



Foreign Intervention in Latin American and the Caribbean

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Preliminary Note: What is CELAC?

The Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC, its widely used Spanish acronym, for Comunidad de Estados Latinoamericanos y Caribeños) is new regional organization, created not just to build regional unity and cooperation, but also to reduce the influence of foreign actors in the region.¹ This makes it unique among regional organizations, and fundamentally different from the Organization of American States (OAS), the regional organization it aims to replace. Formally, CELAC's goal is to unite all of the Latin American and Caribbean states, to strengthen regional integration, their political, social, and cultural ties, in order to improve the '...quality of life, stimulate economic growth, and advance the well-being of all its people.'²

CELAC has been controversial from its birth, largely as the child of socialist governments in South and Central America, who aimed to reduce the influence of the United States in the region. Since it was established in 2010-11, it has seen ups and downs. Right-wing governments in the region view it with

suspicion. For this reason, the largest country in the region, Brazil, withdrew in 2020.³ But CELAC retains strong support from other regional actors, especially Mexico and Venezuela, and smaller states like Cuba and Nicaragua.⁴



CELAC annual Summit of Heads of State and Government, 28-29 January 2018, San Jose, Costa Rica.

The regional bloc was formally established on 3 December 2011, following a Unity Summit on in February 2010. The bloc's main focus is to unite all Latin American and Caribbean states, to strengthen the integration their political, social, and cultural ties in order to improve the

¹ **Warning:** when studying this topic, be careful with the website: <http://celacinternational.org/> This is a commercial website with no relationship to the organization it pretends to represent.

² 'Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC)', *Nuclear Threat Initiative*, 14 July 2019, <https://www.nti.org/learn/treaties-and-regimes/community-latin-american-and-caribbean-states-celac/>

³ 'Brazil sits out leftist Latin American nations' body on anti-democracy fears', *Reuters*, 16 January 2020, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-brazil-diplomacy-celac/brazil-sits-out-leftist-latin-american-nations-body-on-anti-democracy-fears-idUSKBN1ZF2U9?>

[celac/brazil-sits-out-leftist-latin-american-nations-body-on-anti-democracy-fears-idUSKBN1ZF2U9?](https://www.reuters.com/article/us-brazil-diplomacy-celac/brazil-sits-out-leftist-latin-american-nations-body-on-anti-democracy-fears-idUSKBN1ZF2U9?)

⁴ The current membership of CELAC includes 32 member states: Antigua and Barbuda, Argentina, Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, Bolivia, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, Dominican Republic, Dominica, Ecuador, El Salvador, Grenada, Guatemala, Co-operative Republic of Guyana, Haiti, Honduras, Jamaica, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Santa Lucia, Federation of Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Suriname, Trinidad and Tobago, Uruguay, and Venezuela.



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‘...quality of life, stimulate economic growth, and advance the well-being of all its people.’⁵

Unlike the OAS, CELAC has no hesitation about engaging major international issues, especially those that antagonize the United States. Since the organization’s establishment, its Heads of State and Government have showcased concerns regarding nuclear weapons and the use of nuclear weapons and what that means for mankind.

They have strongly encouraged the importance of nuclear disarmament and nuclear nonproliferation, including the Latin American and Caribbean Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone (NWFZ), the Treaty for the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons in Latin America and the Caribbean, also known as the Treaty of Tlatelolco or 1969. More recently, it supported the Treaty for the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (the Nuclear Ban Treaty of 2017), which is opposed by the United States and other nuclear weapons states like China, France, and Russia.

CELAC also supports more moderate action on issues less related to disputes with the United States or other foreign powers. For example, CELAC strongly disapproves any and all acts of terrorism. Its Member States agreed to commit to fighting terrorism and adhering to International Law, International Humanitarian Law, and to the International Rules of Human Rights Protection. They wish to ‘...strengthen their national legislations and cooperate with...international partners to prevent acts of terrorism.’⁶ They also committed to take action to eliminate terrorism and deny any safe haven to those that perform terroristic acts. The Heads of State and Government have committed to the United Nations’ Global Strategy Against Terrorism. CELAC has indicated a desire to

create a function within the United Nations to provide assistance to those who are victims of terroristic acts.

