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Costa Rican Referendum Passes Free Trade Agreement

On October 8, Costa Ricans went to the polls to vote for the proposed Central American Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA) with the United States. Although Costa Ricans remain divided on the issue, preliminary results suggest that 51.5 per cent voted for the agreement. The turnout at just below 60 per cent exceeded the quorum. Opponents of the agreement refuse to recognize the results until a recount is completed, as required by Costa Rican law. Should the results hold, Costa Rica would join the Dominican Republic, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua and El Salvador in implementing the trade agreement. Costa Rican President Oscar Arias campaigned heavily in support of the deal. The United States also put significant pressure on Costa Ricans to approve it. Critics fear that Costa Rican service and agriculture industries will face stiff competition from the United States, leading to job losses.

Haiti: Putting Gender and Peacekeeping into Practice

Nadine Puechguirbal

February 2004: President Aristide is forced to leave Haiti after weeks of riots and violent confrontations. A Transitional Government is formed and the UN Security Council votes Resolution 1542 (2004) that authorizes the deployment of the UN Stabilization Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH). Among other things, the peacekeeping mission has the mandate to accompany the Transitional Government throughout an electoral process expected to bring back a certain political stability.

Today's multidimensional peacekeeping operations encompass a wide range of activities such as civil affairs, human rights, elections, child protection, disarmament, demobilization and reintegration, in addition to more visible military and police operations. Furthermore, the UN Security Council, in its adoption of Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security (2000), "expresses its willingness to incorporate a gender perspective into peacekeeping operations, and urges the Secretary-General to ensure that, where appropriate, field operations include a gender component."

But what does this resolution mean in practice?

Peacekeepers are often deployed in a post-conflict environment where there is no law and order, where the local men and women live in precarious economic and political conditions, and where women and girls are at risk of sexual violence. Because conflict is a profoundly gendered experience, it is of high importance that peacekeepers understand the differing effects of armed violence on women, men, boys and girls so that they do not further marginalize groups of the society that have already been made vulnerable by war.

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All four countries that voted against the UN Declaration for Indigenous Rights have common law systems. Did this affect the vote?

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When assessing the potential for Cuba's future and discussing policy options, analysts often miss one very important variable.

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Six Haitian senators visited Ottawa and Montreal in October to discuss their country's future and ongoing Canadian involvement.

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Note from the Editor

Argentina now has its first elected female president, surely a significant milestone in a region historically dominated by *machismo*. Yet the fact that Cristina Fernández de Kirchner—Argentina's incoming president and wife of the current president—is a woman has not been raised as a significant issue in the media. In fact, very little has been made of her gender, and this alone might be taken as progress: perhaps it is so acceptable to have a female president that it is no longer newsworthy on its own. Perhaps we have moved forward so that the key issues are about the candidate's potential and her policies, not her gender.

Argentina has, after all, been a relatively solid example of progress for women in politics in recent years. In this last presidential election, the two most popular candidates were women. The country has had a quota law since the 1990s requiring that women make up 30 per cent of political parties' lists of candidates for both houses of Congress. Also, in 2005, President Néstor Kirchner reshuffled his cabinet and appointed women as both the economy and defence ministers, two traditionally male-dominated posts. In another historical precedent, Argentina's Supreme Court now has two women and five men.

However, as those working for women's rights can attest, having a female leader does not necessarily ensure policies for gender equality. Yet it does set an example both nationally and internationally for future leaders. Ms. Fernández is known for defending women's rights, but because she hardly discussed policy in her election campaign, it is difficult to know where she might be heading. With inflation on the rise, serious energy shortages and high unemployment, it would hardly be

surprising if gender equality was near the bottom of Ms. Fernández's priority list. It is certainly notable that she won by such a resounding margin (44.9 per cent of the vote, 23 points ahead of her nearest rival) without discussing what she would do when elected.

But if Ms. Fernández did not discuss policy in her campaign, what exactly were Argentines voting for?

Political dynasty has been suggested as one key factor. Mr. Kirchner has been credited for much of Argentina's recovery after the 2001 economic collapse, and the economy is currently growing by eight per cent each year. After he stepped aside and named his wife as his party's new candidate, Ms. Fernández's electoral victory was hardly in doubt. In fact, some argue that with mandatory voting, many Argentines simply voted for the expected winner, allowing Ms. Fernández to run a successful campaign with hardly any political promises. This advantage was not lost on her rivals, who attacked her for being tight-lipped on future plans.

On the other hand, Ms. Fernández enjoys a popularity that is rightfully her own. The former senator built a strong political career independent of her husband and is undoubtedly the more charismatic of the two. In addition to defending women's rights, she has a strong reputation in her fight for justice over the atrocities of the 1976-83 military dictatorship. After promising that "change is just beginning," Ms. Fernández then indicated that she would leave most of her husband's policies intact—but no one really knows for sure.

