

The unit was conceived to help countries in their own efforts to consolidate democratic gains. It would not rely on any one form of democracy, but would reinforce those that already existed. It would work with governments to strengthen the roots, the institutions and the attitudes that allow democracies to thrive. Periodic elections alone do not constitute democracy, nor does the monitoring of elections alone ensure the promotion of democracy.

The unit could, over time, provide security to all democratically elected governments and would threaten no one except, perhaps, would-be dictators.

Canada believes that the unit is needed -- and the events of the past ten months have surely borne this out. We have been disappointed at the lack of progress in its implementation.

We believe that the program of support developed and approved by the Permanent Council last year is a good one. We also believe that the unit should have its own executive director and a reasonable budget to execute its program.

We had hoped that changing priorities -- and they certainly should be changing -- would have allowed funds to be reallocated from other, less urgent activities.

The Inter-American Defence Board comes to mind. There seems to be agreement that the board's role and mandate should be reviewed in light of changing security concerns in the post-Cold War era. Surely when the main threat to democracy is from the military, the OAS should be shifting funds from a military activity to a democratic one.

I would encourage the Secretary General to give this serious consideration.

Canada will do its part. We are currently supporting the Partnership for Democracy and Development (PDD) in its efforts to promote democracy and development in Central America. We will also support the unit with direct technical and financial assistance. And today, I am pleased to announce that Canada will allocate \$1 million in additional funds directly to the unit to get it started on the work plan approved last year.

The need is obvious. The goal is unquestionable. I cannot think of a higher priority for the OAS to pursue at this time.

Mr. President, the actions we take to defend democracy in accordance with our charter is the standard by which we all will be judged. This issue will decide whether the OAS is a viable institution, one with a meaningful role to play in the Americas.