

AG/DEC. 57 (XXXVIII-O/08)

DECLARATION OF MEDELLÍN:  
YOUTH AND DEMOCRATIC VALUES

(Adopted at the fourth plenary session, held on June 3, 2008)

THE MINISTERS OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND HEADS OF DELEGATION OF THE MEMBER STATES OF THE ORGANIZATION OF AMERICAN STATES (OAS), meeting in Medellín, Colombia, on the occasion of the thirty-eighth regular session of the General Assembly,

REAFFIRMING the commitment of the member states to promote and strengthen in the youth of the Hemisphere the values, principles, and practices of a democratic life, including liberty and social justice, progress, respect for human rights in their universality, indivisibility, and interdependence, and the rule of law, pursuant to the Charter of the OAS and the Inter-American Democratic Charter;

RECOGNIZING the right of young people to participate actively and fully in the political, economic, and social spheres of their countries; and reaffirming our commitment to combating poverty, hunger, and social exclusion and to promoting social cohesion, to improve the living conditions of our peoples;

BEARING IN MIND that the Inter-American Democratic Charter emphasizes the importance and proposes the promotion of fundamental democratic values, principles, and practices, in order to foster a democratic culture among new generations;

CONSIDERING the central role of the OAS in the promotion of a democratic culture in the Hemisphere consistent with the principles, practices, and values of the OAS Charter and the Inter-American Democratic Charter, paying special attention to the development of programs for the education of children and youth as a means of promoting and guaranteeing the permanence of democratic values, principles, and practices, including liberty and social justice;

BEARING IN MIND the agreements, mandates, and commitments set forth in the resolutions and declarations adopted by the OAS General Assembly, and the declarations, commitments, and plans of action adopted by the Summits of the Americas, related to the issue of youth and democratic values;

RECALLING:

That in the Plan of Action of the Second Summit of the Americas, held in Santiago, Chile, in April 1998, the Heads of State and Government committed to develop “democratic culture at all levels, in order to teach individuals ethical values, a spirit of cooperation and integrity. To that end, the participation of teachers, families, students and outreach workers will be stepped up in their work related to conceptualizing and implementing the plans for shaping citizens imbued with democratic values”;

That in the Plan of Action of the Third Summit of the Americas, held in Quebec City, Canada, in April 2001, the Heads of State and Government committed to supporting and promoting lifelong learning by offering varied curricula based on skills, knowledge, and civic and democratic values;

That in the Declaration of Nuevo León of the Special Summit of the Americas, held in Monterrey, Mexico, in January 2004, the Heads of State and Government reaffirmed the hemispheric commitment to democracy and reiterated the importance for democratic governance of political training and leadership development of young people; and

That in the Declaration of the Fourth Summit of the Americas, held in Mar del Plata, Argentina, in November 2005, the Heads of State and Government recognized, among other things, the importance of facilitating the integration of youth into the labor market and of expanding coverage and improving the quality of information services and career counseling, as well as the importance of creating opportunities to facilitate access by youth to decent work; and that in the Plan of Action of said Summit they committed to reducing youth unemployment and significantly lowering the percentage of young people who neither study nor work;

#### TAKING INTO CONSIDERATION:

That the World Programme of Action for Youth to the Year 2000 and Beyond, adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in resolution 50/81, of December 14, 1995, identifies as priority areas education, employment, hunger and poverty, health, environment, drug abuse, juvenile delinquency, leisure-time activities, girls and young women, and the full and effective participation of youth in the life of society and in decision-making;

The need to strengthen initiatives to ensure that the gender perspective is integrated into policies, programs, and projects targeted at youth;

That the promotion of democratic values, including freedom and social justice, as well as the development of knowledge, capacities, and relevant abilities in the young people of the Americas, are essential for their effective integration into the political, economic, and social spheres;

The importance of designing public policy with the joint participation of families and society in order to provide young people with opportunities to develop fully into productive adults, including the design of programs for training, initial employment, and participation in the economic, social, and cultural development process; and

