



VOLUNTARY GROUP FOR THE FOLLOW UP OF THE INTER-AMERICAN DEMOCRATIC CHARTER

PROPOSED GUIDELINES

INTRODUCTION	
	<p>In 2001, the OAS General Assembly approved the Inter-American Democratic Charter, in which the Member States recognized that "The people of America have the right to democracy and their governments have the obligation to promote and defend it," and that "democracy is essential for the social, political and economic development of the people of the Americas". This Charter also recognizes that elements of representative democracy include, among others, "respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms; access to power and its exercise subject to the rule of law; the holding of periodic, free elections, fair and based on universal and secret suffrage as an expression of the sovereignty of the people; the plural regime of political parties and organizations; and the separation and independence of public powers", and that "democracy and economic and social development are interdependent and mutually reinforcing. Likewise, Member States agreed to periodically review the actions adopted and executed by the Organization aimed at promoting dialogue, cooperation for comprehensive development and the fight against poverty in the Hemisphere and take appropriate measures to promote these objectives. The OAS can only thrive as a beacon for democratic practice if its constituent members actively participate and collaborate in initiatives that transcend borders and unite them in the shared pursuit of inclusive, accountable, and responsive democratic institutions. The Voluntary Group offers an opportunity to revitalize the region's commitment to the Democratic Charter, based on mutual understanding, respect and active cooperation.</p>
MANDATE	
	<p>The General Assembly of the OAS, in its 53rd regular session of the General Assembly, issued a mandate contained in resolution Strengthening Democracy AG/RES. 3004 (VI. Follow-up of the Inter-American Democratic Conference), in which it encourages "the creation of an open-participation Voluntary Group of Member States to foster, with the support of the Secretariat for Strengthening Democracy, dialogue, horizontal cooperation and the sharing of best practices among its members, and to identify opportunities within the principles of the OAS Charter and the Inter-American Democratic Charter to strengthen their democracies."</p> <p>This mandate responds to the interest of Member States in strengthening dialogue and cooperation on democracy, considering the new challenges it faces, some of which were described in the Joint Statement "Follow-up of the Inter-American Democratic Charter, on the occasion of the International Day of Democracy", issued by 26 Member States on September 20, 2023, and in which it was reaffirmed the interest in better implementing the Charter based on mutual respect, dialogue and cooperation, the principle of non-intervention, and the exchange of experiences and best practices; improve the quality of our democracies; and strengthen the continuous and creative work to consolidate democracy, as well as a permanent effort to prevent and anticipate the very causes of the problems that affect the democratic system of government.</p>

OBJECTIVE OF THE VOLUNTARY GROUP FOR THE FOLLOW-UP OF THE INTER-AMERICAN DEMOCRATIC CHARTER

Foster dialogue, promote horizontal cooperation and the exchange of best practices among the members of the Voluntary Group of the Follow-up of the Inter-American Democratic Charter to strengthen their democracies in accordance with the principles of the OAS Charter and the Inter-American Democratic Charter.

FUNCTIONING

Authorities:
The Voluntary Group will have a president and a vice-president, who will be elected from among the representatives of the Member States that have expressed their willingness to participate in the group.

Duration:
The president and vice president will serve for a period of six months, which may be renewable for a single additional period of six months.

Frequency of meetings:
Group meetings will be held once a month or every two months.

Meeting format:
Group meetings will be held in a hybrid manner (in person and via Kudo). Only members of the delegations of the Member States, including representatives from capitals when necessary, will be able to participate in the virtual meetings. The meetings are not open to the public, only to Member States.

Technical and logistical support:
The Secretariat for Strengthening Democracy–SSD–will support the Voluntary Group in the functions entrusted to it, in accordance with the mandate of the General Assembly. Among these functions are:

- Convene the meetings of the Voluntary Group via Verbal Note.
- Coordinate necessary services with the Department of Conference.
- Prepare documents as requested, including meeting agendas.
- The languages in which the group will work are English and Spanish.
- Prior to meetings, consolidate information on the programs carried out by the OAS on the topics to be addressed at meetings, in order to avoid duplication of efforts.

Financing of meetings and activities promoted by the group:
Services provided at the meetings (coffee, water) and translation of documents will depend on the availability of financial resources.

If the Member States so decide, the SSD may request financial support from permanent missions and observer missions to the OAS.

DEBATES

The debates will be aimed at seeking to identify opportunities for horizontal cooperation and exchange of good practices among the members of the group, as well as possible lines of action that seek to take advantage of the instruments already existing in the inter-American system for the promotion and strengthening of democracy. None of the documents produced by the group will be binding.

If the group deems it pertinent, external experts and civil society organizations may be invited to participate in the debates. Said participation will be subject to prior agreement between the members of the group, to ensure, as far as possible, equitable geographical representation, reflecting the democracies and cultural diversity of the members of the Voluntary Group.

The group may submit to the Chairman of the Permanent Council information on the development of its activities, so that they could eventually be taken into account as inputs in the preparatory processes of the General Assembly of the OAS and other political bodies.

The data and documents used in group discussions must be impartial and provided voluntarily by the members of the group.

The Presidency of the Voluntary Group, in accordance with its members, is the only body authorized to make public statements or pronouncements on social networks in name of the group, about its work and activities. However, this does not prevent representatives of Member States from communicating about their participation in the meetings.