Moderate positions please much of the membership, but a taste for controversy tends to capture public attention. This does not win the support of all Member States. Many tolerate the fiercer politics of their more aggressive cousins. The Member States tend to divide politically on a left/right axis. The former are especially supportive of aggressive CELAC positions. Those on the right often work to moderate its statements.

Structure

Unlike most regional organizations, CELAC does not have a permanent headquarters or a standing *secretariat* (professional staff). Instead, it is a moving forum, meeting annually in the country holding its Pro Tempore Presidency, which represents it internationally between major meetings.

The *Pro-Tempore Presidency* is CELAC’s highest office, a one-year, rotating position. The main duties of the Presidency are to plan and then chair the Summit of Heads of State and Government meeting and the Ministers of Foreign Affairs and National Coordinators meeting. The Presidency implements the decisions made by the Summit and monitors any and all agreements made at meetings. The Presidency submits for consideration the *Biennial Work Programme* of CELAC activities, prepares working papers, and produces its Annual Reports.

⁵ ‘Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC)’, *Nuclear Threat Initiative*, 14 July 2019, <https://www.nti.org/learn/treaties-and->

[regimes/community-latin-american-and-caribbean-states-celac/](https://www.nti.org/learn/treaties-and-regimes/community-latin-american-and-caribbean-states-celac/)

⁶ Ibid.



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As of January 2020, Mexico holds the one-year position of Pro-Tempore Presidency. It previously was held by Bolivia.⁷

The other major institution of CELAC are *Meetings of National Coordinators*. The National Coordinators are officials of the Member States, responsible for helping get the work of CELAC, as mandated in its resolutions, implemented by the Member States. These usually meet in the state holding the position of Pro-Tempore Presidency. The Coordinators meet twice a year, before the Meeting of Foreign Ministers. They delegate dialogue and political consensus at the national level. The meetings also ease regional integration, monitor the cooperation of projects, and monitor Working Groups. The body also functions as the preparatory body for meetings of the Ministers of Foreign Affairs and they report any findings of the Working Groups to the Ministers. The National Coordinators work with both the Members States and the Pro-Tempore Secretariat by coordinating and track topics that are under discussion. Each Member State has one National Coordinator.

The Summit of Heads of State and Government is in charge of assigning the next state to serve as the Pro-Tempore Presidency and to host the following meeting. The body also adopts new procedures and strategies to navigate relations with foreign nations and organizations. They also set into place actions plans and promote the participation of citizens within the organization.

The Meeting of Ministers of Foreign Affairs meets at a minimum of twice a year to establish dialogue, monitor the unity and integration within the region, and adopting the resolutions and statements to enforce the decisions made by the Summit of Heads of State and Governments.

The body also approves projects and plans that will be presented to the Summit of Heads of State and Government and forms and allocates tasks to working groups.

Foreign Intervention and relations with the United States

CELAC was envisioned in 2010 to give Latin American governments a way to express themselves regionally without foreign interference. Under the leadership of leaders on the political left, led by Brazil, Ecuador, Nicaragua and Venezuela, the most important objective was the insulate the region from foreign intervention. The leaders of the movement to create CELAC were Presidents Hugo Chávez of Venezuela, President of Brazil Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva (widely known as Lula), and President Rafael Correa of Ecuador.

When it was established in 2011, the hope was to create regional unity against the United States, widely seen as the most forceful foreign power trying to impose its interest on the region. This unity would be just the regional states with no influence of any foreign interest such as the United States. Above all, this meant CELAC would solve interregional issues without requiring or inviting foreign powers to intervene. This made it very different the Organization of American States (OAS), where the United States sits as a full member, and hosts with its headquarters in Washington, D.C. In the words of then-Venezuelan President Chavez, the Monroe Doctrine was the original statement of the United States' expectation to intervene in the region as it wished. Chaves said that CELAC was needed to replace the OAS, 'As the years go

⁷ 'President pro tempore of the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States', *Wikipedia*, n.d., https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/President_pro_tempore