The potential of youth as people imbued with principles and values, and with skills and abilities, capable of shaping more free, just, and democratic societies;

#### RECOGNIZING:

The importance of youth participation in political activities and public life, including the electoral process, as a key aspect for the promotion and exercise of a democratic culture;

The importance that youth be able to select their training and education on the basis of the exercise of their fundamental freedoms;

That the full exercise of democracy, respect for and the protection and promotion of human rights, and recognition that the individual is at the center of integral development, are essential for the improvement of social conditions and the eradication of poverty;

That democracy and social and economic development are interdependent and mutually reinforcing;

That conditions of poverty, social exclusion, and vulnerability faced by large numbers of young people in the Hemisphere can affect their development for the rest of their lives;

That poverty and social exclusion constitute obstacles faced by a large number of young people in the Hemisphere and that, therefore, economic and social development that offers equality of opportunity, justice, and social inclusion is essential in order to lend dignity to human beings;

That there are a large number of youths who neither study nor work, that very often the jobs they do find are precarious, and that high levels of youth unemployment are a concern and contribute to their situation of social vulnerability;

The importance of family as a basic nucleus of society for the integral development of young people in their socialization and civic education process;

That free and independent media are fundamental for democracy and for the promotion of pluralism, tolerance, and freedom of thought and expression, and to facilitate dialogue and debate, free and open to youth and all other segments of society, without discrimination of any kind;

That the mass media have an important role to play in educating young people in a spirit of peace, tolerance, justice, freedom, and mutual respect, so as to promote human rights, and the right of young people to access to information from independent, plural, and diverse sources; and

That access to information and the exchange and creation of knowledge are important elements of a free, democratic, and pluralistic society, and that the use of the Internet and the World Wide Web, without political censorship, can contribute to the development of a democratic future, the exercise of the right to freedom of expression, and the free flow of information and ideas for the youth and for all the peoples of the Americas, a basic premise of knowledge-based societies;

RECALLING that the Inter-American Program on Education for Democratic Values and Practices was adopted at the Fourth Meeting of Ministers of Education within the framework of CIDI (Inter-American Council for Integral Development), held in Scarborough, Trinidad and Tobago, from August 10 to 12, 2005, in order to promote a democratic culture through education, both formal and non-formal;

**BEARING IN MIND:**

The work carried out by the Inter-American Children's Institute, particularly the promotion of democratic principles, values, and practices;

That the Third Inter-American Meeting of Ministers of Culture and Highest Appropriate Authorities within the Framework of CIDI recognized the importance of preserving and presenting the diverse cultural expressions of the peoples of the Americas as a substantial factor in promoting social cohesion and inclusion and sustainable economic development;

The OAS Youth Symposium "Empowering the Future Leaders of the Americas," and the special meeting of the Permanent Council, held on September 19 and 20, 2007, respectively, at

OAS headquarters, which were decisively supported by youth participants of the Hemisphere; and taking note of the views expressed to the Permanent Council by the participants;

That 2008 marks the 16th anniversary of the Ibero-American Youth Organization, the 23rd anniversary of the International Youth Year (IYY), declared as such by the United Nations, the 13th anniversary of the United Nations World Programme of Action for Youth, and the 10th anniversary of the OAS Program for the Promotion of Democratic Leadership and Citizenship (PROLIDEM);

That 2008 has been designated “Ibero-American Youth Year” within the framework of the XVIII Ibero-American Summit of Heads of State and Government, to be held in San Salvador, El Salvador, which will focus on the central theme “Youth and Development”; and

The importance of fostering youth solidarity through young people’s participation in voluntary humanitarian activities, including both hunger and poverty reduction and emergency and risk-management situations in cases of disasters, regardless of whether such activities are promoted by the public sector or sponsored by the private sector or civil society organizations, as a way to strengthen their civic and democratic values;

UNDERSCORING that the Lecture Series of the Americas was created by the Permanent Council of the OAS to promote democratic principles and values in the countries of the Hemisphere, through lectures on topics related to the hemispheric agenda, such as democracy and social development; and

