

Fact Sheet
Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs
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Inter-American Convention on Transparency in Conventional Weapons Acquisitions

On June 7 1999, the Organization of American States (OAS) General Assembly in Guatemala adopted the landmark Inter-American Convention on Transparency in Conventional Weapons Acquisitions. To date, the Convention has been signed by 20 OAS member states, including all major hemispheric conventional weapons importers and exporters. Signatories to the Convention are: Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Canada, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Dominica, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Haiti, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Paraguay, Peru, the United States, Uruguay, and Venezuela. The Convention entered into force in November 2003. To date twelve states have ratified the Convention (Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Canada, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Nicaragua, Paraguay, Peru, Uruguay, and Venezuela). The Convention entered into force on November 21, 2002. This unprecedented Convention puts in place a concrete mechanism for strengthening regional stability through mutual confidence and transparency and is a significant achievement for the OAS, the United States, and our hemispheric partners.

This Convention grew out of an OAS resolution adopted at the 1997 General Assembly that stipulated that the OAS would consider the desirability of a legal framework to provide advance notification of major arms acquisitions covered by the United Nations (UN) Register of Conventional Arms. The UN Register is a voluntary annual report by member states on their arms imports, exports, and procurement through national production of any of seven categories of weapons -- battle tanks, armored combat vehicles, large caliber artillery, combat aircraft, attack helicopters, warships, and missiles and missile launchers.

The Convention imposes two sets of requirements on States Parties. First, each State Party is required to provide annual reports to the OAS Depositary on its imports and exports of conventional weapons covered by the Convention, which are identical to those covered by the UN Register of Conventional Arms. Second, each State Party is required to notify the Depositary of its acquisitions of covered conventional weapons, whether through imports or national production, within 90 days after they are incorporated into the inventory of the armed forces. States Parties that have not acquired any covered conventional weapons during the preceding year are required to file a "nil report" no later than June 15 of each year.

In recent years, advances in the establishment and promotion of confidence and security building measures and transparency have strengthened military-to-military relations and decreased historic rivalries and tensions in the Western Hemisphere. The Inter-American Convention marks a further step in that process and is an unprecedented regional arms control initiative. With the Convention in place, states in the region will be better able to evaluate their security situation in an environment that allows democratic governments to maintain and modernize defense forces without triggering suspicions that could lead to an arms race. The Convention establishes a new transparency norm that will foster greater dialogue and understanding about major conventional weapons acquisitions. Most importantly, adherence to the Convention by the OAS member states will further reinforce the environment of trust, confidence, and mutual restraint that has begun to characterize Western Hemispheric security relations.