

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 proposed budget for 2017 amounted to US\$85-0m.

(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 St. and Constitution Ave., NW, Washington, D.C., 20006-4499, USA.

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

Secretary-General: Luis Almagro (Uruguay).

Pacific Alliance

Origin and Aims. The Pacific Alliance was founded in June 2012 through the Pacific Alliance Framework Agreement. The group had informally come together with the signing of the Lima Declaration a year earlier.

Its principal aims are to encourage free trade and economic integration between member states, facilitate freedom of movement and pursue multilateral ties with other regions. A number of jointly-run embassies and consulates have been opened.

Organization. The Alliance holds regular summits attended by heads of member states. This is the leading decision-making body. There is also a Council of Ministers, comprising ministers of foreign affairs and foreign trade, as well as a High-Level Group made up of their deputy ministers.

Membership. In Feb. 2018 there were four members: Chile, Colombia, Mexico and Peru. Costa Rica and Panama were in the process of joining as of Feb. 2018. Countries with observer status in Feb. 2018 were: Argentina, Australia, Austria, Belgium, Canada, China, Croatia, Czech Republic, Denmark, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Egypt, El Salvador, Finland, France, Georgia, Germany, Greece, Guatemala, Haiti, Honduras, Hungary, India, Indonesia, Israel, Italy, Japan, South Korea, Lithuania, Morocco, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Paraguay, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Singapore, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Thailand, Trinidad and Tobago, Turkey, Ukraine, UK, USA, Uruguay.

Website: <http://alianzapacifico.net>

President pro tempore: Ollanta Humala Tasso (Peru).

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, Panama.

Official language: Spanish.

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

Website: <http://www.sieca.int>

Email: info@sieca.int

Secretary-General: Melvin Enrique Redondo (Honduras).

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, Guyana, Peru and Suriname have all been granted associate member status. Bolivia began the accession process to full membership in 2012. Mexico and New Zealand have observer status. Venezuela, which had associate membership between 2004 and 2006, became the fifth member of MERCOSUR in July 2006, although it was not going to have full voting rights until all the other full members had ratified its entry into the organization. Paraguay was the only country still to approve Venezuela's full membership, but it was suspended from MERCOSUR in June 2012 following the impeachment of its president, Fernando Lugo. With Paraguay suspended, Venezuela was then formally admitted in July 2012. Paraguay was readmitted in Aug. 2013 after the swearing-in ceremony of its new