HIGHLIGHTING the Model OAS General Assembly (MOAS), carried out for the purpose of promoting, among youth, democratic values and a better understanding of the Organization as the main political forum of the Hemisphere,

DECLARE:

1. Their commitment to foster among the youth of the Americas the values set forth in the Charter of the Organization of American States (OAS) and the Inter-American Democratic Charter, so as to strengthen their political, social, and economic participation in the framework of a democratic society.
2. That a young citizenry committed to democratic values can strengthen relations among the peoples of the Hemisphere, based on mutual respect, fraternity, cooperation, solidarity, the acceptance of diversity, tolerance, and peace.
3. That respect for and the protection and promotion of human rights and fundamental freedoms of young people in the Americas are essential for the consolidation of democracy and the development of our peoples.
4. Their commitment to move forward in the promotion and observance of the economic, social, and cultural rights of young people, which are inherently linked to integral development, equitable economic growth, and the consolidation of democracy.
5. Their conviction that education and employment constitute priority areas, among others, for young people and strengthen democratic culture and values.

6. Their pledge to combat all forms of discrimination against youth, for reasons, among others, of race, color, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, economic status, birth, or any other condition, and to promote the participation of young leaders from groups in vulnerable situations, including, among others, indigenous youth and persons of African descent, in the dynamics of development and democratic participation.

7. That to build free and responsible public opinion among youth it is necessary to promote and defend freedom of thought and expression, including the freedom to seek, receive, and impart information and ideas, as well as freedom of the press, and to support the access of youth to uncensored information and political debate.

8. Their resolve to develop and encourage strategies and best practices that enhance the possibility of youth to engage actively in the exchange of opinions, including political discourse, through the Internet or other technological communications media, guaranteeing freedom of investigation, of opinion, and of the expression and dissemination of ideas, as essential components of the knowledge-based society.

9. That they attach priority to incorporating youth issues as a crosscutting component in sectoral public actions and policies, for example, through multisectoral programs of action for youth, as appropriate.

10. The importance of promoting the design of strategies, programs, and policies that involve young people in activities that take their interests and needs into account.

11. Their commitment to promote formal and non-formal education in democratic values and practices in order to develop knowledge and skills among the young population to prepare them for life in a democratic society and the full enjoyment of their human rights and fundamental freedoms.

12. Their commitment to provide access by all young people in the Hemisphere to quality and continuous education.

13. The importance of creating awareness among the young population of the value of the educational experience.

14. That they recognize the contribution of young people to sustainable development and express their commitment to foster among them, through formal and non-formal education and public information, a culture that promotes environmental protection as an element that contributes to strengthened democratic and civic values.

15. That they reaffirm their commitment to continuing to improve the coverage and quality of education, both formal and non-formal; to broadening opportunities for access to higher education; to promoting efforts to dissuade young people from dropping out of school; and to boosting professional training and vocational programs, paying particular attention to the more vulnerable segments of the population, with a view to achieving their incorporation into the labor market and the full exercise of their rights and responsibilities as citizens.

16. That the technical and pedagogical training of teachers and administrators of vocational and technical education makes a very positive contribution to raising the level of skills and schooling of youth and adults, thereby increasing their ability to join the workforce; and that

this initiative requires the implementation of projects that contribute to the development of educational policies, programs, and practices suited to the circumstances of each country.

17. Their commitment to promote public policies, programs, and projects that will enhance employability and increase equal opportunity, entrepreneurship, and job creation for the youth of the Hemisphere, so that all of them may achieve decent work and quality jobs, bearing in mind the recommendations of the International Labour Organization (ILO) regarding child labor.

18. The importance of coordinating with the private and academic sectors on developing initiatives for programs and projects for youth.

19. Their commitment to urge the private sector to develop initiatives aimed at offering employment opportunities to youth, as well as instilling in them an entrepreneurial spirit.

