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28 July 2025

**EXECUTIVE COUNCIL TO THE  
INTER-AMERICAN INSTITUTE  
FOR GLOBAL CHANGE RESEARCH  
Fifty-ninth meeting  
Asunción, Paraguay. Hybrid.  
28 May 2025**

**Report of the 59th meeting of the IAI Executive Council**

1. This document was prepared by the IAI Directorate.

Introduction

2. The Executive Council of the Inter-American Institute for Global Change Research (IAI) held its fifty-ninth meeting (EC-59) on 28 May 2025 in Asunción, Paraguay, hybrid.
3. The account of the proceedings and discussions of the meeting are provided in section I of this report.
4. The meeting made three recommendations, which are provided in section II of the report.

Section I: Proceedings of the meeting

Introduction

5. In accordance with *the Agreement establishing the Inter-American Institute for Global Change Research*, Article VI, *The Executive Council*, paragraph 3, the 59<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Executive Council to the Inter-American Institute for Global Change Research was held on 28 May 2025 in Asunción, Paraguay, hybrid.
6. The EC-59 was held back-to-back with the 33rd meeting of the Conference of the Parties (CoP-33, Asunción, Paraguay, 29–30 May 2025) in accordance with Article VI, paragraph 3 of the *Agreement establishing the Inter-American Institute for Global Change Research* and Decision XXV/19: *Joint SAC, SPAC, and EC-CoP*

*meetings.*

7. The meeting was presided by the Chair of the Executive Council, Maria Uhle of the United States of America. Milagro Mainieri of Panama was the First Vice-Chair, and Brian Smith of Canada was the Acting Second Vice-Chair.
8. The following Parties to the Agreement, which are members of the Executive Council, attended the meeting: Argentina, Canada, Chile, Colombia, Panama, Paraguay, United States of America, and Uruguay.
9. The following observer Parties attended the meeting: Bolivia and Jamaica.
10. The following members of the Scientific Advisory Committee (SAC) attended the meeting: Alexandra Mallet, Mercy Borbor Córdova and Barry Warner.
11. The following members of the Science-Policy Advisory Committee (SPAC) attended the meeting: Amparo Martínez (Chair) and Margot Hulbert.
12. The following members of the Indigenous People Advisory Committee (IPAC) Attended the meeting: Cristina Furies.
13. The list of observer Parties and other observers attending the meeting is provided in the List of Participants available on the EC-59 web page: <https://www.iai.int/en/post/detail/EC-59>.

#### Opening of the meeting

##### Welcome by the Chair of the Executive Council

14. The 59th Executive Council Meeting of the IAI was opened by Maria Uhle, EC Chair and representative of the United States, who addressed participants virtually. She expressed sincere thanks to the Government of Paraguay for hosting the meeting. She highlighted this pivotal moment for the IAI, recognizing its achievements over 33 years in building scientific capacity and fostering regional partnerships. She noted that despite uncertainties faced by many governments, the enduring strength of the IAI lies in its collaborative spirit. She praised the Directorate for their innovative leadership, particularly in advancing initiatives such as the Science Diplomacy Center. She closed by emphasizing the importance of celebrating the IAI's collective accomplishments and expressed optimism for continued progress.

##### Welcome by the Executive Director

15. The Executive Director, Anna Stewart Ibarra, formally welcomed delegates and reaffirmed that the IAI is navigating a critical period of transformation. She explained that change is inherent to institutional growth and that the IAI is embracing this transition as an opportunity to strengthen its responsiveness and creativity. She described how the Directorate has remained agile and adaptive, expanding its programs to meet the evolving needs of its Parties. She noted the importance of the IAI's deep regional roots and its comparative advantage in innovation and flexibility among IGOs. Looking ahead to the Conference of the Parties (CoP), she announced the launch of new courses and materials developed to strengthen -trandisciplinarity

and science diplomacy interface, longstanding priorities for Parties.

16. She concluded by welcoming representatives of advisory bodies, including the new Indigenous Peoples Advisory Committee, and emphasized that this biannual presentational gathering is a unique opportunity to renew collaboration and strengthen the relationships that underpin the IAI's mission.

#### Welcome by the Government of Paraguay

17. Fernando Mendez Gaona, representing Paraguay, the host country, welcomed delegates warmly and underscored Paraguay's long-standing commitment to the IAI. He reflected on the importance of facing institutional challenges with resilience, stating that challenging times offer opportunities to build more robust structures and strategies. He expressed pride in hosting the meeting and encouraged participants to enjoy the country's culture and hospitality.

