

ORGANIZATION OF AMERICAN STATES



Presentation by

*Ambassador Albert R. Ramdin
Assistant Secretary General*

30th Annual Forum of Parliamentarians for Global Action (PGA) Strengthening Democratic Institutions, Accountability, and the Rule of Law

Panel Discussion:

Mainstreaming the Rule of Law, Justice and the Fight against Impunity in
International Relations and Cooperation: the role of Parliamentarians

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Thank you Madam Chair, Diputada Minou Tavaréz Mirabal,

I am very pleased to make my presentation under your leadership and I thank you for hosting us with so much warmth and the typical Dominican hospitality,

Your Excellency Senator Ricardo Poveda Pérez, President of the Senate,

Your Excellency Diputado Julio César Valentín, President of the Chamber of Deputies,

Distinguished Members of the Senate and the Chamber of Deputies,

Your Excellency Dr Radhames Jiménez, Attorney General of the Dominican Republic,

Senator Bassey Ewa Henshaw, President of the Parliamentarians for Global Action,

Distinguished Members of the Parliamentarians for Global Action,

A special word of welcome to the delegation of Haitian Parliamentarians, led by Senator Dr Kelly

Bastien, President of the Senate of the Republic of Haiti,

Distinguished Members of the Head Table,

Distinguished Members of the Corps Diplomatique,

Specially Invited Guests,

Representatives from the media,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am indeed pleased to address you today again after the successful seminar in Paramaribo, Suriname a couple of months ago, which undoubtedly contributed to the discussions in the Parliament of Suriname to approve the accession of Suriname to the International Criminal Court and to become shortly thereafter the 107th member of the ICC. In this regard I do want to recognize the sterling efforts of the longstanding member of the National Assembly of the Republic of Suriname, Madam Ruth Wijdenbosch.

I congratulate Parliamentarians for Global Action for holding this annual forum in the Western Hemisphere and especially in the Caribbean nation of Santo Domingo.

I want to express my appreciation to the host country the Dominican Republic and especially the National Congress for hosting this meeting and for the excellent arrangements put in place to make this a most successful and fruitful gathering of parliamentarians, legislators, policy makers and civil society representatives.

I also want to take the opportunity to add my words of deep appreciation to the two awardees of the “Defender of the Democracy Award”, His Excellency Leonel Fernandez, President of the Dominican Republic and the Honorable Don McKinnon, former Minister of Foreign Affairs of New Zealand and former Secretary General of the Commonwealth. It is through these excellent examples of the defenders of democracy and good governance that we continue to be inspired and keep the light of hope burning for those millions living in poverty, discriminated or excluded from the society and economy.

Parliamentarians for Global Action’s commitment to strengthening democracy, promoting transparency and accountability, and the application and enforcement of the rule of law is commendable, as they coincide with the goals of the Organization of American States to create within the democratic framework good governance, peace and prosperity.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I will make some general and introductory remarks on the OAS’s experience in peace building and post conflict developments. I believe it would be then relevant to share with you my views with regard to the efforts in the Republic of Haiti and in their relationship with the Dominican Republic to foster political stability, socials and economic development.

Over the past 15 years, the OAS has invested a tremendous amount of time, resources and energy in addressing a number of significant conflict and post-conflict situations, such as in Nicaragua, Guatemala, Bolivia and Haiti.

In the OAS experience, transforming conflict goes beyond problem solving or crisis management. To secure and maintain peace, it is important to address the root causes of conflict and change how actors or parties perceive, relate and interact with each other. It requires that stakeholders take ownership of the values embedded in the objectives of civic education, solidarity, and tolerance, democracy and human rights. Structural peace building allows for working on immediate and long term goals in order to create sustainable peaceful environments.

What we have learned is that meeting the challenges of peace-building requires reaching out to a broad spectrum of society and government actors simultaneously in order to address the numerous urgent tasks of stabilizing a country. However, there is no blueprint for post-conflict development or peace-building. Each situation is unique and differs from country to country. Experience has shown that decision makers cannot copy measures taken elsewhere, but they can benefit from lessons learned from similar situations.

I would like to propose that state-building and peace-building should be viewed as parallel processes that must happen simultaneously in order to support democratic consolidation. However, the success of these parallel and mutually reinforcing processes are fully dependent on having strong institutional capacity, accountability, representation, and a broadening of political participation from all sectors of society.

Peace building efforts require a long-term commitment; peace building must be holistic and must adopt an integral approach that also includes security and socio-economic development. This will require combining the peace agenda with a strong social and economic development focus including the fight against poverty. Additionally, educating for democracy and peace should be an intrinsic part of curricula if our Hemisphere is to promote better understanding and communication between communities.

In a post-conflict setting, external development assistance to reconstruct a country's infrastructure, institutions and economy is often a key part of the peace-building process, and is vital to ensure that the country can develop to prevent it sliding back into crisis.

The transition to normal security conditions, with an adequate police force and a functioning judiciary is necessary for enforcement of the rule of law. There is no doubt that strengthening the rule of law, accountability and social justice, are fundamental building blocks of peace. However, in my opinion, the one crucial element still lacking in peace-building efforts, and which is highly related to the topic at hand, is the need to build internal capacity so countries can rebuild and reconcile their physical, social and political infrastructure. Peace-building is as much about political stability and sustainable development as it is about public security.

For example, in the case of Haiti, one of the countries in which the OAS has had intensive engagement on these issues, peace-building efforts have been enormous, at times challenging, and are still ongoing. Haiti has made important advances in institution building under the leadership of President Preval and the Parliament. The OAS is proud to have played an important role in this process which undoubtedly had a constructive impact on Haiti's relationship with its neighbor the Dominican Republic and the rest of the Caribbean sub-region.

