



SUMMITS OF THE AMERICAS VIRTUAL PLATFORM (SVP)

The SVP was launched to expand opportunities for participation in the Summits Process through the use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs).

From September 2008 to February 2009 the Organization of American States (OAS), through the Summits of the Americas Secretariat (SAS), carried out a series of virtual consultations with civil society and other social actors on the main themes of the Fifth Summit of the Americas, as presented in the Draft Declaration of Commitment of Port of Spain. Each forum allowed for registered users to exchange ideas and develop recommendations with technical experts in each area through threaded discussions, access to relevant documents and videos and other ICT tools.

After each forum, the SAS produced a summary report and channeled it to representatives of the OAS' Member States for their consideration during the negotiation process of the text signed as a Declaration of Commitment by the Heads of State and Government during the Fifth Summit of the Americas (Trinidad & Tobago, April 2009).

CIVIL SOCIETY CALLS FOR THE CONTINUATION OF VIRTUAL FORA

On March 3 and 4, 2009, more than 100 civil society participants from the hemisphere met at the OAS Headquarters, to formulate recommendations for both the **Fifth Summit of the Americas**, and for the XXXIX OAS General Assembly (Honduras, June 2009).

One of the recommendations, under the theme *“Strengthening of civil society participation in OAS activities and the Summits of the Americas Process”*, states the following:

“We call for the continuation of the OAS Virtual Forum as an ongoing instrument for network and discussion of issues across the hemisphere by Civil Society.”

To refer to all recommendations made by civil society during the 2009 Civil Society Hemispheric Forum, please visit: <http://www.civil-society.oas.org>

VIRTUAL FORA HELD:

Human Prosperity

Energy Security

*In collaboration with the OAS Department of Sustainable Development

Environmental Sustainability

*In collaboration with the OAS Department of Sustainable Development

Public Security & Democratic Governance

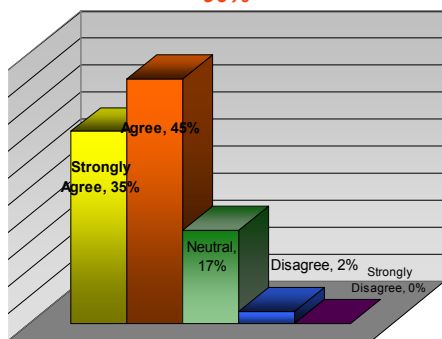
Virtual Gender Forum

*In coordination with the OAS Inter-American Commission on Women (CIM)

SVP User opinion-poll: Highlights of the post-user survey conducted in March, 2009:

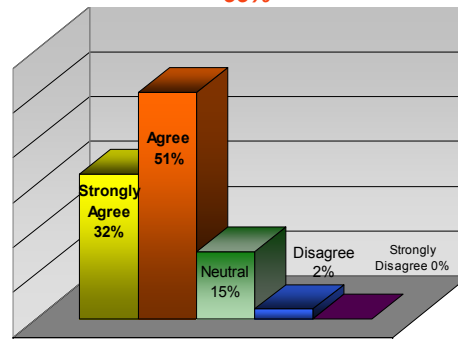
“The SVP virtual fora have improved my understanding of the Summits Process”

**“Agree” or “Strongly Agree”
90%**



“The SVP facilitated participation of civil society and other social actors in the Summits Process”

**“Agree” or “Strongly Agree”
83%**



Please visit our website to access all final reports and to view the findings and conclusions of the survey.

“This is the best option for people like me, who do not have the resources to travel from country to country to participate in civil society meetings”

“This mechanism transcends borders, facilitates and makes communication more affordable and allows users to share experiences”

Main Recommendations: Highlighted below are some of the main comments and frequent recommendations made by participants during the virtual fora related to the primary themes of the Fifth Summit:

Promoting Human Prosperity

- It is considered necessary to explicitly recognize the role that social actors play as an interface between the government and the people. A call is made to the region's governments to encourage the participation of social actors, such as NGOs, in the Summits of the Americas Process.
- Social actors emphasize the need to establish specific actions to promote inter-sector alliances that include government, academia, the private sector and media, in order to strengthen coordination and promote joint efforts.
- Participants insisted on the need to promote corporate social responsibility initiatives aimed at increasing and qualitatively improving private sector's participation in areas such as health, education and knowledge-based society.
- It is necessary for governments go beyond expressing their commitment through this Declaration. Social actors claim for this Declaration to be paralleled with political will and the identification of the necessary resources to achieve the goals set forth within.

Promoting Environmental Sustainability

- The participants emphasized the need to specify in the Declaration of Commitment the kind of actions that the governments are to take to promote environmental sustainability and to indicate who would be the main players involved. Several participants agreed that while the governments had, a number of years ago, recognized the environmental sustainability challenges facing the region, little progress has been made in the areas of disaster mitigation and environmental legislation, and even less in the enforcement thereof.
- There were repeated calls for governments to be more insistent in promoting environmental awareness among social actors. Proposals were made for communication campaigns, education efforts, and citizen participation in the design and implementation of environmental programs and legislation.
- A recurring concern related to climate change and natural disasters was the urgency of mitigating the impact those phenomena have on the most vulnerable segments of the population. The possible solutions included prevention mechanisms (vs. reactive measures), since the former are considered more effective in reducing the socioeconomic impact of natural disasters. The proposed methods included strengthening risk management, early warnings, education on environmental topics, and planning and zoning practices to prevent human settlements from being established in vulnerable areas.

Promoting Energy Security

- The forum emphasized the importance of guaranteeing energy security in the region, and it proposed that the topic's crosscutting nature be explicitly recognized. Participants called on the region's governments, through the Summits Process, to promote topics related to energy security on a comprehensive basis, such as the promotion of sustainable development, environmental management, exploration of natural resources, human rights, and food security.
- The participants also insisted on the need to establish national strategies to set the basis for and to expand incentives for the strengthening of inter-governmental and inter-sector partnerships at the regional level and for the promotion of international cooperation.
- Constant emphasis was placed on the role that both governments and civil society must play in the formulation and implementation of policies and strategies to promote the use of renewable and sustainable energy. The participants also stressed the importance of designing strategies to heighten awareness among the public about saving energy and about the impact all actors have on the environment.
- Finally, one of the topics addressed – not only in the forum, but also in the Lecture Series of the Americas with Mr. Roberto Rodrigues, former Minister of Agriculture of Brazil – was the food-versus-fuel myth. Emphasis was placed on the importance of the role of the OAS in helping to clarify and illustrate this topic in the region's countries.

Strengthening Public Security & Democratic Governance

- Participants emphasized the importance of guaranteeing the implementation and fulfillment of the commitments made in the Declaration, as well as the fundamental part played in this area by nongovernmental and civil society organizations.
- Also emphasized was the need to promote public-private partnerships at both the national and regional levels to facilitate the design and implementation of public policies geared to the realities of each country.
- Participants also underscored the role of the OAS as a regional forum promoting spaces for participation and inclusion of different social players.
- Lastly, participants suggested placing greater emphasis in the Declaration on public security and democratic governance-related matters, such as institutional capacity building, combating corruption, curriculum development, combating domestic violence and violence against children, discrimination, and environmental security.

The SVP is a joint effort of the Summits of the Americas Secretariat and the OAS/SEDI Department of Human Development - through the Educational Portal of the Americas - with the support of the Institute for Connectivity in the Americas / International Development Research Centre (IDRC/ICA).

