

*Permanent Observers.* Algeria, Angola, Armenia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Belgium, Benin, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, China, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Egypt, Equatorial Guinea, Estonia, EU, Finland, France, Georgia, Germany, Ghana, Greece, Holy See, Hungary, Iceland, India, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Japan, Kazakhstan, South Korea, Latvia, Lebanon, Luxembourg, Morocco, the Netherlands, Nigeria, Norway, Pakistan, Philippines, Poland, Portugal, Qatar, Romania, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sri Lanka, Sweden, Switzerland, Thailand, Tunisia, Turkey, UK, Ukraine, Vanuatu, Yemen.

*Aims and Activities.* To strengthen the peace and security of the continent; promote and consolidate representative democracy; promote by co-operative action economic, social and cultural development; and achieve an effective limitation of conventional weapons.

In Sept. 2001 an Inter-American Democratic Charter was adopted, declaring: 'The peoples of the Americas have a right to democracy and their governments have an obligation to promote and defend it.' The Charter compels the OAS to take action against any member state that disrupts its own democratic institutions.

*Organization.* Under its Charter the OAS accomplishes its purposes by means of:

(a) The General Assembly, which meets annually. The Secretary-General is elected by the General Assembly for five-year terms. The General Assembly approves the annual budget which is financed by quotas contributed by the member governments. The budget in 2009 amounted to US\$96.12m.

(b) The Meeting of Consultation of Ministers of Foreign Affairs, held to consider problems of an urgent nature and of common interest.

(c) The Councils: The Permanent Council, which meets on a permanent basis at OAS headquarters and carries out decisions of the General Assembly, assists the member states in the peaceful settlement of disputes, acts as the Preparatory Committee of that Assembly, submits recommendations with regard to the functioning of the Organization, and considers the reports to the Assembly of the other organs. The Inter-American Council for Integral Development (CIDI) directs and monitors OAS technical co-operation programmes.

(d) The Inter-American Juridical Committee which acts as an advisory body to the OAS on juridical matters and promotes the development and codification of international law. 11 jurists, elected for four-year terms by the General Assembly, represent all the American States.

(e) The Inter-American Commission on Human Rights which oversees the observance and protection of human rights. Seven members elected for four-year terms by the General Assembly represent all the OAS member states.

(f) The General Secretariat, which is the central and permanent organ of the OAS.

(g) The Specialized Conferences, meeting to deal with special technical matters or to develop specific aspects of inter-American co-operation.

(h) The Specialized Organizations, intergovernmental organizations established by multilateral agreements to discharge specific functions in their respective fields of action, such as women's affairs, agriculture, child welfare, Indian affairs, geography and history, and health.

*Headquarters:* 17th Street and Constitution Avenue, NW, Washington, D.C., 20006, USA.

*Website:* <http://www.oas.org>

*Secretary-General:* José Miguel Insulza (Chile).

*Publications.* *Charter of the Organization of American States.* 1948.—As Amended by the Protocol of Buenos Aires in 1967 and the Protocol of Cartagena de Indias in 1985; *The OAS and the Evolution of the Inter-*

*American System; Annual Report of the Secretary-General; Status of Inter-American Treaties and Conventions* (annual).

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## Secretariat for Central American Economic Integration (SIECA)

SIECA (Secretaría de Integración Económica Centroamericana) was created by the General Treaty on Central American Economic Integration in Dec. 1960. The General Treaty incorporates the Agreement on the Regime for Central American Integration Industries. In Oct. 1993 the Protocol to the General Treaty on Central American Economic Integration, known as the Guatemala Protocol, was signed.

*Members.* Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua. *Observer:* Panama.

*Official language:* Spanish.

*Headquarters:* 4a Avenida 10-25, Zona 14, Ciudad de Guatemala, Guatemala.

*Website:* <http://www.sieca.org.gt>

*Secretary-General:* Yolanda Mayora de Gavidia (El Salvador).

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## Southern Common Market (MERCOSUR)

Founded in March 1991 by the Treaty of Asunción between Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay and Uruguay, MERCOSUR committed the signatories to the progressive reduction of tariffs culminating in the formation of a common market on 1 Jan. 1995. This duly came into effect as a free trade zone affecting 90% of commodities. A common external tariff averaging 14% applies to 80% of trade with countries outside MERCOSUR. Details were agreed at foreign minister level by the Protocol of Ouro Preto signed on 17 Dec. 1994.

In 1996 Chile negotiated a free-trade agreement with MERCOSUR which came into effect on 1 Oct. Subsequently Bolivia, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador and Peru have all been granted associate member status. Mexico has observer status. Venezuela, which had associate membership between 2004 and 2006, became the fifth member of MERCOSUR in July 2006, although it was only scheduled to have full voting rights in mid-2010.

*Organization.* The member states' foreign ministers form a Council responsible for leading the integration process, the chairmanship of which rotates every six months. The permanent executive body is the Common Market Group of member states, which takes decisions by consensus. There is a Trade Commission and Joint Parliamentary Commission, an arbitration tribunal whose decisions are binding on member countries, and a secretariat in Montevideo.

Further to the treaty signed by 12 South American countries in May 2008, it is anticipated that Mercosur will gradually be integrated into the new Union of South American Nations.

*Headquarters:* Dr Luis Piera 1992, Piso 1, 11200 Montevideo, Uruguay.

*Website:* <http://www.mercosur.org.uy> (Spanish and Portuguese only)

*Administrative Secretary:* Agustín Colombo Sierra (Argentina).