

OFFICE OF THE ASSISTANT SECRETARY GENERAL

In accordance with Article 115 of the OAS Charter and in keeping with measures and policy decided on by the General Assembly and the respective resolutions of the Councils, the Office of the Assistant Secretary General serves as Secretary of the Permanent Council, provides advisory services to the Secretary General, and is responsible for all activities the latter may entrust to him.

The Office of the Assistant Secretary General provided advisory services to the Secretary General, supported the activities of the various dependencies of the General Secretariat, and made efforts to assist the member states in the search for solutions to topics of critical importance to them.

Support for the organs of the inter-American system

In his capacity as Secretary of the General Assembly, the Assistant Secretary General coordinated technical and operational services for the thirty-fourth regular session of the General Assembly, held in Quito, Ecuador, in June 2004. He also supervised the preparatory technical work for the thirty-fifth regular session of the General Assembly, to be held in Fort Lauderdale, Florida, in June 2005.

As Secretary of the Permanent Council and its subsidiary bodies, the Assistant Secretary General provided them with policy support and guidance and facilitated deliberations on their respective agenda items. The Office of the Secretariat of the General Assembly, the Meeting of Consultation, the Permanent Council, and Subsidiary Organs assisted representatives of the member states and permanent observers in the preparation and conduct of 36 regular meetings of the Council, 25 special meetings, 10 protocolary meetings, a joint meeting of the Council with CEPAC, and two private meetings, as well as weekly coordination meetings of the Council chairs and the regional coordinators.

Haiti

The Assistant Secretary General continued to provide steadfast support to the Secretary General in dealing with political issues in OAS member states. These included efforts to seek solutions to the political and institutional crisis in Haiti, which became even more challenging for the OAS after the events of February 29, 2004, with the departure of President Jean Bertrand Aristide. Under the guidance of the Assistant Secretary General, the General Secretariat ensured that its actions were strictly in keeping with the applicable provisions of the Haitian Constitution and with the spirit of the CARICOM Action Plan, of January 31, 2004, which had been endorsed in resolutions CP/RES. 861 (1400/04) and CP/RES. 862 (1401/04).

Following the adoption of United Nations Security Council resolutions 1529 and 1542 and in an effort to ensure the fullest possible cooperation between the OAS and the United Nations on the situation in Haiti, the Assistant Secretary General held extensive consultations with senior officials of the United Nations. These discussions focused on the need for early elections in Haiti; recommendations regarding the size, structure, and mandate of the Stabilization Mission (MINUSTAH), approved by the Security Council; and cooperation between the OAS and UN in Haiti. The outcome was an agreement to negotiate a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) concerning the modalities for cooperation between the OAS and the UN on electoral matters in Haiti, which was signed by both organizations on November 3. In accordance with the MOU, the OAS is responsible for “conducting the voter registration exercise,” plans for the implementation of which are at an advanced stage. The Assistant Secretary General was a member of the delegation which the Permanent Council dispatched to Haiti from September 9 to 11, 2004 to “foster the full restoration of democracy” in that country.

Belize-Guatemala (territorial differendum)

The continuing efforts of the Organization to help resolve the territorial differendum between Belize and Guatemala was another issue for which the Assistant Secretary General provided critical support. Following the failure of the Facilitators' Proposals to end the controversy, over the course of 2004, the Assistant Secretary General convened a series of ministerial meetings at OAS headquarters between Belizean and Guatemalan delegations. He also visited both capitals in order to find common ground and devise strategies for resolving the dispute.

The Office of the Assistant Secretary General also guided the work of the Office of the General Secretariat in the Adjacency Zone, which is responsible for monitoring compliance by the two Governments of a series of confidence-building measures designed to lower tensions in the Adjacency Zone between Belize and Guatemala and ensure respect of the human rights of settlers in the area. The Office in the Adjacency Zone completed a resettlement and housing project for approximately 35 Guatemalan families who were living on the eastern-side of the Adjacency Line, or very near the Line.

