assassination of a former foreign minister in 1976, sent an important signal to military officers who have tended to view themselves above the law. In August, President Frei sent three constitutional reform bills to Congress, two of which were aimed at limiting the role of the military as protectors of Chilean society. One bill proposed changes to the composition of the National Security Council, giving greater weight to civilian representation. A second bill gave the president stronger powers over the naming and retirement of senior military officers (the third bill dealt with human rights). The likely success of these bills remains uncertain.

In **Ecuador**, partisan political clashes between the executive, legislative and judicial branches of government surrounding charges of corruption, resulted in impeachment proceedings against two ministers and a judge through the summer and an arrest warrant for the vice-president in October (who subsequently fled the country). Although the military did discuss the evolving situation with representatives of the three branches of government throughout this period of chaos at the top, the military stayed in the barracks.

AFRICA AND THE MIDDLE EAST

Africa and the Middle East saw mixed results over 1995. Continued progress was evident in the holding of a number threshold elections in the region, sustaining a trend well into its fifth year. On more than one occasion major opposition parties or groupings refused to participate in what they viewed as an unfair process. Though many of the elections were less than ideal from either a technical or political perspective, they, nevertheless, marked a step forward in the development of democratic electoral traditions in all these countries.

Coups remain a persistent threat in Africa, though in 1995 they had little staying power. A military takeover in **Sao Tomé and Principe** in August was overturned in less than a week through successful Angolan mediation and international pressure. In the **Comoros**, a mercenary-led coup in September was reversed through French military intervention in October. The Comoros intervention was followed by the establishment of a firm electoral timetable with elections held in March 1996 (further details will be in 1996 Year in Review).

In **Gambia**, coup attempts aimed at delaying the planned return to democracy in 1996 were thwarted and the timetable remains on track with elections scheduled for mid-1996. However, the arrest of 35 members of the former ruling party and 2 former ministers in 1995 for demonstrating for the return of the former president has raised some concern about the electoral climate which will be in place. (See multilateral section on Commonwealth for further information).