

ORGANIZATION OF AMERICAN STATES

The Organization of American States (OAS) is the oldest regional organization in the world. Originally established in 1890 following a series of inter-American conferences beginning in 1826, it became more formally structured as the Pan-American Union. It was re-organized and re-named the Organization of American States with the signing of the Charter of Bogota on April 30, 1948.

The fundamental purposes of the OAS are to strengthen peace and security and to promote solidarity, economic and social development, independence and territorial integrity of the member states.

At present, there are 35 member states. Twelve of the 35 are relatively new English-speaking members from the Commonwealth Caribbean. (Cuba is a member state, but its present government has been suspended; periodically, Latin American members discuss reinstating Cuba to normal status.)

From 1972 until becoming a full member in 1990, Canada had permanent observer status at the OAS and was a full member of several specialized agencies of the inter-American system, notably the Inter-American Institute for Co-operation on Agriculture (IICA), the Pan-American Institute of Geography and History (PAIGH) and the Inter-American Committee on Telecommunications (CITEL). In 1989, Canada, through the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), announced a five-year, \$1.3-million grant to support OAS development assistance activities.

Canada has been a full member of the OAS since January 8, 1990. Canada's annual quota payment is currently \$6.3 million plus a \$1.8-million contribution to the OAS Voluntary Fund.

In addition, CIDA is pursuing arrangements with IICA and the Pan-American Health Organization (PAHO) for technical co-operation projects that will cost Canada approximately \$2 million a year for four years.

During its first year as a member, Canada was instrumental in the creation of the Unit for Democratic Development within the OAS. Canada has been a major and active participant in the OAS electoral assistance and election monitoring programs in Nicaragua, Haiti and El Salvador. Canada was elected to the Inter-American Drug Abuse Control Commission (CICAD) and is actively contributing to its work. Canada has joined the Inter-American Commission of Women (CIM) and is participating fully in its programs.