



PERMANENT THEMATIC WORKING COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION, CULTURE, SCIENCE, AND TECHNOLOGY

REPORT OF PROCEEDINGS

**Foz do Iguaçu, Brazil
May 10, 2005**

During this third work session of the COPA Committee on Education, Culture, Science, and Technology, which brings together some thirty parliamentarians of the Americas, Committee chair Eric R. Mercier—a member of the Québec National Assembly—began by briefly presenting the meeting theme, i.e., protecting cultural diversity in creating the Free Trade Area of the Americas.

He then invited Mr. Gaëtan Tremblay, a full professor in the Communications Department at Université du Québec à Montréal, to present the key challenges of protecting cultural diversity internationally.

In his presentation, Mr. Tremblay discussed the need to adopt at UNESCO an international convention on the diversity of cultural expressions that would create a cultural law parallel to international trade law.

He stated that cultural goods and services—in addition to being trade items—are powerful vectors of identity, values, and meaning for all of society. We must therefore ensure that the discourse used in reference to culture is not merely economic, but also leaves ample room for its specifically cultural dimension. It is thus imperative to avoid wording that would imply that culture is subordinate to purely market-driven concerns.

However, adopting a convention at UNESCO cannot resolve all the problems entailed in protecting cultural diversity. For this reason, Mr. Tremblay proposes that COPA parliamentarians continue discussing the issue with respect to the integration process in the Americas. Thus, following the example of the European Union, he suggests that if the FTAA ever comes to pass, programs be established to assist artists, professionals, and businesses working in the cultural industries of the poorest countries in our hemisphere.

Mr. Tremblay's presentation raised questions, particularly on the piracy of intellectual property on the Internet, the dual nature of cultural products, the unequal distribution of cultural resources in a given area, the use of open source software, access to culture, and the relationship between cultural life and education.

A discussion paper covering the following topics was also distributed to Committee members to spur discussion on the issue:

- 1) The treatment of cultural goods and services in current trade negotiations, particularly those expected to lead to the creation of FTAA
- 2) Progress in work to adopt an international convention on the diversity of cultural expressions at UNESCO
- 3) Initiatives by inter-American institutions to promote and protect cultural diversity in the Americas, and
- 4) Courses of action for parliamentarians who wish to work on promoting cultural diversity

The Committee's work has helped establish a consensus on the importance of protecting cultural diversity in the Americas. Committee members agreed to unanimously adopt a recommendation urging heads of state and government of the Americas, among other things, to refrain from any World Trade Organization (WTO) commitments on the liberalization of cultural goods and services so as not to compromise the effectiveness of instruments aimed at promoting and supporting cultural diversity.

At their next work session, Committee members hope to discuss a motion by members Lara Bernardi, Fatima Bezerra, and Naluh Gouveia of Brazil on efforts to convert foreign debt into resources for education.

Consequently, Mr. Jesus Garrido Pérez, a member of the Legislative Council of the State of Bariñas, Venezuela, proposed to Committee members courses of action for education, such as the creation of a parliamentary network to promote education. These proposals could also be discussed at the next Committee work session.