20. Their commitment to develop social policies and programs that facilitate access by youth, especially those working in the informal sector, to microcredit and microfinance.

21. The importance that productive organizations, in accordance with each country's characteristics, such as cooperatives and other forms of production, can have for youth, bearing in mind the contributions of these organizations to the economy and to the creation of decent jobs.

22. Their commitment to develop plans and programs to strengthen the training and skills development of young people living in rural areas in the agricultural sciences, including livestock sciences and any others that may be necessary, with a view to creating jobs and helping to increase agricultural production in the Hemisphere.

23. Their commitment to guarantee youth the conditions necessary to live in peace, generating and expanding, as appropriate, forums for dialogue, in order to make them participants in the promotion and building of a culture of peace.

24. Their commitment to promote a favorable economic, social, and cultural environment, enabling young people to develop fully and remain in their places of origin, in order to avoid migration by necessity or for economic reasons and, as appropriate, facilitate their return and their reintegration into their countries of origin.

25. Their commitment to promote joint efforts aimed at guaranteeing observance of the human rights of young migrants, irrespective of their migration status, especially those who find themselves subjected to racial and other forms of discrimination, and cruel or degrading treatment, and to promote orderly migration and support for migrant programs that enable young migrants to become socially integrated into receiving countries, as well as to promote respect for the cultural identity of migrant youth.

26. Their commitment to promote and implement strategies, policies, programs, and concrete measures designed to foster education for democracy, in particular for youth and women, and to increase support to civil society, especially to facilitate citizens' engagement in policy-making processes and in the provision of civic and democracy education.

27. Their commitment to promote favorable conditions for full and effective political participation by young people conscious of their rights and responsibilities, and able and willing to become involved in decisions relating to their own development, thereby consolidating democracy in the Hemisphere.

28. That the participation of young people in decisions relating to their own development is a right and a responsibility, which makes them necessary actors in the formulation, implementation, and evaluation of public policies and gives them an important role in the fulfillment of the development goals of the United Nations Millennium Declaration.

29. The importance of creating or strengthening leadership programs for young people so that they may become promoters of civic and democratic values in their families and communities, in order to generate healthy and safe environments for their development.

30. That they pledge to promote greater participation and inclusion of young people in public affairs and civil society activities by ensuring favorable conditions, including, among others, in electoral observation processes, social volunteering activities, community-based programs, and activities related to the protection of the environment.

31. That they will encourage the creation of independent youth organizations and youth participation in political processes that enable them, collectively and democratically, to voice their ideas and expectations in society.

32. Their commitment to encourage the participation of youth in electoral processes and to strengthen their involvement in these processes by making them more responsive to young people's needs and expectations, by reducing barriers, and by improving accessibility.

33. The importance of promoting the effective exercise of, and respect for, the right to identity of youth, especially through the universalization of civil registry, which is essential to the full exercise of their civil, political, economic, social, and cultural rights, as well as their participation in a democratic society.

34. Their commitment to promote, protect, and ensure, in conditions of equality, respect for the human rights of youth with disabilities, as well as to combat all forms of discrimination and promote the elimination of all types of obstacles and barriers to their development and their full inclusion in society, facilitating the exercise of their rights and duties as citizens in a framework of democratic values and principles.

35. That, bearing in mind the positive impact of cultural activities, including cultural industries, they will endeavor to develop policies that strengthen in youth a recognition of, and appreciation and respect for, the value of cultural diversity, tangible and intangible cultural and historical heritage, including popular customs, and the contributions, *inter alia*, of indigenous people, as well as of persons of African descent and minority communities, and policies that generate greater understanding of the relationships among culture, development, and education, as factors that contribute to the strengthening and promotion of democratic values.

36. Their commitment to adopt policies and programs to ensure the social, economic, and cultural inclusion of young people, bearing in mind their vulnerability to diverse problems such as poverty, crime in all its forms, violence, drug addiction, illicit drug use, trafficking in persons, high drop-out rates, and unemployment, and to increase the quality and coverage of social services aimed at improving the quality of life of youth and promoting healthy lifestyles.