[of the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States](#)



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by, CELAC is going to leave behind the old and worn-out OAS.⁸

During the organization's annual summit of 28-29 January 2015, CELAC Member States rejected intervention by the United States in the region. They specifically agreed to condemn the US blockade on trade and travel with Cuba and its sanctions against Venezuela. In their *Belen Declaration* (named for the city where it was signed) the heads of government of the Member States agreed to stress '...regional cooperation, social inclusion...sovereignty...right to self-determination of member states...[and]...commitment to tackling poverty and inequality.'⁹ The emphasis on sovereignty, a right countries like the United States take for granted, was a signal of CELAC Members' intention to insulate themselves and the region from foreign intervention.

During the Belen summit, Ecuador, Nicaragua, and Venezuela pushed an initiative to have the US territory of Puerto Rico recognized as a CELAC Member State. Rafael Correa, then president of Ecuador, stated that this would '...demonstrate that America is a region free of colonialism.'¹⁰ Correa said CELAC must be proactive supporting the final steps in decolonization in Latin America and the Caribbean, and that the organization should be the principal actor resolving conflicts within the region, without involvement from foreign actors.

Five years later, the countries of Latin American and the Caribbean are still trying to prevent foreign intervention within the region, particularly the United States. Many issues that exist today in the region are due to interference from foreign nations and the consequences from those actions. The United States became a major

player in Latin America since the corollary to the Monroe Doctrine by former president, Theodore Roosevelt. The corollary stated that not only were European powers were not welcomed to the Western Hemisphere for colonization, but that colonized countries in the Western Hemisphere would be protected and preserved by the United States, thus allowing the United States full access to any and all Latin American and Caribbean countries. The collar to the Monroe Doctrine was initially just to set the United States up as policeman for the Western Hemisphere, but over time the friendly neighbor policy became hazardous as the United States started to seek out special interests in the region.

For many governments in the region, a major threat to their stability is the attitude of the United States. The 1952 coup in Guatemala, in which the US CAI led a force that toppled the democratically elected government, and the repeated US efforts in the 1960s to assassinate Cuban revolutionary leader Fidel Castro, are well known. In 1974 the United States secretly supported a coup that toppled the democratically elected government of Chile.

More recently Honduras faced similar issues due. In 2009, former President Manuel Zelaya was captured by the Honduran military and flown to Costa Rica, effectively removing him from power. Despite regional pressure, U.S. President Obama refused to call it a coup. The current president, Juan Orlando Hernández, militarized the police to stay in power. In 2017, during his re-election campaign, he relied on the police to intimidate and marginalize his competition. US President Donald Trump congratulated his subsequent re-election victory.

⁸ 'Venezuela hosts first CELAC summit', *PressTV*. 3 December 2011, <http://www.presstv.ir/detail/213501.html>

⁹ Boothroyd, Rachael. 'US Further Isolated as CELAC Rejects Regional Intervention',

Venezuelanalysis.com, 31 January 2015, <https://venezuelanalysis.com/news/11178>

¹⁰ *Ibid.*



Former President of Honduras Manuel Zelaya, caught in police suppression of a protest against the re-election of the current Honduras President, Juan Orlando Hernández

Fast forward to 2020-21 and North American intervention is a live issue again. The United States has elevated issues like the governments of Cuba and Venezuela, as well as the issue of migration from Latin America. For many governments, migration is a sensitive issue. While they want their people to remain home and contribute to national development, they also support the human rights of their citizens trying to move elsewhere, especially when they are arrested and jailed.¹¹

CELAC Member States also seek freedom to conduct their own foreign affairs. A major issue is oil important. Venezuela has the world's largest oil reserves, but it lacks refining capability and relies on imported diesel and gasoline. After the United States embargoed Venezuela to protest the Maduro government, Venezuela turned to Iran for assistance. This provoked a new confrontation with the United States, which opposes any trade with Iran. For Venezuela, this is an issue of national sovereignty.¹²

¹¹ Julian Borger, 'Fleeing a hell the US helped create: why Central Americans journey north', *Guardian*, 19 December 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2018/dec/19/central-america-migrants-us-foreign-policy>

COVID-19 and the China question



CELAC Foreign Ministers and the Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi, attend the Second Ministerial Meeting of the China-CELAC Forum, 2020.

