

## **CENTER FOR ELECTORAL PROMOTION AND ASSISTANCE**

### **I. NATURE AND OBJECTIVES**

The Center for Electoral Promotion and Assistance (CAPEL) is a specialized program of the Inter-American Institute of Human Rights (IIHR). It was created in 1983 and began operations in February 1985. Under its Statute, the IIHR/CAPEL is mandated to provide electoral technical assistance and promote elections, adopting a multidisciplinary approach. It has carried out work in those areas with electoral bodies, legislative branches, civil society organizations and political parties. The Statute also establishes that the IIHR/CAPEL's activities are to be based on "the principles of free elections as an essential part of the theory and practice of human rights, as a condition for democracy and as the basis of the right to free determination and peace in national and international relations."

For the past 25 years, the IIHR/CAPEL has helped strengthen democratic processes throughout the western hemisphere. To support the reintegration of the countries into electoral processes, it has given priority to efforts to strengthen electoral bodies by means of technical assistance programs, horizontal cooperation among the bodies themselves and civic campaigns aimed at developing a democratic political culture.

### **II. ASSOCIATIONS OF ELECTORAL BODIES**

CAPEL serves as the Executive Secretariat of the associations of electoral bodies, to which almost every electoral body in Latin America, North America and the Caribbean belongs.

The Association of Electoral Bodies of Central America and the Caribbean (Tikal Protocol) was set up in 1985. The Association of Electoral Bodies of South America (Quito Protocol) followed in 1989, and in 1991 the two associations created the Inter-American Union of Electoral Bodies (UNIORE), of which electoral bodies in North America and the Caribbean subsequently became members.

These associations were set up to provide an institutional mechanism for sharing knowledge and experiences and thereby enhance the development of electoral systems, a key factor in achieving truly democratic regimes. Taking advantage of the work of these associations, the IIHR/CAPEL has designed, carried out and evaluated technical assistance programs and electoral observation missions, and promoted communication, international relations and regional cooperation via annual meetings.

### **III. ELECTORAL OBSERVATION MISSIONS**

In its capacity as the Executive Secretariat, the IIHR/CAPEL carries out electoral observation missions in the different countries of the Americas where electoral processes are held. The purpose of these missions is twofold: technical observation of the electoral process and impartial verification of the fact that it is free and fair. Mission members pay special attention to aspects related to the administration of the process, such as voter lists, voter identity documents, voting materials, the voting procedure and the counting and tabulation of the ballots cast. They also monitor the effective implementation of fundamental international standards with regard to civil and political

rights, to ensure that the assessment of the electoral process is comprehensive and objective.

These missions are made up of electoral judges and officials. They evaluate election day, analyze the process and send their findings to the electoral body in charge of organizing the elections, in keeping with the associations' emphasis on horizontal cooperation. If the host organization finds the mission's technical observations and suggestions relevant, it can use them to improve its organization of electoral processes in the future.

#### **IV. SPECIALIZED TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE**

The IIHR/CAPEL's desire to promote and consolidate representative democracy, the rule of law and free elections as an essential part of the theory and practice of human rights led it to establish a specific area devoted to electoral technical assistance.

The IIHR/CAPEL provides technical assistance in the following areas: modernization and institution building; systems of electoral administration and logistics (schedules of activities; design, approval, printing and procurement of electoral materials; operational design for the timely, secure and fluid transmission and public dissemination of election results); civic education campaigns and training of electoral staff, polling officers and scrutineers, and the training of observers from political parties; design of programs for the electronic processing of data applied to electoral processes; and civil registries, electoral registries, identity documents and the transmission of results.

The specifics of the IIHR/CAPEL's electoral technical assistance vary but it is always based on a close, personalized relationship with the principal electoral body of the country receiving the assistance. National counterparts are also chosen to guide the specific program, working closely with a team of expert advisers assigned by the IIHR/CAPEL. Programs may be national or regional in nature, depending on the type of assistance required by the national electoral organization.

#### **V. EDUCATION AND TRAINING**

The IIHR/CAPEL's education and training activities address electoral topics from an interdisciplinary perspective, drawing on the expertise of leading Latin American specialists. The aim of the IIHR/CAPEL in carrying out these activities is to consolidate truly democratic regimes by helping to enhance existing electoral systems through the study and sharing of experiences. The activities can be divided into two categories:

- The Inter-American Course on Elections and Democracy, which makes an effective contribution to the optimization of democratic electoral systems and processes in the hemisphere. Electoral issues are addressed from several perspectives, which must be adapted to the specific situation involved.
- Special courses and seminars - non-recurring activities that dovetail with CAPEL's core objectives.

## **VI. STRENGTHENING POLITICAL PARTIES IN LATIN AMERICA**

The IIHR has an institutional strategy aimed at strengthening political parties in Latin America. Supported by academic research and consultations with political parties, it places emphasis on the development of measures for the institutionalization, democratization and transparency of political groupings.

## **VII. PUBLICATIONS AND WEB PAGE**

The IIHR/CAPEL produces, publishes and distributes important material on electoral topics, including texts designed to generate greater support for the implementation of free elections and the strengthening of representative democracies.

The IIHR/CAPEL's publications include series such as the *Cuadernos de CAPEL* and studies and reference works like the *Diccionario Electoral* and the *Tratado de Derecho Electoral Comparativo*, both of which are now in their second editions.

Most of the academic publications and other specialized information about electoral and political topics is available on CAPEL's Web page, which includes the INTER-AMERICAN ELECTORAL NETWORK. The address is: [www.iidh.ed.cr/capel](http://www.iidh.ed.cr/capel)



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