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The Summits of the Americas process is a series of reunions where the leaders of the countries of the Americas gather to discuss the topics that most concern the region and find solutions to them. The Summit of the Americas takes place every three years in a different city. From each summit emanates a document signed by all the country leaders that records the agreements reached during it. These agreements are known as Summit Mandates. The Summits of the Americas Secretariat, an office of the Organization of American States (OAS), is responsible for organizing the Summits along with the host country, providing follow up of the implementation of mandates, and coordinating other institutions affiliated to the summits process. The Summits Secretariat is headquartered at the Administrative building of the OAS, located on Constitution Avenue in Washington DC, some scarce steps away from the Washington Monument. In one of three cubicles in office 110B of this building, the Secretariat receives an intern every season. In the summer of 2011, thanks to the support of the Kellogg institute for International Studies of the University of Notre Dame, I had the great fortune of occupying that cubicle as an intern at the Secretariat.

My days in Washington would begin every morning with a commute from the northern neighborhood of Tenleytown to the bustling business district downtown. Every morning I would descend into the subsoil on the steps of a seemingly eternal escalator at the Tenleytown metro station. Inside the station, I would march among the ranks of an army of suited men and women who traveled to their jobs downtown and invariably portray a look of busyness and importance in their stride and facial expressions. Once downtown, I would walk a couple of blocks down 17<sup>th</sup> street to arrive at the Summits Secretariat office, where I would greet my coworkers in any one

of three languages “*Buenos días*”, “*Bom dia*”, or “Good morning” could be used invariably. Then I would begin to work.

At the OAS, I worked on several projects. One interesting project that I participated in was the preparation of a report on the work that the Joint Summits Working Group (JSWG) institutions had carried out towards accomplishing the V Summit mandates. The JSWG is an organ of the Summits Secretariat that is responsible for coordinating the participation of twelve international institutions in the summits process. This report was presented at the 41<sup>st</sup> ordinary session of the OAS General Assembly, in San Salvador. The report was made by compiling reports from each of the institutions and publishing them under a unique format and in a specific order that made clear to which of the V Summit mandates each action responded. I had two tasks in this process. The first was to call some of the institutions to request that they submit their reports. The second, by far more interesting, consisted in reading through both the English and the Spanish versions of the report and verifying that the translations were accurate, and in proposing corrections when they weren't. Major texts are usually sent out for professional translation, but whenever last minute additions to the text were made, I was the one to translate them. Having grown up both in Mexico and the United States, and speaking both languages fluently, I was mostly qualified to do this, but it was still a tricky task. I was amazed to discover the difficulty that is entailed in ensuring that translations are accurate. Often, words and phrases do not have exact translations. Often, a single misplaced proposition will change the meaning of an entire sentence. It seemed to be a mantra in the office, however, that in the context of delicate political processes like these, inaccuracies due to imprecise language usage can be extremely compromising, and hence language was treated as all but trivial.

Another Summits Secretariat project to which I contributed was the renewal and update

of the Summit of the Americas Implementation and Follow-up System (SISCA). SISCA is an online platform where Member States report in precise terms and with respect to specific parameters their progress towards summit goals and mandates. This system is a relatively new initiative, and this year the entire web page was updated. This meant that there was much work to be done to migrate the information from the old platform to the new one, and to ensure that it was accurate. My responsibilities here involved uploading countries' reports to the new platform. This was interesting mostly because I was able to read these reports and find out much about many of the development initiatives that different countries carry out across the hemisphere. Also within the scope of SICA, I translated the web page buttons to French. I enjoyed doing this because although it was more challenging for me than a Spanish-English translation, it allowed me to practice a language I am in the process of learning. That during my internship I productively used all three languages of which I have knowledge, bears testimony to the truly international character of the OAS and of the experience there as an intern.

A third initiative in which I participated that I think is worth mentioning was the creation of an aid proposal under the framework of Results Based Management (RBM). RBM is a framework of funding and administering international aid projects where continued funding of a project is contingent upon the completion of certain previously established goals, as measured by previously established indicators. Many OAS initiatives are funded in this way, and I helped my boss to prepare a proposal for aid in this was by suggesting several indicators that could be used to measure the goals of the project. This task was different than others I carried out during the summer because it was of a very creative nature. I had to learn the particularities of the project, but I also had to decide what would be an indicator of its success and how one would be able to measure it.

The tasks I performed at the OAS were by no means limited to the three-abovementioned projects, but I do think these are the most noteworthy. In general, my tasks included translating, proofreading, transcribing, note taking, summary writing, and researching. However, the experience of interning at the OAS is far more than an experience in performing office tasks. While interning at the OAS, I was a front row witness to some of the most exciting political developments in the hemisphere and around the globe. As a part of a community for which these political events are determinant, events that occurred in the arena of international politics were events that occurred to me.

One of the most important developments in hemispheric politics this summer was Honduras' return to the OAS as an active member. Honduras had been placed on probation after the 2009 coup attempt, but this summer an extraordinary session of the General Assembly was summoned to vote for Honduras' return. The session occurred in the OAS general building, across the street from where my office was located. Unfortunately, I could not go to the session in person because it was so full that all "non-essential staff" was prohibited from entering the premises. However, it was streamed live over the Internet, and I watched it with the whole office on the webcast. The best part of this experience was that after the session, I had the unique opportunity of listening to the commentary of my coworkers and my bosses. They pointed out events of the session that were seemingly irrelevant but which constituted real disputes and differences among the countries (these differences of opinion, in true embodiment of the term «diplomatic», are articulated in subtle and tacit terms). Many more things happened this summer in the world of international politics. Dominique Strauss-Kahn was arrested in New York on charges of sexual assault (the IMF is headquartered in Washington and is a partner of the JSWG, so this event was much talked about), Greece approved strict austerity measures to try to avert

defaulting on its debt, Hugo Chavez declared he was undergoing surgery for cancer, and the United States approved after much debate to raise the debt ceiling. All these events were the talk of the town, and it was very exciting to be a part of the conversations that evaluated them.

Finally, another part of my stay in Washington that was extremely fulfilling was my attendance to the many cultural events that are hosted in this city. Prominent among these were conferences at think tanks and at many of the other international institutions around Washington DC. Along with other interns, and with the support of my coworkers, I attended conferences on topics that included indigenous peoples' rights, the resolution of gang problems in Central America, the upcoming Mexican elections in 2012, immigration in North America, and Mexico's Drug War. At these conferences I listened to prominent intellectuals like Enrique Krauze (I even chatted with him after the conference), Luis Carlos Ugalde, Jorge Castañeda, and Denise Dresser. Furthermore, the OAS staff was often invited to various receptions that were organized around the motive of different countries' independences. To these conferences I attended with my coworkers and fellow interns. There I was able to chat with some of the ambassadors to the OAS.

In sum, my experience at the OAS was far more than a collection of tasks performed in an office. When every morning I descended the escalator into the red line of the DC metro, I entered a new world: the world of diplomats, international institutions, politics, multilingualism, multiculturalism, and intellectuals, which exists in the downtown DC area.