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THE CENTRAL AMERICAN PARLIAMENT – PARLACEN

The PARLACEN exists since 1991 and consists of elected representatives from Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua, Panama and the Dominican Republic.

This regional parliamentary entity has its head office in Guatemala City and runs subsidiary organs in the capital of each member state.

The PARLACEN is the regional and permanent organ of political and democratic representation of the System of Central American Integration (SICA) with the fundamental objective of realizing the integration of the Central American countries.

HISTORY

The historic "Declaration of Esquipulas I", which was adopted by the presidents of the Central American states in the city of Esquipulas (Guatemala) on May 25th of 1986, included the following declaration: "It is necessary to establish and complement activities that support understanding and cooperation through institutional structures. These shall strengthen the dialogue, the common development, democracy and pluralism as fundamental elements for peace in the area and for the integration of Central America. Therefore, the creation of the PARLACEN is necessary. Its members will be elected freely by universal and direct elections with special regard to the principle of participatory political pluralism."

Hence, the Constitutive Treaty of the PARLACEN and other political entities was signed in October (8th, 15th and 16th) of 1987 by Guatemala, El Salvador, Costa Rica, Nicaragua and Honduras. It initially came into force in three countries only (Guatemala, El Salvador and Honduras) on May 1st of 1990. PARLACEN was officially established on October 28th of 1991 and has its head office in Guatemala City, Republic of Guatemala.

The PARLACEN as the political organ of this region is part of the Central American Integration System (SICA). It was incorporated through the Protocol of Tegucigalpa, which was signed on December 13th of 1999, into the Charter of the Organisation of the Central American States (ODECA). The main objective of SICA is to achieve the integration of Central America so as to form a region of peace, freedom, democracy and development.

MISSION

The PARLACEN is the organ for democratic and political representation of the people of Central America and the Dominican Republic. It exercises the parliamentary functions of the common system of regional integration in order to achieve solidarity between our people.

OBJECTIVES

The PARLACEN's objective is to be an effective and democratic leader among the different regional actors that in the course of sustainable development shall contribute to the successive construction of the Central American – Dominican Union. At the same time it shall shape a modern and just society that stands in solidarity and warrants peace and respect for Human Rights.

LEGAL STATUS

With regard to its legal nature the PARLACEN acts as the regional and permanent organ of political and democratic representation of the SICA with the aim of realizing the Central American integration. It wants to achieve a peaceful coexistence within the framework of security and social welfare, not only based on a representative and participative democracy, but also in pluralism, in respect for national legislation and International Law.

PARLACEN has been granted the status of a legal entity according to International Law.



FORMATION

The PARLACEN is composed of 20 representatives of each member state. In case of absence, every Member of Parliament has an elected representative. Furthermore, former presidents and vice-presidents of the Central American states remain members the PARLACEN, even after their term of office, for a duration laid down in the constitutions of each individual country.

Each member state elects its representatives and deputies in accordance with its national electoral law, which shall allow for a broad, political and ideological representation, in a democratic and pluralistic system that guarantees free and participative elections and grants all political parties with equal chances.

COMPETENCES

The PARLACEN conducts the following tasks:

- It is the regional and permanent organ of political and democratic representation with the fundamental aim to realize the integration.
- Proposing legislation in matters of integration and initiatives aimed at consolidating integration e.g. to practice parliamentary control of the integration and to further and steer the process of integration and the possibly broadest cooperation between the Central American states.
- Proposing drafts of treaties and agreements, which are to be negotiated between the Central American states and which shall contribute to the satisfaction of needs in the region, as well as forming an opinion of what the SICA proposes.
- Participating in conventions of the presidents and the ministerial counsellors of the SICA.
- It takes notice of the election of the executive authorities of SICA and inaugurates the elected. It is informed about the budgets of the integration entities and creates special committees to analyze the disagreements between the states which could affect further integration.
- It stands up for peaceful coexistence and security in Central America and the respect for Human Rights.
- Supporting the consolidation of a democratic, pluralistic and participative system in all states of Central America with strict respect for International Law.
- It contributes to the strengthening of full validity of International Law.

BODIES OF PARLACEN

The PARLACEN's organizational structure is as follows:

1. PLENUM

The plenum is the highest body of the PARLACEN and is formed by all representatives. Furthermore, the committees and parliamentary parties are involved in fulfilling its tasks.

The responsibilities of the Plenum are the following:

- It gives advice to the presidents' assembly concerning affairs of peace and security of Central America and the development of the region.
- Annual election of the Board of Parliament.
- Approval of the budget of the PARLACEN.
- Considering and deciding on the reports of the Board of Parliament.
- Elaborating and approving the internal decrees of the Central American Parliament and on other necessary regulations.
- Formation of working committees that are regarded as necessary by the Plenum.
- Proposing drafts of contracts and agreements, which are to be negotiated between the Central American states and which shall contribute to the satisfaction of needs in the region.
- Annual ratification of the directives of the parliament's standing committees.
- Other tasks conferred upon the plenum by this contract or its ancillary instruments.



The Commissions

The commissions are parliamentary institutions that are supposed to conduct studies and research within their sphere of competence or on matters assigned to them by the Board or the Plenum, in order to contribute expertise and release reports.

The working committees of PARLACEN can be classified in the following manner:

Permanent commissions are laid down in the Internal Order for an unlimited period of time, designed to work on their respective commission affairs.

The permanent commissions are composed of at most two representatives of each member state and should not exceed a total of twelve members.