CELAC Member States are used to dealing with power plays from Washington. In recent years Beijing emerged as an alternative, and less meddling, source of assistance. The Coronavirus pandemic led many Member States to welcome more Chinese assistance. But some are suspicious of Chinese intentions and seek safeguards to ensure that Chinese help does not lead to Chinese control.

As the Coronavirus pandemic continues to move through and tear apart communities, many governments scramble to work towards a solution, whether that be national lockdowns, social distancing guidelines, and or assistance from allies. China is no stranger to many Latin American countries as it has been a loyal trading partner and ally to many states in the region for the past 20 years. Since the pandemic hit Latin America in March 2020, China has been a friendly sight to many of the states as many of them struggle to keep up with the deadly effects of the virus. China so far has donated 150,000

¹² Lara Jakes and Eric Schmitt, 'In Diplomatic Doubleheader, U.S. Seizes Iranian Fuel From Ships Headed to Venezuela', *New York Times*, 14 August 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/08/14/world/middleeast/trump-iran-venezuela-fuel-tankers>



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masks and hazmat suits to Brazil. The state has also donated ventilators, monitors, defibrillators, and ultrasound scanners to Peru and “10 ventilators, 50,000 testing kits, and 100,000 medical masks to Argentina.”¹³ Through the month of June, China has made at least “...300 coronavirus...related transactions across Latin America and the Caribbean...” with the majority of these transactions being donations, not trade deals. While many struggling governments are grateful for the help, many are not convinced that these handouts are purely out of the goodness of their heart. China was the first nation to report cases of the novel virus after health experts in Wuhan, the heart of the outbreak, tried to cover up the severity of the virus. Many government officials in Latin America believe that the generosity campaign is only a show to keep their public image intact. Jorge Guajardo, former Mexican ambassador to China called it an “apology tour”.

At the Second Ministerial Meeting of the China-CELAC Forum, co-chaired by Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi and Mexican Foreign Minister Marcelo Ebrard Casaubón, foreign ministers from Argentina, Barbados, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Panama, Peru, Trinidad and Tobago, and Uruguay. The meeting included five proposals brought to the ministers by Wang Yi. The first proposal was centered around strengthening cooperation against combating COVID-19 and this meant making communication and coordination between the two regions stronger. Wang Yi also mentioned that China would be ready to send medical teams to Latin American and Caribbean states to assist on the research and development of a vaccine. The second proposal included offering support so that the region can reopen the

economy, sustain the job market, and protect the livelihood of the people. Minister Yi stated that China would have to motivate for trade between itself and the region to stimulate the economy; this could potentially include commercial flights between China and the Latin American and Caribbean states. The fourth proposal emphasized cooperation; the Chinese government supports Mexico in its role of Pro-Tempore President and hopes to hold another Ministerial Meeting to proceed on working together on “...public health, food security, poverty, disaster reduction, digital economy and clean energy.”¹⁴ The fifth and final proposal focused on fairness and justice when working together on global governance. Both regions share interest in advancing towards a multi-polar world and multilateralism. This includes supporting the United Nations multilateral system, international order and law, rejecting unilateralism, protectionism, and striving to build an open world economy and defend the rights of developing countries.

In June 2020, the Latin American and Caribbean region was the world’s hotspot for the number of deaths, with the region reaching 4 million COVID-19 related deaths. Three months later, COVID-19 cases have since doubled and has the most deaths from the virus out of any region in the world. In particular, Mexico and Brazil have seen the highest number of cases and deaths in the region with Brazil being the second in highest death rates related to the virus after the United States.

