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# CONSORTIUM FOR LEGISLATIVE DEVELOPMENT

CONSORCIO PARA EL DESARROLLO LEGISLATIVO ♦ CONSÓRCIO PARA O DESENVOLVIMENTO LEGISLATIVO  
♦ CONSORTIUM POUR LE DÉVELOPPEMENT LÉGISLATIF

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## PANAMA ACTIVITY REPORT

Seminar on

### The New Role of the Legislative Assembly in Panamanian Democracy

Submitted for the Consortium for Legislative Development

by

Florida International University

November 6, 1992

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## BACKGROUND

The New Role Seminar was conducted as an activity under the Public Policy component of "Improving Parliamentary Capabilities" element of the project. This is an area of activity which has been assigned to Florida International University by the Consortium for Legislative Development.

Originally, the New Role Seminar was programmed for August 25, 1992 but was canceled at the request of the Assembly due to their internal elections. The seminar was then rescheduled for October 27, 1992. The in-country project coordinator, Kelly McBride, worked closely with Legislative Development Committee (LDC) members, the President and Secretary General of the National Assembly, and Gerald Reed and Allan Rosenbaum of FIU in developing the program content and in identifying speakers for the panels.

## OBJECTIVES

The general purpose of the seminar was to provide a forum at which local Panamanian experts and other Latin American legislative experts could discuss the new and important role of the Assembly in Panama's transition to democracy.

The specific objectives of the New Role Seminar were to a) raise the awareness among the members and staff of the legislative assembly of the ongoing modernization efforts of the Legislative Development Committee in the Panamanian Assembly; b) to heighten Assembly members' awareness of the experiences of other Congresses in Latin America (particularly Chile) that have re-opened after a military government and the challenges faced in following a military government; c) to discuss the actual and historical experience of the Panamanian Assembly; d) to plant the seeds for further legislative development activity such as the career track and professional staffing of the LDC, the upcoming staff training and the installation of the legislative information system (LIS); e) to call public attention to the efforts of the Legislative Assembly to strengthen itself as an institution; and f) to mobilize further public and institutional support for the Legislative Assembly and its modernization effort.

## PROGRAM

The New Role Seminar took place on October 27, 1992 with forty-two legislators and twenty-eight staff members participating. The seminar was composed of two working sessions. The first session, held in the morning, was chaired by Assembly President Zarak and had Dr. César Pereira Burgos, the Minister of Agriculture in Panama, speak on the topic of "The Role of the Parliament and Its Executive Legislative Relations in the Panamanian Democratic System". Minister Burgos was followed by Senator Mariano Ruiz Esquide of the National Senate of Chile who discussed the "Challenges to Parliaments after Democratic Transitions". The topic for the afternoon panel was "The Vision of Legislators and Professional Staff on the Modernization of the Panamanian Legislative Assembly". This panel, chaired by Assembly member Alberto Cigarruista, included fellow Assembly member Milton Henriquez; Dr. German Vargas, a staff member of the Costa Rican Legislative Assembly; Lic. Ruben Arosemena, the Secretary General of the Panamanian Legislative Assembly; and Dr. Allan Rosenbaum, FIU Principal for the CLD. (See Attached Agenda)

## RESULTS

Among the more notable positive results of the seminar were the following:

- A remarkably large turnout of the membership of the National Assembly, especially for the morning session. This is particularly significant since the Assembly recently has upon occasion had difficulty obtaining a quorum.
- A solid representation from all the parties in the Assembly, including representation from the PRD (the Democratic Revolutionary Party);
- The Burgos presentation was characterized by several participants as the best presentation that they had ever heard on the Panamanian Assembly and its recent historical roots. After which a very lively discussion took place.
- The Chilean Senator was very well received by the Panamanian legislators who were quite receptive to his speech on the Chilean model of "*concertación*". His talk highlighted the need for the new civilian government and its forces to work together in setting new political, social, and economic goals. The audience was particularly receptive to this message of compromise and the need to maintain a coalition in the Assembly while undergoing the democratic transition process;
- President of the Assembly, Lucas Zarak, invited the Chilean Senator to speak to the plenary the day after the seminar (on October 28);
- Both the seminar itself, as well as the planning of it, served to call the project to the attention of the new Assembly President and to seemingly significantly enhance his interest in it;
- The seminar exposed numerous legislators and staff who had not been previously involved with the project to it and various issues of legislative reform;
- Extensive media coverage was given to this activity, particularly in generating positive television coverage on that night's evening news.

[Note: The results and feedback from the questionnaire evaluations as well as the list of participants who attended will be forwarded to the Mission on Monday, November 16, 1992.]

#### **PROBLEMS ENCOUNTERED**

-There was clearly less participation by members of the Assembly in the afternoon for the technical panel. While the number of members attending dropped from 42 to 15, most of the staff participating remained for it; however, the question and answer session was much briefer. On the other hand, it should be noted that having 15 members of the National Assembly present for an hour and a half afternoon discussion on reforming the legislative assembly is not an insignificant achievement especially in the context of the current situation of the Assembly and the general lack of public attention to legislative reform as an issue in Panamanian affairs.

-A comment was made from one of three Panamanian women legislators that no women speakers were included in the program. This is an important point, and we will be more sensitive to this issue in the future.



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**EL ROL DEL PARLAMENTO EN EL SISTEMA DEMOCRATICO**

27 de octubre de 1992

**The Center for Democracy**

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Prof. Abdo Bakliri  
*Consortium Principal*

Dr. Charles Dawson  
*Program Manager*

**08:30 a.m. - 9:00 a.m.**

**INSCRIPCION**

**09:00 a.m. - 9:30 a.m.**

**PALABRAS DE BIENVENIDA**

**H.L. Lucas Zurak Linares**  
**Presidente de la Asamblea Legislativa de Panamá**

**Dr. Allan Rosenbaum**  
**Decano de la Facultad de Asuntos y Servicios**  
**Públicos. Universidad Internacional de la Florida**

**9:30 a.m. - 10:30 a.m.**

**"EL ROL DEL PARLAMENTO EN EL SISTEMA**  
**DEMOCRATICO PANAMEÑO Y LAS RELACIONES**  
**EJECUTIVAS LEGISLATIVAS"**

**Dr. Cesár Pereira Burgos**  
**Ministro de Desarrollo Agropecuario de la**  
**Republica de Panamá**

**10:30 a.m. - 10:45 a.m.**

**DESCANSO**

**10:45 a.m. - 11:45 a.m.**

**"RETOS DEL PARLAMENTO LUEGO DE UNA**  
**TRANSICIÓN DEMOCRATICA"**

**Senador Mariano Ruiz Esquide**  
**Miembro del Senado Nacional de Chile**

**12:00 p.m. - 1:30 p.m.**

**ALMUERZO**

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**1:45 p.m. - 3:00 p.m.**

**"VISION DE LOS LEGISLADORES Y TECNICOS SOBRE LA  
MODERNIZACION DE LA ASAMBLEA LEGISLATIVA PANAMEÑA"**

**H.L. Milton Henriquez  
Miembro de la Comisión Especial para  
el Desarrollo Legislativo de la Asamblea  
Legislativa de Panamá**

**Dr. German Vargas  
Asesor del Directorio de la Asamblea  
Legislativa de Costa Rica**

**Licenciado Ruben Arosemena  
Secretario General de la Asamblea  
Legislativa de Panamá**

**Decano Allan Rosenbaum  
Decano de la Facultad de Servicios y  
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de la Florida**

**CIERRE**