El Salvador-Honduras (border demarcation)

The Office of the Assistant Secretary General was also instrumental in providing timely technical and political support to complete the demarcation of the El Salvador-Honduras border. In keeping with the request from both governments for technical assistance from the General Secretariat of the OAS and from the Pan American Institute of Geography and History (PAIGH), an advisor in the Office of the Assistant Secretary General and Mr. John O. Gates, of the PAIGH, continued their work on the border, under the overall guidance of the Assistant Secretary General. The OAS-PAIGH team was able, on the basis of these on-site observations, the text of the 1992 Court judgment, documents provided by the Special Honduras-El Salvador Demarcation Commission, satellite imagery, and other technical tools, to provide definitive solutions, respected by both countries, to the technical problems encountered by the Commission.

Dominican Republic

The Assistant Secretary General accompanied the OAS Electoral Observation Mission for the presidential and legislative elections in the Dominican Republic, held on May 20, 2004. He also represented the Organization at the inauguration of President Leonel Fernández, on August 18, 2004.

Responsibility for the General Secretariat

Finally, in the absence of the Secretary General on several occasions during the period covered by this report, the Assistant Secretary General was in charge of the General Secretariat. On October 16, 2005, following the resignation of Miguel Ángel Rodríguez and in keeping with Article 108 of the OAS Charter, the Assistant Secretary General assumed the duties of the Secretary General.

Office of Conferences and Meetings

The mission of the Office of Conferences and Meetings is to identify, integrate, administer, and modernize the conference services that the General Secretariat must provide to the OAS governing bodies. The Office of Conferences and Meetings is composed of the Office of the Director and three divisions, whose functions are to coordinate conference services, services in the official languages, and the production and distribution of documents and information.

Management and coordination of conferences and meetings

The process of replacement and modernization of the conference services equipment and facilities continued, which included the equipment used to ask for the floor and installation of digital monitors in the conference rooms of the General Services building. This state-of-the-art digital equipment provides the usual services for requesting the floor and multimedia audio and video services that are integrated and compatible with the services provided by the Department of Public Information, including real-time videoconferencing via videophone, and with simultaneous interpretation services in the Organization's four languages.

The Office of Conferences and Meetings and the Department of Administration and Finance worked together on developing administrative procedures in the OASES System for executing the Organization's budget for meetings. For systems development and operation, the Office increased its collaboration with the Office of Information Technology Services to put together the computerized conference-services platform. Access to these services via the Internet has become easier and more user-friendly. It is now possible online to check the schedule of meetings and to obtain official meeting documents and information stored in a database of references accessible to the public. The databases are being revamped to combine existing services with the administrative systems.

Conference Services

The Office provided logistical support for the organization and holding of 815 meetings. A total of 745 meetings of the governing and technical bodies, the Permanent Council and its subsidiary organs, CIDI and its subsidiary organs, and the other specialized organizations and entities like the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR), the Inter-American Commission of Women (CIM), the Inter-American Telecommunication Commission (CITEL), the Inter-American Drug Abuse Control Commission (CICAD), and the Inter-American Children's Institute (IIN), were held at headquarters. Another 70 meetings were held in the member states, such as the thirty-fourth regular session of the General Assembly, the thirty-fifth and thirty-sixth regular sessions of the Inter-American Drug Abuse Control Commission (CICAD), technical meetings of the IACHR, CITEL, CICAD, and others, which meant that human and technological resources had to be mobilized from OAS headquarters and taken to the countries hosting these meetings. During this reporting period, the Office updated a semiannual schedule of the Organization's meetings, which it uses as a tool to make more efficient use of the resources needed for conference services.

Language Services

The Language Services Division provided translation and simultaneous interpretation services in the four languages, to all meetings of organs, agencies, and entities of the Organization, at headquarters and in the member states. The total number of events serviced came to 815, which included informal meetings with services and meetings of the Style Committee. The policy of modernizing equipment and programs for language services continued and the 6.5 version of TRADOS was acquired, which is the translation memory program that generates a database and interacts with a four-language glossary called MultiTerm. The Division also kept up inter-institutional contacts for sharing glossaries and terminology with other international organizations and expanded the e-library of OAS documents on the Internet.

The list of outside translators and interpreters continues to grow, with the addition of the names of professionals from throughout the Hemisphere, now grouped into areas of specialization. An added effort has been made to test candidates and to add the names of more freelance translators and interpreters living in all the member states, which represents a significant savings for the host countries when meetings are held away from headquarters.