37. That, considering the problem of youth involved in criminal activities, it is important to establish programs that focus on prevention and emphasize their full reintegration into society through, among other things, rehabilitation support services and education policies.

In addition, measures should be taken to ensure due process and, as applicable, decent conditions of detention, within the framework of full respect for their human rights.

38. Their commitment to strengthen cooperation in the fight against trafficking in persons and the smuggling of migrants, promoting public awareness and prevention campaigns aimed at educating youth on the dangers of criminal networks and providing protection and assistance to the young victims.

39. Their commitment to pay special attention to those aspects of the physical, mental, and social well-being of young people necessary for their full integration and participation in society, such as access to basic health care, including, among other things, sexual and reproductive health, prevention and treatment of HIV/AIDS, and prevention, treatment, and rehabilitation programs related to illicit drug use, the prevention of early pregnancy, and the elimination of all forms of violence, including gender-based violence, sexual exploitation of young people, and child prostitution.

40. That they call on member states to promote programs to expand young people's training in, and access to, the use of information and communication technologies, in order to reduce the digital divide and the knowledge gap that affect them and to strengthen their democratic participation in political, economic, social, and cultural forums.

41. That they urge member states to promote programs to motivate young people to participate in science and technology, as a means of fostering technological innovation and scientific development.

42. That they welcome the holding of the XVIII Ibero-American Summit of Heads of State and Government, to take place in El Salvador in October 2008, with the central theme of "Youth and Development," which will generate further initiatives and results to benefit the youth of the region.

43. That they request that the OAS General Secretariat, in collaboration with the member states and in accordance with available financial resources and applicable rules and procedures in this regard:

- a. To promote greater participation by youth in the activities established by the Inter-American Program on Education for Democratic Values and Practices, which contributes to strengthening democratic culture through formal and non-formal education; developing and strengthening teaching methods for that purpose; fostering a culture of respect for human rights and peace, with a focus on equality and cultural pluralism; and promoting horizontal cooperation and the exchange of experiences among the different entities active in this area internationally, regionally, nationally, subnationally, and locally, as appropriate;
- b. To develop a regional information and evaluation system on the status of citizenship competencies, in coordination with the Regional System for Evaluation and Development of Citizenship Competencies and other entities that are carrying out pertinent similar initiatives, in order to share best practices in education for democratic values and to identify opportunities for horizontal cooperation among governments, educational institutions, and civil society;

- c. To support the training of young people for more effective and efficient participation in the diverse sectors of society;
- d. To continue promoting the Lecture Series of the Americas as a means of fostering democratic principles and values among young people of the Hemisphere;
- e. To continue promoting the holding of Model OAS General Assembly (MOAS) sessions in the countries of the Hemisphere, to foster in young people negotiation, leadership, and communication skills—essential components for life under democracy;
- f. To mainstream the youth perspective into the programs and activities of the OAS, in particular, activities that focus on the promotion of democratic principles and values;
- g. To identify a Focal Point on Youth within the General Secretariat to facilitate the coordination of all OAS initiatives relating to the youth agenda, and to report annually to the Permanent Council on the progress of these initiatives;
- h. To organize annually at OAS headquarters a Youth Week, which may be held in conjunction with the OAS Model General Assembly;
- i. To contribute to the consolidation of a hemispheric vision for policies and programs designed to secure and promote young people's rights and thereby advance the integration and social cohesion of young people;
- j. To support the work of national, state, provincial, and local protective services or other competent authorities, as appropriate, to strengthen, *inter alia*, protection of the rights of young people; and
- k. To support the exchange of best practices in the Hemisphere in research into problems affecting youth and their possible solutions, with the participation of institutions working in this field.

44. That they request the Permanent Council and the Permanent Executive Committee of the Inter-American Council for Integral Development (CEPCIDI) to consider convening an Inter-American Meeting of Ministers and Highest Authorities responsible for Youth before the fortieth regular session of the General Assembly, to be held in 2010.