

focus on People at the Québec Summit



Carlos Castillo, age 4, sits before a banner that reads "Misery" and "Exploitation," in front of the National Congress building in Tegucigalpa, Honduras, December 10, 1996. The occasion was a demonstration marking the International Day of Human Rights.

The first two Summits of the Americas showed how much hemispheric leaders can achieve. Miami and Santiago left a valuable legacy: a substantial base of co-operation and dialogue. Both summits enhanced the sense of shared values. Now countries of the Hemisphere have the opportunity to build on past successes, address shared challenges and identify people-centred priorities for action.

Defining the issues

During the OAS General Assembly last June in Windsor, Ontario, foreign ministers met to start defining topics for

discussion at the Québec Summit. Since then, the Summit Implementation Review Group has held several meetings to prepare for Québec 2001. They have identified three overarching themes for Summit discussions: strengthening democracy, creating prosperity and realizing human potential. All three will be explicitly mentioned in the Declaration, and they will provide the framework for practical initiatives under the Plan of Action. Alongside the three themes, leaders will look at connectivity issues—in other words, how to harness new information and communications technologies for the benefit of people in all walks of life.

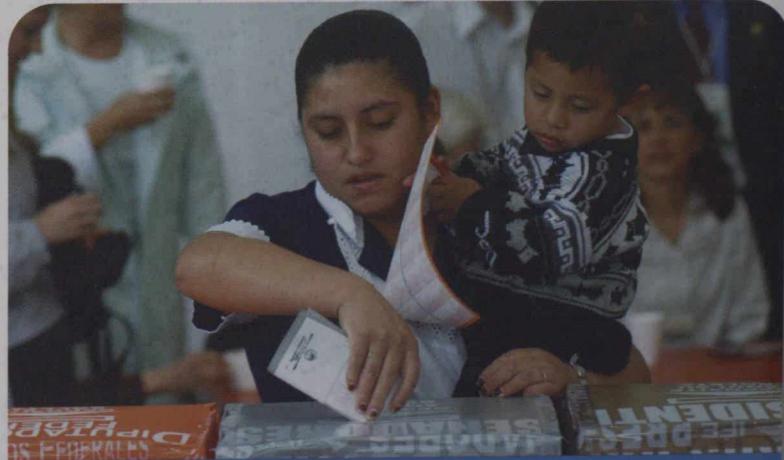
The themes of strengthening democracy and promoting economic integration have been central to the Summit process ever since Miami. The third theme of realizing human potential reflects the growing importance of social issues in the Summit process. It emphasizes inclusion. That means bringing all citizens—women, children and youth, people with disabilities, Indigenous peoples, and others—into the political, economic and social mainstream of hemispheric society.

Strengthening democracy

Across the Hemisphere, free and fair elections—once rare occurrences—are now commonplace events. The past decade has seen much further progress in developing democratic systems. There have been occasional challenges and temporary setbacks, but they have merely shown how strongly entrenched democracy is in the Americas today. Look, for example, at how the OAS helped Peru deal with a crisis to that country's democracy in 2000.



Refugee camp of Pavarando, about 500 miles north of Bogotá, Colombia. Thousands of peasants have fled here to escape from violence between leftist guerrillas, right-wing paramilitary fighters and the military.



Holding her child, a mother drops her vote into a ballot box at a Mexico City polling station during presidential elections last July.