According to a report published by the *Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean* (ECLAC), the pandemic will lead to the most severe shrinkage of economy activity in the region in recorded history. Economies will

¹³ Matt Rivers, 'Pandemic power play: It's China vs. the US in Latin America', *CNN*, 15 August 2020, <https://www.cnn.com/2020/08/15/americas/latam-china-us-covid-diplomacy-intl/index.html>

¹⁴ *People's Republic of China. China and Latin American and Caribbean Countries Hold Special Video Conference of Foreign Ministers on COVID-19*. Beijing: Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2020.



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contract at least 5.3 percent. Dependence on trade with China and the US is a big part of the problems. More than 20 percent of exports from Chile, Peru, and Uruguay, for example, go to China. With the fall in commodity prices and demand, they will be hit hard. Mexico has the largest manufacturing sectors of all CELAC Member States. Due to the pandemic, its economy is expected to shrink by 6.5 percent. Unemployment and spreading poverty are fast increasing throughout the region. Poverty is expected to jump over to 35 percent of the population. Extreme poverty is expected to rise by 13.5 percent.¹⁵

Country Positions

Changes of government: Because it was formed under the leadership of left-oriented governments, changes of government can have a significant effect on how countries relate to CELAC. Its most stalwart supporters are long-standing leftist governments such as Cuba, Nicaragua, and Venezuela. Other leftist governments that played an important role in the emergence of CELAC, distanced themselves from it when those governments fell. Two prominent examples are Bolivia and Ecuador, which supported the creation of CELAC under their leftist-socialist governments, but have become less engaged and supportive since recent changes of government brought right-oriented leaders to power.

The following are a few revealing examples:

¹⁵ ECLAC. *Report on the Economic Impact of Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19) on Latin America and the Caribbean*. Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, 2020, pp. 9-17.

¹⁶ Daniel Ramos and Monica Machicao, 'Bolivia's Morales resigns after protests, lashes out at 'coup'', *Reuters*, 10 November 2019,

Bolivia: After the controversial elections of 20 October 2019, Bolivia's President since 2006, Evo Morales, resigned and fled to Mexico.¹⁶ With the end of Morales' left-oriented presidency and his replacement by a leader associated with the right, Bolivia's foreign policies changed immediately. While President Morales was highly active in CELAC, that was not true of his successor. *Interim President* Jeanine Áñez Chávez inherited the last months of Bolivia's role as CELAC President Pro Tempore, but showed little interest in its role or the work.¹⁷



Brazil's President Jair Bolsonaro with members of his cabinet during a ceremony at the presidential palace in Brasilia, Brazil, 2 January 2019. AP Photo/Eraldo Peres.

Brazil leads rightist opposition to CELAC. The greatest shock to the young organization came on 14 January 2020, when Brazil suspended its membership. According to Brazil's Foreign Minister, Ernesto Araújo, Brazil pulled out because the organization had become a 'stage' for authoritarian states led by Venezuela, Cuba, Nicaragua, and Venezuela. Araújo says Brazil

<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-bolivia-election-idUSKBN1XK07T>

¹⁷ 'Bolivia no asistirá al cambio de presidencia de la Celac por roces con México'. *El Imparcial*, 23 December 2019,

<https://www.elimparcial.com/mundo/Bolivia-no-asistira-al-cambio-de-presidencia-de-la-Celac-por-roces-con-Mexico-20191223-0073.html>



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remains committed to working in all other regional bodies, especially the Organization of American States (OAS) and Mercosur, which unites the countries of South America's Southern Cone.¹⁸ Brazil's far-right populist president, Jair Bolsonaro echoed these sentiments in his criticism of leftist Latin American governments. The exit of Brazil, a year after Bolsonaro was elected president, shocked many.

Colombia is cautious in CELAC. The government of President Iván Duque Márquez is comfortable with support from the United States, which was important in its effort to end the fifty-year civil war against the FARC rebel movement. But Colombia also encourages regional solidarity. Most recently, Colombia leads several countries struggling with millions of refugees fleeing extreme poverty caused by the collapse of the Venezuelan economy. Border tension with Venezuela is major problem for Colombia, and its foreign policy priority.

Cuba is the Member State closest to Venezuela politically, viewing the Bolivarian Socialist Revolution as a brother movement to its own commitment to socialist rule. Cuban provides medical assistance to Venezuela, and benefits from Venezuela export of subsidized oil products. **Cuba and Nicaragua** are Venezuela's most loyal supporters internationally.

