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Waging Peace. Fighting Disease. Building Hope.

THE CARTER CENTER IN THE AMERICAS

What is the mission of the Carter Center's Americas Program?

The Americas Program strives to strengthen democratic accountability, enhance democratic quality, and make democracy more meaningful to citizens across the region.

- **To strengthen democratic accountability**, the program helps citizens hold their governments accountable through clean elections, effective access to information, and the professional and nonpartisan practice of journalism.
- **To enhance democratic quality**, the program promotes international cooperation to address threats to democratic

quality by enhancing regional norms and capacities to collectively defend democracy and its fundamental rights.

- **To make democracy more meaningful**, the program helps defuse nascent crises or raise public attention to democratic erosion and helps manage and transform conflicts through mediation, dialogue, and reconciliation efforts.

The program works at several complementary levels—hemispheric, between countries, and in a country—to advance its mission, including serving as the secretariat of the Friends of the Inter-American Democratic Charter; working with polarized societies in the Andes on conflict prevention and democratic accountability; promoting the right of

access to information as a fundamental human right and necessary tool to enhance democratic governance, transparency, and accountability across the region and the world; and supporting dialogue to improve relations among and within countries.

How has the work of the Americas Program changed over the last 25 years?

The Carter Center established the Americas Program in 1986, when the Western Hemisphere was undergoing dramatic political changes, restoring or establishing democracies, and opening economies. In the late '80s and early '90s, the program focused its work on election monitoring in countries transitioning from authoritarian to democratic governments.

Thirty years after many Latin American countries transitioned to democracy, the region is still experiencing bouts of democratic and political instability. While political and electoral rights have been largely achieved, greater political participation has not consistently translated into greater social participation. Many countries in the hemisphere suffer from weak political institutions, persistent income inequality, unsatisfactory poverty rates, and insufficient economic growth. The mixed picture of expanded democratic rights with weak accountability mechanisms, economic growth with inequality, and growing national sovereignty with greater need for regional cooperation poses new challenges to democracy.

The program now aims to help democracies work effectively to serve their citi-



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President Jimmy Carter greets a member of the Bolivian women's federation in El Alto, Bolivia. The Carter Center has worked across Latin America since 1986.

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zens. The current focus is on the quality of democracy, including not only elections but also the ability of governments to meet the needs of the people. There also is a need to assure that democratic transformation occurs within a framework of peace with justice, respect for human rights, and in an inclusive manner that engages a broad array of citizens.

What role does access to information play in advancing democracy in the Americas?

Access to information is a recognized fundamental human right and a critical component to exercising other rights, such as the right to clean water, housing, and education, and can be particularly important for the most vulnerable people in our societies. Access to public information (also called freedom of information)

is a cornerstone of good governance, public participation, and accountability. Information is a necessary element for citizens to effectively engage in public life, help set priorities, and have a voice in policy determinations.

Sustained democratic transformation and conflict prevention are only possible with transparency, accountability, and civil society participation, all of which depend on the free flow of information. Moreover, access to information helps engender trust in government, more efficient government administration, and more meaningful participation in policy formation and reform. It also supports the fight against corruption.

Since 1999, the Carter Center's global access-to-information initiative has supported the establishment of access-to-information cultures in three core

countries in Latin America and the Caribbean (Jamaica, Bolivia, Nicaragua), and shared those experiences with a number of core countries in Africa and in China. At the regional level, in partnership with the Organization of American States, the Center has helped to establish norms on access to information through several conference reports and declarations. Additionally, the Center has partnered with the World Bank and the Inter-American Development Bank in advancing the right to information throughout the region. The Center also has been instrumental in bringing awareness to the need for full and effective implementation of access-to-information legislation through its Implementation Assessment Tool and most recently has begun programming to address the inequities that women face in exercising their right to information.