XXXIX GENERAL ASSEMBLY

REMARKS FROM
THE HEAD OF DELEGATION OF
THE PERMANENT OBSERVER COUNTRY OF

SWITZERLAND

JUNE 1, 2009
Intervention by Mr. Martin X. Michelet, Alternate Permanent Observer of Switzerland to the Organization of American States

Distinguished Mister Secretary General, distinguished Ministers, Ambassadors and Delegates

First, I would like to thank the Government of Honduras for hosting this year’s General Assembly. I also extend my thanks to the OAS for the kind invitation and to the people of the city of San Pedro Sula for their warm welcome.

Switzerland shares close ties with the people and the societies in the Americas due to cultural and historical links. Our values and our attitudes toward the importance of democratic institutions, human rights and peaceful conflict resolution are largely the same. Respect for and compliance with international law underpin all these values.

The strengthening of democratic institutions and the consolidation of democracy, for example within the framework of election observation missions, are core activities of the OAS and deserve special mention. In 2008, Swiss observers followed the elections in Paraguay as members of the OAS electoral mission team with great interest. In January and March of this year, Switzerland sent observers to the parliamentary and presidential elections in El Salvador. With these activities, Switzerland contributed up to 100’000 USD to the OAS.

If the OAS established an Electoral Observer Mission for the elections taking place in our host country, Honduras, in November 2009, Switzerland is willing to support such a mission with observer personnel.

Freedom of expression is a fundamental right and an important element in any democratic society. Therefore, Switzerland is determined to make a contribution to its advancement. Last year’s Swiss contribution to the Office of the Special Rapporteur for Freedom of Expression of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights resulted in three workshops on “Access to information” of which the first one took place in Mexico in April. It was a great success and we hope that the planned workshops in Ecuador and Argentina (August and September this year) will be received with the same interest.

The promotion of international law is another field to which the OAS as well as the Swiss Government attach great importance. I am therefore proud to announce that following a request by the OAS, Switzerland will provide a guest professor to participate in the OAS Course of International Law that takes place annually in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. Since 1973 this course is
organized by the Inter-American Juridical Committee and the Department of International Law of the Secretariat for Legal Affairs of the OAS. It constitutes an opportunity to promote the exchange of ideas and generate an open dialogue about issues of particular relevance in the area of international law.

Mister Secretary General
We encourage the international community present here in the beautiful country of Honduras to work to further strengthen democratic institutions in the Americas. In this spirit, Switzerland – based on its long democratic experience and expertise – is keen to participate in this year’s General Assembly.