#### Agenda item 1: Approval of the agenda

18. The Chair invited members of the Executive Council to approve the agenda.
19. The agenda was approved by consensus.

#### Agenda item 2: Approval of the Reports of the 56th and 57th meetings of the Executive Council

20. The Chair invited members of the Executive Council to approve the reports of the 56th and 57th meetings of the Executive Council.
21. The reports were approved by consensus.

#### Agenda items 3 and 4: Financial and Administrative Committee report and financial items to be forwarded to the CoP-33

22. The Chair invited the Administration, Finance and Operations Officer to introduce agenda items 3 and 4.
23. The Administration, Finance and Operations Officer began her introduction by summarizing the Financial and Administrative Committee report and the financial items to be forwarded to the CoP-33.
24. She continued her presentation by reporting that the Financial and Administrative Committee (FAC) had reviewed the IAI's core budget request for the coming fiscal year and recommended that the Executive Council forward it to the Conference of the Parties for approval.
25. She noted that the FAC considered that the budget request reflected the changing nature of the IAI's operations and that the proposed expenditures were reasonable and appropriate.
26. She highlighted that the independent auditors' report gave an unqualified opinion that the IAI's financial statement presented its financial position fairly in all material respects.

27. She presented the request for the core budget and contributions from countries for the fiscal year 2025–2026 and the preliminary request for fiscal years 2026–2028.
28. The core budget contribution levels for the fiscal year 2025–2026 will remain unchanged. However, a 5% increase was projected for the following two fiscal years, 2026–2027 and 2027–2028, as recommended by Parties in Decision XXXII/3. The importance of timely country contributions was strongly emphasized, as these are essential to sustaining the Institute's operations and programs. Understanding that contributions are voluntary, the Directorate also considers and recognizes in-kind contributions.
29. Several budget categories were reviewed in detail. Allocations for salaries and benefits remained stable at their current levels. An increase in IT-related expenses was noted, primarily due to investments in developing a new website and associated digital infrastructure. At the same time, targeted efforts were made to reduce expenditure on outreach and extension activities, reflecting a more strategic and efficient use of resources across the Directorate's operations.
30. The U.S. representative informed the meeting that the request for funding the U.S. voluntary contribution to the IAI core budget had been submitted to the U.S. National Science Foundation. However, both the timeline and the extent of potential support remain uncertain, as guidance from the current administration is still pending. Until specific directives are issued, the recommendation is to proceed with planned activities. She reiterated the U.S.'s commitment to the mission of the IAI but acknowledged the challenges presented by this budgetary uncertainty.
31. She further explained that this situation could potentially impact the IAI's ability to fund research teams from member states in Latin America and the Caribbean in the Belmont Forum's Collaborative Research Actions (CRAs). In the absence of U.S. financial support, the IAI will provide in-kind contributions for research teams. Nonetheless, significant funding gaps persist, particularly for the consortia selected for funding in the Climate, Environment, and Health (CEH) CRA, and for teams invited to submit proposals under the Tropical Forests CRA.
32. The IAI Science Director detailed the direct consequences of this funding gap. Six selected CEH projects across countries, including Bolivia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Mexico, Panama, Peru and Uruguay, would have received approximately USD 200,000 to USD 250,000 each from the IAI. Additionally, 49 teams across the Americas were invited to submit full proposals under the Tropical Forests CRA. Of these, a large proportion are led by researchers from the Americas, a result of the IAI's deliberate efforts to increase scientific leadership from IAI member states. The Science Director emphasized that they are working closely with global funders to seek additional resources to support these teams.
33. The Executive Director of the Belmont Forum emphasized the importance of preserving regional leadership in these CRAs. She underscored that the IAI's participation has enabled researchers from Latin America and the Caribbean not only to engage in global funding calls but to lead them, a notable achievement in multilateral science funding. She appealed to Parties to identify national mechanisms to finance their researchers. She highlighted conversations already underway with science funding agencies in Uruguay, Chile, Argentina, Panama, Costa Rica, and

multiple Brazilian state funding bodies, including from São Paulo and Santa Catarina.

