

# *OAS Permanent Council receives Secretary-General candidacies*

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Washington, February 13 (RHC)-- Luis Almagro, Hugo De Zela and Maria Fernanda Espinosa have presented their candidacies for Secretary-General of the Organization of American States before the Permanent Council in Washington, ahead of the March 20th elections.

Uruguayan Almagro, current Secretary-General, seeks to compromise the 18 votes he needs to be confirmed in office. During the session, he defended his management stating that he has returned the institution to "its central place as a hemispheric political forum."

Almagro has been fundamental in the United States-led plan against the progressive governments in the region. The diplomat has defended controversial tools such as economic sanctions against Venezuela, and the coup that ousted former President Evo Morales.

However, Almagro has to face two competing rivals: Ecuadorean former Minister of Foreign Affairs and 73rd President of the United Nations General Assembly Espinosa, as well as seasoned diplomat Peru's de Zela.

Espinosa, during her address to the Permanent Council, promised to "evaluate with the States sensitive emerging issues before executing actions on behalf of the organization," as well as to "heal" the polarization of OAS.

She also expressed that she would promote a dialogue with a "road map" to end the crisis in Venezuela. "We need to communicate more and better by eliminating personal positions and reflecting the positions of the member states taken by resolutions," said the diplomat. Her candidacy was presented not by Ecuador, which with the right-wing Lima Group members support Almagro, but by Antigua and Barbuda and Saint Vincent and the Grenadines.

The third candidate, Hugo De Zela defended that if Almagro or Espinosa wins, the OAS countries will continue to polarize and there will be no progress in the Venezuelan crisis. The Peruvian diplomat said in his presentation that the General Secretariat "has to be part of the solution, its role cannot be to exacerbate the crisis."

De Zela said that the role of the head of the OAS is "to maintain a functional relationship with the member states" and that his role "does not reside in the leading role in social networks."

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