen demands, in a system of representative democracy, is essential to the functioning of the democratic political system.

The firm intention to promote full participation by citizens in the political system, in order to increase credibility and public trust in democratic institutions, including support for civil society organizations.

Democratic governance calls for reinforced state modernization processes, incorporating new technologies, so as to raise levels of efficiency, probity, and transparency in public administration.

Judicial reform and modernization leading to an independent, more expeditious, and more accessible justice system constitute a primary objective in the process of consolidating the rule of law.

Corruption and impunity weaken our public and private institutions, distort our economies, and undermine the social values of our peoples. Responsibility for preventing and containing these problems lies with all branches of government in collaboration with society as a whole. Cooperation and reciprocal assistance against corruption, in accordance with applicable treaties and law, are fundamental factors in the promotion of democratic governance.

In the framework of a global economy, democratic governance obliges us to focus on the responsible management of public affairs as an essential factor in the sustainable development of our countries with social, ethnic, and gender equity.

The economic and social development of the developing countries of the region must be effectively addressed to support their democratic governance.

Strengthening democratic governance calls for the elimination of poverty and social exclusion and the promotion of equitable economic growth, by means of sound public policies and practices that promote equal opportunity, education, health, and full employment.

The states should strengthen their public policies and reinforce measures to address directly the grave problems of poverty, malnutrition, hunger, health care, and illiteracy, which hamper the consolidation of democracy. Economic growth with equity is essential to eradicating poverty, enhancing social justice, and creating equal opportunities for each and every citizen in our region.

This assumes a world economic order that will promote such growth, trade liberalization for the region's products, and an increasing flow of investments into the region. In that context, support for democratic governments from international financial organizations is essential and also assumes the need to consider innovative financing mechanisms to strengthen democratic governance.

The consolidation of democracy in the region requires a culture based on profound democratic principles and values and on their daily observance. These values should be fostered through education for democracy.

Respect for and appreciation of cultural diversity enhance social and economic vitality and contribute positively to the promotion of good governance, social cohesion, and human development. The inclusion of indigenous peoples in our societies and institutions is an essential factor in ongoing efforts to strengthen democracy and human rights.

Gender equality and equity and the elimination of all forms of discrimination are key factors for attaining people-centered sustainable development.

Promoting and strengthening cooperation activities and mutual assistance are vital to building sound democratic institutions that will facilitate transparency and good governance.

The commitment to democracy, the strengthening of the rule of law, and access to effective justice, respect for human rights, the promotion of shared national basic values, and integral development are the foundations of progress, stability, and peace for the peoples of the Americas and are essential to democratic governance.