

GOVERNANCE PROGRAMS THE NEED FOR AN INTEGRATED AGENDA

**By
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I am pleased to be invited by the National Coalition on Caribbean Affairs (NCOCA) to present a paper on governance to this meeting convoked by the Committee on Inter-American Summits Management and Civil Society Participation in OAS Activities. I do so with the understanding that some of my comments are relevant to the Caribbean as well as to the hemisphere as a whole.

I wish to refer to you a document which I prepared in 1999 in my capacity as consultant to the OAS/Unit for the Promotion of Democracy entitled "Working Document on Program of Support for Democracy and Good Governance in the Caribbean." In that document I reviewed the various contributions to this subject relevant to the Caribbean from 1995 to 1999 and the resolve of local, regional and international institutions to strengthen democracy and governance in the region. I presented my analysis of the problems which were surfacing at the time and made recommendations for action programs in order to avert a worsening of the situation.

Since then other contributions have been made to this subject. I wish to refer you to a Conference on Constitutional Reform in the Caribbean on January 20-22, 2002 held in Barbados, which was attended by Caribbean Heads of Government, our Secretary General and other distinguished personalities, who all made brilliant contributions to the conference.

The question we must ask ourselves is, what actions have been taken by the OAS or other organizations to implement resolutions and recommendations emanating from the many meetings referred to above?

One of my observations is the tendency to look at topics such as governance in segregated or compartmentalized corridors and not the interdisciplinary connectedness within the subject area. The reason for this should be well known, but little is done to break such barriers.

In my paper of 1999 I made reference to civic education, improvement of the justice system, local government and citizen participation, constitutional reform, electoral reform and security as areas which are vital components of governance.

I contend that the slow and painful process to the consolidation of democracy and good governance in some countries in our hemisphere can be attributed to the absence of an integrated and collaborative approach to implementation processes by local, regional and international institutions. In some cases, even when broad programs are elucidated, there is the absence of follow-up action and activities and in many cases programs are narrow in execution with limited funding. In other cases attempts at implementation are programmed without an in-depth understanding of the socio-cultural perspectives of the countries under consideration or indeed their leaders.

It is therefore not surprising that some old problems, e.g. those pertaining to the electoral process, continue to fester in some countries creating grave problems to democratic governance. We also have examples where even after proper elections are held, governance in a country remains as a problem. Here we need to examine internal as well as external influences on governance, a subject which one may wish to consider in another forum.

I think that this is an appropriate juncture for stock taking and honest reflection. We must ask ourselves why is it that after so many years of institutional experience there are still so many recalcitrant problems, sometimes no different from the past? I contend that this stock taking should not be executed by self-serving officials within institutions but should be opened to external analysts.

Without mentioning countries, it is clear that existing constitutions in some countries lend themselves to problems of governance and the use of strong-handed tactics by leaders in the name of the defense of democracy and the constitution which put them in place. Many Caribbean countries are embarking on constitutional reform to address, *inter alia*, the problems related to representative government. Some countries in our hemisphere are slow to recognize the need for such a reform.

In my paper of 1999, I recommended that our various institutions of higher learning and think tanks should embark upon studies in this area. I am of the view that the time is ripe for the production of scholarly works on the basic elements which should be incorporated within a constitution in order to protect our leaders from themselves and, above all, to protect our societies from excesses of well-intentioned leaders in the execution of their powers.

It is enlightening that the role of civil society in democracy and governance is now taking center stage. In this regard balanced dialogue should be encouraged. The Caribbean has been seized with this thrust as manifested in The Charter of Civil Society for the Caribbean Community expressed by the Heads of Government in the Caribbean. In Article 14 of the Charter under the subtitle *Awareness and Responsibilities of the People* it is stated, "The States hereby declare that the people have an important role to play in the pursuit and maintenance of good governance. Accordingly, the States should build awareness, engender support and establish programs to foster sound values and positive attitudes and shall enhance individual and institutional capacities to secure..." well-defined objectives related to democracy and governance.

In summary, I contend that there is need for an integrated approach to the implementation of programs of democracy and governance to include the various areas mentioned earlier in this paper. I also contend that there is need for an assessment of the implementation of the many recommendations put forth by the many local, regional and international meetings on democracy and governance in our hemisphere and that this should include external assessors.

The Summit Management Committee of the OAS must not be looked upon as a mere repository of reports and recommendations. It is important that, with the assistance of external agents, it should undertake an assessment of the implementation of past

resolutions and recommendations. It is by so doing that we can formulate meaningfully plans for the future and avert a repetition of errors of the past.

I place this as a challenge to you.

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