34. The IAI Executive Director expanded on the significance of IAI's leadership in the Belmont Forum Tropical Forests CRA, which she described as the first of its kind to be led from Latin America. The IAI co-designed this initiative with the state science funding agency of São Paulo, Brazil (FAPESP), over three years, engaging indigenous leaders, policymakers, and scientists from around the globe in an inclusive and multilingual process. This funding call also piloted a novel grant submission platform that used artificial intelligence tools to allow for proposals in English, Spanish, Portuguese, and French, which was made possible with NSF support. The IAI also ran a comprehensive transdisciplinary training program, which reached over 100 participants, a third of whom were Indigenous Peoples, resulting in 9 co-funded seed grants in partnership with Panama and the state science funding agency of Santa Catarina, Brazil (FAPESC).
35. She indicated that at this moment the IAI could not commit funding to the Belmont Forum CRA on oceans and resilience, due to budgetary uncertainty-. However, the Directorate will continue seeking funding from external donors and supporting research teams through training, network building, mentorship, and coordination with funding agencies. She called on Parties to consider joining these calls directly and to explore possibilities for national funding in collaboration with the IAI and the Belmont Forum Secretariat.
36. The Chair of the Executive Council and the IAI Deputy Executive Director both underlined the significant impact of the Institute's capacity -building efforts, particularly in fostering transdisciplinary collaboration aligned with national priorities and its integrated approach, which combines scientific, governmental, and diplomatic dimensions. These initiatives contribute meaningfully to science diplomacy and international cooperation.
37. It was reported that the Belmont Forum has begun the legal process of establishing a 501(c)(3) nonprofit entity in the U.S., which will enable it to receive philanthropic contributions. This new structure would facilitate broader resource mobilization and potentially support the IAI's future involvement in global research funding calls.
38. The Science Director provided data demonstrating the effectiveness of the IAI's efforts to increase the quality and quantity of grant submissions. In the first phase of the Tropical Forests CRA, 80 pre--proposals were received, of which 50% included participation from IAI member countries. After the eligibility review, the participation rate rose to 65%, showcasing the impact of IAI mentorship and training.
39. The Executive Council formally approved the financial and administrative report and agreed to forward all financial items to the Conference of the Parties (CoP). The Executive Council recommended that the Conference of the Parties approve the Core Budget and Country Contributions for FY 2025–2026 and the preliminary request for 2026–2028.
40. Finally, the Executive Council recommended that Parties explore collaboration with the Belmont Forum through their national science funding agencies. The Executive Council also endorsed continued outreach by the IAI Directorate and the Belmont Forum Secretariat to identify and align future funding opportunities with national priorities, ensuring continued regional leadership and engagement in global scientific research.

#### Agenda item 5: Report of the Executive Council

41. The EC Chair made brief remarks regarding the relocation of the IAI headquarters from Uruguay to Panama during the previous fiscal year and invited Milagro Mainieri of Panama to provide updates regarding the new office.
42. Milagro Mainieri, First Vice-Chair of the Executive Council and representative of Panama, reported that the IAI is currently operating from the City of Knowledge in Clayton, Panama. SENACYT's Board recently approved a multi-year agreement that includes annual financial contributions to support the IAI's office and staff. The agreement is now awaiting final approval from the Comptroller General of the Republic. The representative reaffirmed Panama's strong commitment to the IAI and noted that the establishment of bank accounts is also nearing completion.
43. The EC Chair reminded the Executive Council that members serve two-year terms. Elections for the Executive Council are needed for 2025–2027 and would be held during CoP-33. She explained that 9 of the 19 Parties serve on the EC. Both self-nominations and peer nominations are permitted, and all Parties are invited to propose candidates to fill the nine EC member seats. She explained that following the election of the new Executive Council, the EC bureau, composed of a Chair, a First Vice-Chair, and a Second Vice-Chair, would be designated in a separate process in which the nomination and appointment of bureau positions are made by the new Executive Council itself.
44. The EC Chair emphasized the critical importance of this moment for the IAI. She encouraged new members of the Executive Council to take an active role in advancing the Institute's work over the following two years.
45. Canada expressed interest in continuing its participation on the EC and joining the EC bureau.

#### National permanent representatives

46. The Chair of the Executive Council introduced the agenda item concerning the designation process for national permanent representatives. She explained that traditionally, representatives have been appointed by name. However, this practice has presented ongoing challenges, particularly in countries with high rates of personnel turnover. Each time a national representative leaves their position, the designation of their replacement must be formally renewed through the relevant Ministry of Foreign Affairs or other competent authority, often resulting in delays and disruptions in communication and coordination.
47. To improve continuity and operational efficiency, she encouraged Parties to consider designating their national permanent representatives based on institutional roles rather than the names of individuals. This role--based designation would help ensure smoother transitions and knowledge transfer during personnel changes, build lasting institutional capacity for more impactful participation in the IAI's work and enhance consistency and effectiveness in the IAI's engagement with its Parties.
48. The Executive Director noted that this proposal aligned with recommendations from the recent assessment conducted with Parties. The assessment, which included a marketing study on focal point engagement, identified high turnover and lack of

continuity as key challenges. She emphasized that assigning the focal point role to an institutional position rather than an individual would enhance sustainability and maintain smoother engagement with the IAI over time. Importantly, she clarified that countries would retain full flexibility to determine which institutional role is best suited to serve as national permanent representative and could revise this decision as their national structures evolve.