From a state-building perspective, there have been a number of institutions the OAS and the international community have built in Haiti, with relative success including:

- the strengthening the Haitian National Police and the introduction of a vetting process for new and existing recruits;
- supporting governments efforts in developing new security measures;
- reforming the judiciary and strengthening the rule of law;
- strengthening of the electoral process through the provision of national voter ID cards to more than 95% of the adult population and, in the process, laying the foundation for the first-ever modernized national civil registry.

While the situation in Haiti continues to be a challenge, many of us will agree that what it needs now is innovative, comprehensive and actionable plans of development that will enable its citizens to realize their full potential and facilitate the country's substantive engagement with partners in the sub-region and the hemisphere.

In its relationship with the Dominican Republic, there is considerable mutual interest to work together in order to address common problems. The political willingness from each government to continue to strengthen their ties and relations remains quite high. In this regard, I would like to again thank the Haitian Parliament for the opportunity that they gave me last February to speak with them about the critical importance of the border region.

Haiti and the Dominican Republic stand at an important crossroads in the history of their shared island. Peaceful coexistence between the two countries is a pre-requisite if true development is to take place in the island as whole. During my visits to the Belladere-Elias Piña and Ouanminthe-Dajabon borderlands, I have seen firsthand the importance of these cross border links. And here I would like to express my appreciation to the Pan American Development Foundation, an affiliate of the OAS, for their excellent work in the border area between the Dominican Republic and the Republic of Haiti. I call on the international community to continue supporting the PADF in these efforts to foster social and economic development and friendly relations between the two countries.

Border management, trade, migration, human rights, and natural resources, among other issues, are important for advancing the bi-national relationship and strengthening their social, economic, and political environments in an increasingly competitive global market.

Cross-border engagement, however, requires more than understanding and political will on the behalf of the Haitian and Dominican governments. It requires a coordinated strategy, plan of action, and technical assistance to ensure progress. Beyond the national government level, local communities, including municipal governments and civil society groups, must also be engaged and participate in finding solutions to the challenges at hand. I see a clear and strategic role for Parliamentarians to ensure that communities on both sides of the border receive the necessary support to expand opportunities for growth and stability.

Increased collaboration will help create economic opportunities for both countries to improve community relations between Haitian and Dominican communities, and help ease migration flows.

Furthermore, both countries will benefit from working constructively to enhance communication and cooperation between Haitians and Dominicans interacting on the border. This will require the political support of local officials to:

- develop local capacity of community leaders to manage tensions and resolve smaller border issues,

- facilitate cooperation between customs and migration officials from both sides through improved functioning of existing bi-national mechanisms; and
- improve border conditions, from a social, economic, and security perspective through greater policy dialogue between the two governments.

It is gratifying to know that both governments are working to strengthen their *respective* border controls to stop smuggling of people, weapons, drugs, and contraband. The Government of the Dominican Republic has provided training to its border agents and created a special branch of the military to control the border. Haiti is moving to install customs and immigration offices in the last two border crossings where these services were lacking and is also talking about creating a new border police. The recent tragic events in the border area underscore the urgent need to reinforce and intensify these efforts. Given the existing synergies cooperation among Parliamentarians can provide the much needed political and leadership support to move forward.

Two of the most significant factors that spur migration on Hispaniola are the effects of ineffective social and economic policies combined with political instability. I believe that on both issues, domestic efforts and international cooperation have begun to create a better environment for progress.

A holistic approach to migration management would require a three-pronged response:

- more effective migration control, through strengthening of the concerned institutions and a well articulated migration policy;
- the establishment of legal migration opportunities and the promotion of dialogue at the highest political level; and
- and above all, vigorous structural economic growth and sustainable democracy in Haiti.

Let me commend both countries for the initiative of establishing a joint commission to examine and explore solution to many issues, including migration and trade. I understand that this structure initially contributed *rapprochement* between the authorities of the two countries and resulted in several agreements. I strongly advocate that the joint commission be reactivated as soon as possible.

Twenty years ago, Haiti and the Dominican Republic opened their borders to trade with great hopes for economic integration and cross-border cooperation. I was particularly pleased to see how the Dominican Republic reached out to help Haiti in the post-hurricane period by sending over a team of doctors to provide humanitarian assistance, among other kinds of support. Although both countries have seen an increase in trade and cross-border migration, they have also experienced the challenges that can surface due to differences in culture, language and history.

History has left a marked imprint on the relationship between Haiti and the Dominican Republic. Consequently, there is a need for increased cooperation, dialogue and policy coordination on a wide range of binational, national and regional issues, including the specific needs of local communities.

Over the years, I know that a number of Dominican Parliamentarians have visited Haiti and vice versa to work with their counterparts and that there has been a series of meetings between the two institutions over the years.

These engagements are critical, I believe. As parliamentarians, you have the vision and responsibility to strengthen the relationship between the two countries. I urge parliamentarians from the Dominican Republic and the Republic of Haiti present at this conference to use this unique opportunity to establish structural mechanisms to foster friendly relations, to demonstrate the fundamentals of peaceful coexistence and to collaborate in strengthening the social and economic development of both countries through concrete actions plans. Haiti and the Dominican Republic through their elected representatives have a historic opportunity, through the facilitary role of the PGA, to create meaningful dialogue mechanisms to achieve these objectives.

I reaffirm our commitment to the people and Governments of the Republic of Haiti and the Dominican Republic in your objectives to foster friendship, solidarity and economic well being. The OAS stands ready to support you in this endeavor.

I thank you for your kind attention.