

I. WHAT IS THE ORGANIZATION OF AMERICAN STATES ?

ORIGIN: The OAS is the oldest international regional organization in the world and has its headquarters in Washington, D.C.. Its origins lie in the International Union of American Republics founded in 1890. Renamed the Pan American Union in 1910, the organization adopted its current name and basic Charter in 1948. Today it is comprised of all 35 independent nations of the Caribbean, and North, Central, and South America. Cuba is a member but the current government is suspended.

PURPOSES: The mandate of the OAS is to strengthen peace and security, promote and consolidate representative democracy and contribute to the settlement of political, juridical and economic problems in the hemisphere. It is also expected to promote the economic, social and cultural development of its 34 active members.

STRUCTURE: The OAS is comprised of :

- The General Assembly (supreme body, meets annually at level of foreign ministers);
- The Meeting of Consultation of Ministers of Foreign Affairs (considers problems of an urgent nature and meets as required);
- The Councils:
 1. Permanent Council (consists of the Permanent Representatives of the member states. It meets regularly in Washington and has authority to establish working groups for specific issues);
 2. Inter-American Economic and Social Council (administers "national projects" of an economic and social nature (e.g poverty alleviation) and six business related Inter-American Centres);
 3. Inter-American Council for Education, Science, and Culture (oversees 20 Inter-American Centres specializing in cultural and educational activities);
- The General Secretariat (carries out the decisions of the General Assembly);
- Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (observance, protection, and respect for human rights);
- Inter-American Court of Human Rights (an autonomous judicial institution of the OAS that interprets and applies the American Convention of Human Rights);
- Inter-American Juridical Committee (develops/codifies international law and provides legal advice to the OAS);

