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OAS delegation concludes visit to Haiti

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WASHINGTON, USA: Organization of American States (OAS) Permanent Council Chairman Ambassador Cornelius Smith of the Bahamas and Assistant Secretary General Albert Ramdin on Sunday concluded a four-day mission to Haiti, after leading a high-level delegation which reaffirmed the hemispheric commitment to supporting the consolidation of the Caribbean nation's democracy, human rights and social and economic development.

In a formal communiqué issued in Port-au-Prince, the OAS Mission reaffirmed that support would be "in consonance with the priorities and needs articulated by the government of Haiti." In his remarks to the media, Ramdin observed that, "whatever we do in Haiti and for the Haitians should be based on the priorities and needs identified by the Haitians themselves. The responsibility for the political and socio-economic development of Haiti lies in the first place with Haitians themselves."



OAS Permanent Council Delegation visits Haiti. OAS Photo

The delegation, which included the ambassadors of Argentina, Brazil, Canada, Peru, United States and Uruguay, along with the Alternate Representatives of Chile and Mexico, praised the current climate of political inclusiveness as "critical to the continuing period of relative political, economic and social stability."

The hemispheric organization has also pledged to continue working with the government of Haiti to maintain and strengthen relationships among the Government, the legislature, the political parties and civil society.

The Assistant Secretary General described political inclusiveness as critical to sustaining political, economic and social stability and progress. "It is important to facilitate a process of social and economic development, focusing on key areas of education, health, justice, production, investment promotion and job creation," said Ramdin.

"We believe that Haiti is on a path of upward growth. The OAS is committed to working with Haiti to ensure that the current path leads to real economic development and poverty-reduction for the people of Haiti," Permanent Council Chairman Smith said at the press conference that followed a meeting with a cross-section of civil society organizations.

The meeting and the media event took place at the OAS Haiti Office in the Port-au-Prince

suburb of Pétienville. The member state representatives on the delegation also shared their views and impressions.

Permanent Council Chairman Smith said the OAS delegation found a "deep commitment" and general consensus among all the parties with whom they had met since arriving in Haiti on Thursday, as regards the need to seize the opportunity of the current relative stability, promote cooperation throughout society, and take advantage of the international agencies' willingness "to assist Haiti in its march towards a democratic and productive society."

The Haitian authorities and society were also commended for "directing their best efforts" towards holding partial Senatorial elections as soon as possible.

The OAS Mission called on all sectors of society to work together to lay the foundation for a more sustainable development and for a stable, just and prosperous society. In noting the constitutional reform debate formally launched by President René Prével, the delegation noted the important role of the Presidential Commission which is charged with presenting concrete proposals.

During the visit, the hemispheric diplomats met with the Haitian President and cabinet members as well as senior authorities, and visited various sites around the country, including Cité Soleil outside Port-au-Prince.

The Permanent Council Chairman observed an impressive increase in the level of security in Cité Soleil.

"We witnessed first-hand the transformation that is taking place at the grassroots levels and we are encouraged by the level of support that the National Police and the international community, through [the United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti] MINUSTAH, are providing," the Bahamian diplomat declared.

Additionally, he observed that there is "a great potential for economic development through the development of tourist, agricultural and manufacturing facilities in Cap Haïtien and Labadie in the country's northern region."

While applauding the international community's support, the OAS delegation urged donors to expedite delivery of pledges in order to support Haiti's stability, economic growth and development. The organization's member states also pledged to work with international partners to ensure the success of the International Donors' Conference, slated for Port-au-Prince next April.

Meanwhile, the members of the special mission to Haiti also applauded initiatives by the Pan American Development Foundation (PADF) to assist Haiti with migration issues through a special project being carried out in the border town of Belladère near the Dominican Republic.

The OAS delegation visited Haiti February 14 to 17 as a follow-up to a mandate from last year's General Assembly.

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