One thing that is certain is that Ms. Fernández initiated change just by being elected. Whether the media talk about it or not, the election of a female president is a significant step for Argentina. With the election of Chile's Michelle Bachelet in 2006, Latin America now has two elected female heads of state. Canada, in comparison, has never elected a female prime minister, and the United States has never had a female president, although that might soon change. Another female leader in a global arena dominated by men is undoubtedly some kind of advancement, even if that leader does not implement specific gender-sensitive policies.

What progress Ms. Fernández will achieve in office remains a mystery. But that she was elected at all is a different kind of progress altogether. 🌐

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Gender and Peacekeeping *(continued from page 1)*

Without the collection of sex-disaggregated data, it is very difficult for the mission to clearly identify the different needs of women, men, boys and girls and to target its assistance programs accordingly. Since Haitian women and girls have been the most affected because of pre-existing gender inequalities that have been reinforced by violent social upheaval, special attention should be placed on the creation of an environment conducive to the promotion of their rights. The so-called “gender-blind” approach, irrespective of the different needs of women, men, boy and girls does not create conditions of gender equality. On the contrary, it consolidates the position of male actors who traditionally hold the official and visible power.

MINUSTAH’s Senior Gender Advisor endeavors to implement a two-fold mandate: first, she works with the entire mission’s components to ensure that they have a plan to integrate a gender perspective into their respective policies, programs and activities. Second, she works on capacity building with civil society groups to help them to become more autonomous, thus involving local men and women in the transformation of their society so that they maintain ownership of the process.

Currently, MINUSTAH’s Gender Unit is implementing three main projects: 1) promoting the participation of women in the electoral and political processes as candidates

and voters; 2) working on a strategy to enable women and girls to leave the endless cycle of armed violence in the slums; and 3) contributing to a national strategy on eradicating violence against women with the participation of both men and women as actors of change. For example, a pilot project in the south of the country is currently supporting a group of men who decided to become peer educators within their own community to advocate for a

While men can walk freely in the slums of Port-au-Prince now that the main gangs have been overpowered, this does not mean that it is also safe for women... Peace will only be sustainable in Haiti when women feel safe in their own environment and when, as citizens with rights, they are able to raise their voices on the path to democracy.

society that respects women.

Today, Haiti enjoys a relatively stable security situation that allows the development of myriad projects to assist the Haitian men and women in rebuilding the social fabric of their society. However, significant challenges remain. While men can walk freely in the slums of Port-au-Prince now that the main gangs have been overpowered, this does not mean that it is also safe for women. Security for peacekeepers very often means the cessation of hostilities, of fighting between armed gangs or groups, whereas for local women it means being able to carry out their

daily activities in the neighborhood without the fear of being sexually assaulted. In Haiti, violence created by male-dominated armed gangs has receded, but domestic violence still prevails because of gender roles entrenched in the culture and traditions. Because the police and justice systems are dysfunctional, male perpetrators of violence against women still enjoy impunity.

As the Haitian feminist Danièle Magloire wrote in the *Revue Haïtienne-Caraïbéenne* (Vol. V, No. 2, October 2004): “Violence against women, or even the threat of violence, maintains women in a state of fear or constant vulnerability and limits their movements (particularly in the evening or at night), their access to public spaces where they would feel safe, their social participation, their autonomy. Their access to a full citizenship is denied.”

Peace will only be sustainable in Haiti when women feel safe in their own environment and when, as citizens with rights, they are able to raise their voices on the path to democracy. The involvement of women is particularly important as we slowly move from peacekeeping to peace building, and this peace building must be an all-inclusive process for the successful consolidation of a precarious stability. 🌍

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Do Common Law Traditions Conflict with the UN Declaration on Indigenous Rights?

Anthony Knox

On September 13, 143 countries voted in favour of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (the "Declaration"). Four countries—Canada, Australia, New Zealand and the United States of America (the "Four")—voted against it and 11 countries abstained from voting. On the face of it, the Declaration appears to be the kind of non-binding statement of human rights principles that liberal democracies such as the Four might normally be assumed to support.

As each of the Four is a common law country, is there something in this type of legal system that would make voting for the Declaration more difficult for countries of the common law tradition?

One might easily be misled into assuming that failure to support the Declaration was either based upon some fundamental concepts of the common law systems of the Four or upon some self-serving motives shared by four nations that inherited (from various European empires) vast lands containing vast resources that were once occupied only by their indigenous peoples.

Such assumptions should be easily dispelled because the actual reasons for the negative votes of the Four appear to have everything to do with a) the officially accepted importance of indigenous peoples living in each of the Four, and b) the development of very sophisticated doctrines of law relating to the relationship between indigenous nations and the nation

states in which they live. However, developing legal systems seeking to achieve reconciliation of the sovereignty of nation state and the sovereignty of indigenous groups are neither fully formed nor easily explained or understood.

That the vast majority of the world community voted in favour of the Declaration reflects a) many countries have a benevolent view of indigenous people but no "indigenous peoples" or populations dominated by "indigenous peoples" and hence no developed law relating to indigenous peoples, and b) many countries with substantial indigenous populations have little or no developed law relating to the rights of such populations. Notably, such great common law jurisdictions as the United Kingdom, India, Sri Lanka and all but two of the African common law countries voted for the Declaration.

