



Anti-Corruption Assessments Reveal Secrecy As A Continuing Challenge In The Americas

Transparency International

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ANTI-CORRUPTION ASSESSMENTS REVEAL SECRECY AS A CONTINUING CHALLENGE IN THE AMERICAS

AS CIVIL SOCIETY YESTERDAY CELEBRATED RIGHT TO KNOW DAY, LACK OF UNIVERSAL ACCESS TO INFORMATION CONTINUES TO PLAGUE THE REGION

Posted 29 September 2005 by [Transparency International Secretariat](#)

Translations: [ES](#) Translation of: [Evaluación anticorrupción revela que el secretismo sigue siendo un desafío en las Américas](#)

The United States, Canada and Guatemala share a common concern about public access to information, according to independent reports presented on Monday by national chapters of Transparency International (TI) to the Committee of Experts of the Organization of American States (OAS). The Committee is responsible for monitoring country compliance with the Inter-American Convention against Corruption.

“The right to know and to challenge a government’s activities is a fundamental element of accountability,” said Silke Pfeiffer, Director for the Americas at Transparency International. “All countries in the region must take action to more fully and consistently implement higher standards of access to information.

GUATEMALA

Guatemala lacks an access to information law.

65 percent of all requests for public information in Guatemala were rejected, denying the people their constitutional right to information, according to "Acción Ciudadana", the Guatemalan chapter of Transparency International. Acción Ciudadana monitored access to information between October 2002 and June 2004. Their report shows that the percentage of rejected petitions for access to information increased to 78 percent in electoral periods. Coupled with the country’s lack of a law on access to information and an effective system to detect cases of government conflict of interest, a principal tool of good governance is also denied to Guatemalan citizens. Members of the Committee suggested that quick passage of an access to information law was essential in Guatemala.

UNITED STATES

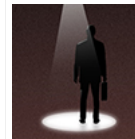
The United States has a strong access to information regime but exceptions to providing information under the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) are increasing, according to a Transparency International USA report prepared with the assistance of Foley Hoag LLP and numerous US organisations. The report underscored the robust US regime, but expressed concern about the increased number of exceptions to granting access to government documents under the Freedom of Information Act. The report highlights that from 1995 to 2002 the average number of pages declassified annually was 126 billion. In comparison, a mere 43 billion were declassified in fiscal year 2003.

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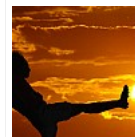
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CANADA

Canada also has a strong access to information regime but it is inconsistently implemented.

TI-Canada reports that while there has been considerable progress in implementing the provisions of the Inter-American Convention, Canada's record on access to information shows an inconsistent and mixed response to information requests across the federation, according to the TI chapter.

The OAS Committee of Experts has issued important assessments of how countries are implementing the Convention's provisions in areas that include declaration of assets, conflict of interest prevention, access to information, and civil society participation. But, there is little evidence that countries are acting on those recommendations. Moreover, some governments have refused to permit publication of reports, limiting the capacity of their citizens to identify and support reform efforts.

"This lack of transparency is a fundamental obstacle to the ability of citizens to trust in the political will and capacity of their government to fight corruption", stated Miguel Angel Penailillo, TI's regional co-ordinator of the Americas Anti-Corruption Conventions Programme. "Governments must publicly account for how they are implementing the OAS Committee's recommendations."

In a meeting last week with representatives of Transparency International, Jose Miguel Insulza, the new Secretary General of the OAS, reiterated his commitment to greater transparency and to the fight against corruption. He pledged to work closely with TI, and acknowledged the need to strengthen and accelerate the pace of the follow-up mechanism of the Convention.

Transparency International chapters in the Americas, in coalition with other civil society organisations, have worked for many years to promote implementation of the Convention, which serves as the hemisphere's roadmap for the fight against corruption.

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TI is the global civil society organisation leading the fight against corruption.

Notes to the Editors: To read the full reports form Guatemala, Canada and US, please click here.

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