49. Several participants voiced strong support for this shift. The Chair of the Scientific Advisory Committee (SAC) highlighted ongoing efforts to strengthen communication between the SAC, SPAC (Science-Policy Advisory Committee), and national representatives. She endorsed the move toward institutional roles as a practical way to ensure continuity and maintain institutional memory, which is particularly critical given frequent personnel changes in ministries and agencies.
50. Representatives from Colombia and Paraguay echoed these points, with Paraguay encouraging Parties to consider nominating multiple national representatives who would serve as national delegations, small, inter-institutional teams representing key sectors such as science, environment, and higher education. Paraguay shared a national example where this type of collaborative approach, involving academia, legislative actors, and the executive branch, led to successful project funding and -long-term engagement.
51. In response, the Executive Director emphasized the importance of maintaining a clear hierarchy amongst national representatives, noting that each country must designate one permanent national representative, while any additional members can serve as alternates. This structure ensures clarity and efficiency in official communication and decision-making processes.
52. The representative of Panamá expressed support for maintaining a structure centered on a single national permanent representative, emphasizing that this approach is more effective. Rather than creating large national delegations, it was suggested that the main representative should work internally within their country to coordinate with alternates as needed. This model promotes more transparent communication and more streamlined engagement with the IAI. She also emphasized the importance of attending IAI meetings and developing specific national strategies to ensure that other relevant actors, from science ministries to local researchers, remain engaged.
53. The representative of Chile supported the idea, stressing the need for strategic planning and stronger -internal national coordination. She underlined the need for formal commitments from national authorities to improve inter-ministerial communication and enable more structured, medium-term involvement with the IAI.
54. The Executive Director confirmed that a guidance document on the role of national representatives had been developed recently and welcomed further input from the Parties to enhance it.
55. In conclusion, the Executive Council agreed to forward this recommendation to the Conference of the Parties.

#### Agenda item 6: Closing remarks and closure of the meeting

56. The Chair expressed gratitude for the support of the Executive Council to the IAI and its work.

57. The Executive Director thanked all participants for their engagement in the meeting and expressed appreciation for their valuable contributions. She noted that the insights and comments shared would help guide the discussions over the next two days during the Conference of the Parties. She reaffirmed the Directorate's commitment to supporting the Parties and encouraged participants to continue sharing their feedback and inquiries.
58. The representative of Paraguay extended a warm invitation to all attendees to join a lunch gathering and also reminded them of the side event co-organized with the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) titled "Droughts in the Americas: Regional Priorities, Early Warning Systems, and Sustainable Development," taking place later in the afternoon, to explore key issues and regional approaches to drought management and resilience, with over 500 virtual participants registered. The report of the side event is available on the [IAI website](#).
59. The Executive Director of the Belmont Forum congratulated the IAI on its unique ability to attract large, multilingual virtual audiences, rarely seen in similar forums. She highlighted this as a strong indicator of the relevance of the Institute's work and its growing visibility within the scientific and policy communities across the region. Others echoed this sentiment, celebrating the visibility achieved in Paraguay through the week's events, including the science diplomacy workshop, which drew over 130 in person participants on its opening day.
60. The meeting adjourned at 11:40 a.m. on 28 May 2025.

## Section II: Recommendations adopted by the Executive Council at its 59th meeting

### Recommendations

#### **Approval of the Reports of the 57th and 58th meetings of the EC**

LI/1. The Executive Council approves the reports of its 57th and 58th meetings.

#### **Core Budget and Country Contributions**

LI/2. The Conference of the Parties is invited to approve the Core Budget and voluntary Country Contributions for FY 2025–2026 and to consider the Preliminary request for 2026–2028.

#### **Designation of National Representatives**

LI/3. Parties are invited to consider designating their national representatives based on institutional roles rather than specific individuals to improve continuity and operational efficiency, to ensure smoother transitions and knowledge transfer during personnel changes, build lasting institutional capacity for more impactful participation in the IAI's work, and enhance consistency and effectiveness in the IAI's engagement with its Parties.