Documents and Information Services

The Division of Printing, Distribution, and Information Services played a central role in printing and distributing the General Secretariat's official documents and storing information. It provided the permanent missions of the member states and the permanent observers with assistance in finding information. During this reporting period, the Division printed and distributed 4,298 documents involving a total of 3,671,389 pages. It also printed and sent out 15,500 invitations for the Art Museum of the Americas and the Protocol Office.

The Division continued to use the electronic documents processing and storage program (IDMS), which allows accurate control of documents from their inception to final storage. Information assistance was provided to all the missions and entities that requested these services, and to the Permanent Council and its working groups.

Support Services to the Model OAS General Assembly (MOAS)

Support was provided for the "Edgar Maya" Model OAS General Assembly for Universities, held from April 4 to 9, 2004, in Washington, D.C. This Model General Assembly was cosponsored by the Inter-American Institute of Diplomacy, a nonprofit whose board is composed of university professors with a long history of cooperating with the OAS Model General Assembly.

In 2004, the XXIII Model OAS General Assembly for high-school students (XXIII-MOAS) was held from December 1 to 4, 2004, at OAS headquarters in Washington, D.C. Some 320 high school students from 24 schools participated, advised by 37 professors. They came from high schools in the United States (including one from Puerto Rico). The students represented 29 countries (28 member states and 1 permanent observer), the Communications Center, and the OAS General Secretariat. Three days of exhaustive debate and discussion centering on the resolutions approved by the OAS General Assembly at its thirty-fourth regular session, held in Quito, Ecuador, in June 2004, gave students an opportunity to examine current problems in the Americas and to draft their own resolutions. After being evaluated by a committee composed of professors, officers elected by the MOAS, and officials from the OAS General Secretariat, a number of resolutions were approved. Also, students had an opportunity to meet with representatives of the permanent missions of the member states. This is one of the highlights of their MOAS experience. Participating in the XXIII/MOAS was Mr. Adrian Fenty, a former student and now a distinguished member of the Washington, D.C., City Council. He was a special speaker at the closing ceremony.

Because no offers were received to host the Model OAS General Assembly for Universities in 2004, it was not held. It is hoped that some country will come forward as a host in 2005.

Under an agreement between the General Secretariat and the MOAS Inter-American Studies Foundation, the General Secretariat continued to provide support to the Foundation in the form of the use of OAS premises and equipment. Under Executive Order 05-03, starting in 2005 the MOAS program will be under the Office of Public Relations and Information in the Organization's Department of Communications and External Relations.

Columbus Memorial Library

The Columbus Memorial Library was created by the First International Conference of American States on April 18, 1890. The Library serves as a modern information and documentation center, providing essential information to the OAS General Secretariat, the permanent missions, the diplomatic community, and the general public interested in the Organization's work and the work of the inter-American system.

The Library is the repository of the institutional memory of the OAS, the Pan American Union, and the inter-American system. Over the course of the years, the Library has evolved from a traditional library program and now includes archives and records management of the General Secretariat. It is also the depository of OAS official documents.

In 2002 the Permanent Council assigned the Columbus Memorial Library the sum of US\$300,000 from the Reserve Subfund, to give users online access to documents and archives. As part of that undertaking, in 2004 work continued on the Documents Catalog Retrospective Conversion Project, with the scanning of 18,497 catalogue cards of OAS publications. The project is in its final stage and upon completion the files will appear in standard OCLC MARC format to be made available on the On Line Public Access Catalogue (OPAC), and will reach a broad client base via the Internet.

Competitive bidding was conducted for the Preservation and Digitalization Project. Once the Library completed a technical evaluation of the offers tendered, the Contract Awards Committee recommended that the OCLC "Online Computer Library Center" be awarded the contract for the project, which will provide digital images of a select group of Permanent Council resolutions and declarations and Proceedings and Documents of the General Assembly. The first phase of the project has gotten under way and 50,000 images have been identified for digitization.

Bids were also tendered for an Integrated Library Automation System. The Library signed a contract with TLC ("The Library Corporation") to provide services that will automate all the functions of the library, including acquisitions, serials, circulation, OAS documents, and cataloguing. In the end, the public will have access to the rich collection that the Columbus Memorial Library has on the inter-American system.