Ecuador's formative role in the creation and establishment of CELAC is closely associated with the tenure of President Rafael Correa Delgado, 2007-17. Correa's presidency was part of the Latin American *pink tide*, a turn toward

leftist governments in the region. Correa allied himself with Hugo Chávez of Venezuela, and his successor since 2013, Nicolas Maduro. He was best known internationally for protecting Wikileaks founder Julian Assange in the Ecuadorian Embassy in London. Since replacing Correa in 2017, current President Lenín Moreno Garcés has led the country in a more conservative direction, in which CELAC plays only a limited role.¹⁹

Mexico has become an active supporter of CEALC under the leadership of President Andrés Manuel López Obrador (widely known as AMLO), elected in 2018. In January 2020, Mexico took the rotating presidency of CELAC.²⁰ AMLO represents a compromise figure for CELAC. He is a committed socialist, but also cultivates his personal relationship with US President Donald Trump, who he avoids antagonizing.



Mexican President Andres Manuel López Obrador speaks during his inaugural ceremony at the National Congress in Mexico City. Eduardo Verdugo / Associated Press.

¹⁸ 'Brazil sits out leftist Latin American nations' body on anti-democracy fears', *Reuters*, 16 January 2020, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-brazil-diplomacy-celac/brazil-sits-out-leftist-latin-american-nations-body-on-anti-democracy-fears-idUSKBN1ZF2U9?>

¹⁹ Franklin Ramírez Gallegos, 'Ecuador veers to neoliberalism', *Le Monde diplomatique*, 1 December 2018, <https://mondediplo.com/2018/12/06ramirez>

²⁰ *Mexico Is Elected President Pro Tempore of CELAC for 2020*, Mexico: Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores, 27 September 2019 <https://www.gob.mx/sre/en/articulos/mexico-is-elected-president-pro-tempore-of-celac-for-2020-219863?idiom=en>



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Proposals for Action

The situation at hand in Latin America and in the Caribbean is a very complex topic that goes back centuries since the first territory was colonized. It will take many years before the nations are able to flourish as they once were before foreign entities robbed them of their peace and resources. As a committee, this body can advance these efforts by:

- Start a diplomatic initiative to bring Brazil back into CELAC by accepting Brazilian positions on key social issues.
- Condemn Brazil for leaving, and for its social and geopolitical policies that oppose CELAC initiatives and agreements
- Welcome Chinese assistance to combat the coronavirus pandemic, but establish limits to preserve local control of the use of Chinese assistance, safeguards to ensure that Chinese help does not lead to Chinese control. Acceptable safeguards might mean channeling all pandemic assistance through local government agencies for control and distribution, forbidding direct distribution by China. Such control also would help local officials to maximize the domestic political benefits of any assistance.
- Agree that foreign assistance is never permitted to facilitate the violent take-over or removal of Member State governments (coups). This proposal is

widely accepted, but controversial among government where the military or other political parties anticipate the possibility of relying on coups in the future to gain power.

- Design a new basis for relations with the United States, establishing baselines in what is accepted and not accepted in relations with Washington. Such initiatives would be popular with CELAC stalwarts, but would be challenged by countries with better US-relations, such as Brazil, Columbia, El Salvador and much of the Caribbean.

Resolution drafters should note the particular role of CELAC. Because it strives to strengthen the sovereignty of its Member States, CELEC does not *demand* or *require* that its Member States do anything. Instead, it usually *calls upon* or *requests* Member States to work harmoniously toward the policies they agree on.

Most CELAC resolutions stress the role of the Meetings of National Coordinators. These are Member State officials who meet to review action on its resolutions. They also work with their own home governments to implement its resolutions. The National Coordinators are officials of the Member States, responsible for helping get the work of CELAC, as mandated in its resolutions, implemented by each of their own Member States. It is natural for CELAC resolutions to stress the role of the Meetings of National Coordinators for oversight and implementation, to make sure its mandates actually get done.



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