WORK PLAN	
	The work plan proposals of the respective Presidencies will be framed within the following Thematic Axes:
THEMATIC AXES	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Axis 1: Democracy and human rights ➤ Axis 2: Democracy, integral development and combating poverty ➤ Axis 3: Promotion of a democratic culture ➤ Axis 4: Strengthening and preservation of democratic institutions <p><i>Note: the thematic axes must consider the gender perspective and the equal participation of women and men.</i></p>
THEMES AND ACTIVITIES	
	<p style="text-align: center;">➤ Axis 1: Democracy and human rights</p> <p>Themes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Protection of minorities and groups of persons in situations of vulnerability ○ Freedom of expression and the media ○ Rule of law ○ Open digital, inclusive, and transparent Government Challenges ○ Democracy in the face of other current challenges ○ Promote the elimination of all forms of discrimination and racism, keeping in mind Article 9 of the IADC <p>Possible activities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Share best practices and consider challenges regarding minority human rights protection. ○ Share perspectives to promote freedom of expression. ○ Promote dialogue about strategies to promote a democratic environment with the media. ○ Exchange experience on disinformation in electoral contexts to support the updating of the “Guide to guarantee freedom of expression against disinformation in electoral contexts.” ○ Share best practices and cooperative actions on effective citizen participation in political and social decision-making, particularly of women, young women, and youth. ○ Other activities or themes of interest to the group compatible with its mandate. ○ Open discussions and debate compatible with its mandate.

	<p style="text-align: center;">➤ Axis 2: Democracy, integral development and combating poverty</p> <p>Themes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Social inclusion and sustainable development ○ Equity and social justice ○ Environment and democracy ○ Economic opportunity, empowerment and inclusive growth ○ Innovative economic models for poverty reduction ○ Money and politics, for example, campaign finance, transparency in politics <p>Possible activities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Share experience and best practices regarding social inclusion and inequality. ○ Share experience and best practices on the equal participation of women in political structures. ○ Share experience and best practices on policies to protect labor rights and generate decent working conditions. ○ Identify and review the actions adopted by the OAS General Secretariat related to the principles contained in the IADC (art. 14). ○ Facilitate a panel discussion on the role of entrepreneurship, access to credit and economic opportunities in achieving sustainable development. ○ Hold a symposium on the impact of inclusive economic policies on democratic processes and integral development. ○ Brainstorm possible ways the OAS could further explore connections between economic instability, democratic participation and poverty alleviation. ○ Presentation of practices and initiatives aimed at regulating, reducing and making transparent the influence of money in politics. ○ Other activities or themes of interest to the group compatible with its mandate.
	<p style="text-align: center;">➤ Axis 3: Promotion of a democratic culture</p> <p>Themes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Promotion of a democratic culture and human rights through education ○ Women and democracy <p>Possible activities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Share experiences and good practices for the promotion of the full and equal participation of women in the political structures of their respective countries as a fundamental element for the promotion and exercise of democratic culture (art. 28 IADC). ○ Examine and share opinions on the goals and objectives of “Human rights education in formal education in the Americas,” and the “Inter-American Program on Education in Democratic Values and Practices”. ○ Share information on civic education programs (citizen education) and initiatives to promote citizenship education and inclusive dialogue among young people.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Programs for youth that have a gender, diversity, and inclusion perspective. ○ IIHR activities presented by Mr. J. Thompson at the 2nd meeting of the Group to revitalize citizen education, promoting work with civil society organizations, enhancing the role of electoral bodies' educational institutes, and updating educational and curricular resources. ○ Share strategies to improve access to education and strengthen technical training. ○ Review the activities carried out by the OAS to promote human rights education. ○ Reflect on educational programs related to democracy and human rights. ○ Other activities or themes of interest to the group compatible with its mandate.
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	<p style="text-align: center;">➤ Axis 4: Strengthening and preservation of democratic institutions</p> <p>Themes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Promotion of democratic governance <p>Possible activities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Identify best practices for the effective, broader and more inclusive, participation of civil society and other social actors in the spaces of the OAS. ○ Share best practices and experience regarding democratic strengthening and promote their collection by the Organization. ○ Consider the development of a digital platform to promote best practices and cooperation between actors. ○ Identify opportunities within the principles of the OAS Charter and IADC to strengthen the democracies of the members of the Voluntary Group. ○ Meeting of the Group of Friends of the CDI, with participation and input from the members of the Voluntary Group. ⊖ Follow-up on the results of the roundtables held in diverse areas regarding the needs and challenges of the IADC. ○ Invite experts to collaborate with the group to nurture dialogue, taking into consideration the need for prior agreement among the members of the group to ensure a balance of geographic representativeness, reflecting democracies and the cultural diversity of the members of the Voluntary Group. ○ Other activities or themes of interest to the group compatible with its mandate.
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DURATION, PRIORITIZATION AND ACCOUNTABILITY	
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	<p>This work plan shall be valid for twenty-four (24) months. Within this framework, every six months the Group will review its work and prioritize the activities or topics to be addressed in the following six-month period, in accordance with available resources, and make possible adjustments to the Work Plan when appropriate.</p>
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