In all these projects, the Library has worked very closely with the Office of Information Technology Services to evaluate technical standards and compatibility of software and hardware.

Acquisitions: Donations helped supplement the Library's insufficient budget. A total of 2,249 books and periodicals were received and processed, and 76 purchase orders were prepared from requisitions received from other departments of the OAS for the purchase of books and other materials.

Cataloging: The Documents Retrospective Conversion Project continued with the scanning of 18,497 catalogue records of OAS publications. The goal of this project is to make the catalogue of OAS publications accessible to the public online. The Library continues to assign the International Standard Book Number (ISBN) and CIP ("Cataloging-in-Publication") data for new OAS publications and documents. This ensures that new OAS publications and documents will be immediately available in the online catalogue. The Library also continues to publish the "Selective List of Books Accessioned and New Periodicals Received in the Columbus Memorial Library." This information can be found in the Library's Public Folder on the Intranet.

Reference services: The demand for reference services is still on the rise, even as the Library also provides access to resources that support OAS programs. The Library is helping with current research needs and the Archives is documenting and giving access to historical actions already taken.

The Library circulated approximately 15,000 books and 5,000 periodicals and answered 6,000 requests for information. A total of 173 cubic feet of photographs of historical value were used to respond to those requests. The Documents Control Unit also saw an increase in requests and answered some 2,000 requests for information. The Archives Management Unit answered 382 requests. Approximately 9,000 photocopies were taken for the General Secretariat, the missions, and outside users.

The use of various databases has enabled Reference Services to provide better service. The Library subscribes to “First Search” and can have access to information in 70 databases covering a wide range of subject matters and providing access to thousands of libraries worldwide and to 5.9 million articles in electronic format, taken from 9,000 periodicals, including 3,500 e-zines.

The search version of the “Hispanic American Periodicals Index” (HAPI) provides global data on Central America, South America, Mexico and the Caribbean, the U.S.-Mexican border region, and Hispanics in the United States. The Library continues to have access to “WorldCat,” the “United Nations Treaty Collection Database,” and “Lexis-Nexis.” It also subscribes to “The Economic Intelligence Unit – Selected Country Profiles” and the “Official Document System of the United Nations On Line”.

OAS documents and publications: Some 48,000 documents were received, processed, and circulated. The Library assisted the Office of the Secretary General with preparation of the index for the publication titled: “The OAS 1994-2004: A Decade of Transformation.” The index of documents of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, 1960-2004, and the Inter-American Court of Human Rights, 1980-2004, was brought up to date.

Preservation: The Library processed and microfilmed the OAS Official Records Series 2000 and then sent it to university and specialized libraries. It also updated the Series of Official Documents of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights and the Inter-American Court of Human Rights. Proceeds from sales help the Library fulfill its mandate of seeking external sources of funding. Those proceeds resulted in deposits of \$42,127.07 into the Hipólito Unanue account.

Archives and Records Management Service (ARMS): ARMS has a contract with “Iron Mountain” for storage of the Organization’s records at a site removed from headquarters. A total of 4,311 boxes are stored with the outside contractor. The Archives and Records Management Center received 364 boxes of semi-active documents for storage; it sent 607 empty boxes to offices for transferal of their records to ARMS; and it permanently processed valuable records and incorporated them into the OAS Archives. ARMS has 10,335 cubic feet of General Secretariat files in its custody.

Exhibits: The Columbus Memorial Library mounted eight exhibits on the themes of Haiti, Cities of the Americas, Celebrations of Pan American Day, Secretaries General of the OAS, Central America, Gabriela Mistral 1889-1957, Columbus and America, and Jewels from the Rare Book Collection.

Interns and volunteers: The Columbus Memorial Library has benefited greatly by the contribution made by the interns and volunteers assigned to specific projects. They help compensate for the staffing shortage. The interns come from secondary schools and universities in the United States, Latin America, and the Caribbean, and from some of the permanent observer countries as well. With their help, several guides and bibliographies have been completed.

Inter-American Children’s Institute and Inter-American Commission of Women

Information regarding the activities of the Inter-American Children’s Institute and the Permanent Secretariat of the Inter-American Commission of Women, entities which are under the purview of the Assistant Secretary General, can be found in the chapter on Specialized Organizations.