Up to date there are thirteen permanent commissions:

- Commission of Agriculture, Fishing, Environment and Natural Resources
- Commission of Urban Development, Public Participation
- Commission of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology
- Commission of Women, Children, Youth and Family
- Commission of Monetary Affairs and Finance
- Commission of Tourism
- Commission of International Relations and Migration Affairs
- Commission of Health, Social Security, Population, Labor and Corporation Affairs
- Commission of Peace, Public Security and Human Rights
- Commission of Integration, Trade and Economic Development
- Commission of Legal Affairs, Integration Law and Regional Institutions
- Commission of Politics and Party Affairs
- Commission of Indigenous Peoples and Afro Descendants

Extraordinary commissions are set up by the Plenum for matters of special importance and institutional significance for the PARLACEN as well as for the process of integration.

Special commissions are set up to handle special affairs by the Board of Parliament.

Parliamentary Groups

They reflect the ideological lines of the Central American representatives and are organized according to the political orientation of their parties.

The parliamentary groups are launched with the adoption of an internal statute, which is presented at the plenary meeting and registered by the Board of Parliament. The statute is published and contains the ideological principles, the political objectives, the management bodies and the internal rules of procedure of the group.

2. BOARD OF PARLIAMENT

It is the executive body implementing the decisions that emanate from the Plenum. It is the administrative body of the PARLACEN and is expendable according to its internal rules.

The Board of Parliament is elected by the Plenum. It acts for the period of one year as a permanent organ and is composed of:

- One President
- Five Vice-presidents
- Six Secretaries.



The board takes its decisions with the approval by seven of its members. In the event of a tie of votes, the president's vote counts twice. The presidency is assigned in rotation according to the alphabetical order of the member states, starting with the state that holds the head office.

All resolutions can be appealed in the Plenum. Owing to the special observer's status of the Dominican Republic, one vice-president and one secretary act on their behalf at the Board of Parliament.

The tasks of the board are the following:

- Consideration and handling of all requests that fall within the remit of the PARLACEN.
- Forwarding the invitations for the ordinary and extraordinary meetings of the Plenum of the PARLACEN
- Drafting of the budget, which is stated in Central American Pesos, for the work routine of the PARLACEN.
- Providing information about relevant affairs for each member state respectively.
- Executing the resolutions of the PARLACEN.
- Rendering the annual report about the execution of its duties and the results of its administration to the Plenum, as well as an account on the budget.
- Management and supervision of the Secretary Office and appointment of necessary personnel. Here, the equal treatment of all Central American states has to be taken into consideration.
- Handling of the economic and organisational affairs that affect the PARLACEN.
- Submission of proposals to the Plenum about regulating instruments required for the internal order.
- Creation of special committees to carry out a mission or to realize a special function.
- Proper filling of a vacancy that can occur in the event of absence of a representative.
- Calling for the deputy representatives in case of vacancies.
- Proposing to the Plenum a list of candidates for the appointment of the internal and external auditor of the PARLACEN.
- Forming delegations for official missions in respect to the regulating norms for the integration of special missions of the PARLACEN.
- Elaborating and approving its own internal rules and division of functions among its members.
- Other tasks conferred upon the board by the Constitutive Treaty or by ancillary instruments.

3. SECRETARY OFFICE

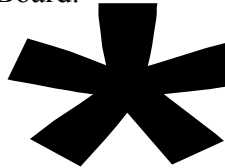
The Secretary Office is the technical-administrative organ of the PARLACEN and splits into three secretariats, which have the following functions and responsibilities:

The **Secretariat for Parliamentary Affairs** undertakes and obeys the decisions of the PARLACEN. It reports to the Plenum on a regular basis and technically assists the Plenum as well as the committees in all their activities. At the same time it coordinates advices to the committees and if necessary it has to assist the extended Board with the set up of the agenda for the plenary meetings.

The **Secretariat for Administration and Finance** administers all branches, manager's offices, departments and administrative units as well as the personnel of the PARLACEN and controls the proper administration of its resources.

The **Secretariat of the Board** offers technical help to the board in questions relating to the responsibilities of and the topics worked out by the Board.

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THE OBSERVERS

The PARLACEN can confer an observer's status to states, national and regional parliaments whose objectives and principles are in accordance with the PARLACEN, as well as to International Organisations that apply for this status.

The observers take part in these activities, in compliance with the laws and the obligations laid down in the internal rules. Furthermore, participation underlies certain conditions defined in detail in a special agreement.

The observers can be classified as follows:

Special observers are those states in the region that have not yet been able to elect their representatives into the PARLACEN in a direct and democratic way. Special observers are entitled to participate in the meetings of the PARLACEN and its committees. They are allowed to contribute on equal terms as the representatives elected by popular vote in their fields of activity unless otherwise prohibited by the internal rules.

Permanent observers are parliaments of other extra regional states as well as other International Organisations whose objectives and principles comply with those of the PARLACEN. Currently this status is held by Mexico, Venezuela, Puerto Rico and the Republic of China in Taiwan.

Original observers are parliaments that hold this status due to their contributions and assistance for the establishment and consolidation of the PARLACEN. These parliaments are the following: The European Parliament, the Parliament of Latin America and the Parliament of the Andean Community.



THE COMPREHENSIVE CONCEPTION OF DEVELOPMENT AND INTEGRATION

The PARLACEN supports a comprehensive conception of Central American integration and refuses to realize this through an intergovernmental process.

The PARLACEN stands for an integral conception of Central American development and integration, for the benefit of its peoples in the political, economic, social and cultural domain. It does not share the idea of reducing integration to a mere economic dimension and free trade.

PARLACEN

12 avenida 33-04 zona 05

Ciudad de Guatemala, Guatemala, 01005, C. A.

Tel: (502) 2424-4600 Fax: (502) 2424-4610

comunica@parlacen.int