The fact that the countries of Lat-

CUBA: DEBATING SOCIALISM?

In tens of thousands of meetings in workplaces, communities and Communist party clubs in recent months, ordinary Cubans have been encouraged to discuss the direction of their country. The spark for this national debate was the state of the union speech delivered by Raúl Castro on July 26, one year after he took over as Cuba's acting president when his elder brother, Fidel, underwent intestinal surgery. These public meetings are his first effort to draw the general population into a process of rethinking Cuban socialism. This process has been going on for the past year, including a procedure through which the party, state enterprises, research centres and other official institutions were summoned to describe problems and solutions that would raise output, productivity and living standards. In the July 26 speech, Raúl said that Cubans faced economic hardship and social problems that would take time to fix. Acknowledging that the economy needed "structural and conceptual changes," he called for an "open debate" on what to do in order to reactivate the economy and revitalize socialism. According to a guide distributed to party members leading the public meetings, opinions and suggestions about the economic situation of the country should be allowed, the only exception being "the decision to build socialism." At each meeting, a note taker has recorded without attribution the criticisms and suggestions. The main complaints have been petty corruption, slovenly officials, low pay, rising income inequality, inefficiency, waste and stifling bureaucracy. Loyal Communist militants along with ordinary Cubans have criticized the state of the country's health and educational systems, including Cuba's policy of sending thousands of doctors and other specialists to support Chávez's "Bolivarian Revolution" in Venezuela. The results of this exercise will be analyzed over the course of the next couple of months, with the first announcements of what responses can be expected to happen by the end of December.

in America are primarily civil law jurisdictions, in many cases have large indigenous populations and mostly voted in favour of the Declaration seems to illustrate that the civil codes of those countries either ignore the rights of indigenous peoples as separately recognized groups or deal with them in much less developed terms than the common law developed in the Four. It does not prove any propensity based upon civil law doctrines to accept enlightened treatment of minorities or traditionally disadvantaged majorities. It may suggest that such countries are now seeking to establish a basis for the fairer treatment of indigenous peoples at a time in which developing international law is turning strongly against marginalizing the existence and rights of indigenous peoples.

As Chair of the International Bar Associations Committee Three on Indigenous Peoples and Development only a few years ago, I remember being told by some Latin American lawyers that their countries were even then more likely to employ force against their indigenous peoples to assist resource development than seek appropriate legal means to such ends. Such statements may have been made with the rhetorical hyperbole of the passionate, but evidence suggests that they are not

totally without merit.

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The Canadian example is instructive. In the deliberations of its courts, Canada grants some persuasive value to principles of customary international law. The Declaration is not international law, either customary or effected by the consensus of the world body. Parts of it may amount to customary international law by their previous general acceptance in the international community over time. Other parts clearly are not.

The Canadian example is instructive. In the deliberations of its courts, Canada grants some persuasive value to principles of customary international law. The Declaration is not international law, either customary or effected by the consensus of the world body. Parts of it may amount to customary international law by their previous gen-

eral acceptance in the international community over time. Other parts clearly are not. Parts of it are plainly contrary to Canadian law, which is evolving in the hands of the Canadian judiciary to effect a fair reconciliation between the Canadian nation

and indigenous nations within Canada. Canada could not help to move the Declaration towards international consensus without being at odds with its developing domestic law relating to indigenous peoples.

For example, the Declaration would require "free, prior and informed consent" of indigenous peoples to what are impacts upon their traditional rights.


However, the Canadian constitution, which expressly recognizes "existing aboriginal and treaty rights" as constitutionally protected, has been judicially interpreted so as not to give to its indigenous peoples a free veto to such impacts.

Rather, the constitution deals with such impacts in essentially

administrative law terms, in which the federal and provincial governments of Canada seek, on an appropriately informed basis, to balance fairly the rights of all Canadians while giving priority to the traditional rights of indigenous peoples when appropriate.

Some have argued that voting against the Declaration to protect

a domestic legal construct which seeks a balancing of rights along a spectrum when aboriginal rights are infringed—rather than granting a veto to indigenous peoples—represents an unfair advantage in the face of developing international law. Such views have been published in criticism of Canada's stance on the Declaration. However, as explained above, Canada's rejection of the Declaration was necessary for the continued appropriate development of Canadian law relating to the reconciliation of indigenous and settler populations on a basis which is broadly fair to all interested parties.

Examples from the experience of the other countries making up the Four are beyond the scope of this article but could be supplied further to demonstrate that it is specific doctrines of domestic legal systems—and not broad legal traditions—that led to how countries voted in the General Assembly of the United Nations on the Declaration. 

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The 2007 Leader's Summit: Progress is Still too Slow

Perrin Beatty

On August 21, the “three amigos” concluded the 2007 Leader's Summit hosted by Prime Minister Stephen Harper in Montebello, Quebec. In the weeks leading up to the summit, some questioned whether bringing together Prime Minister Harper, President Bush, and President Calderon could achieve anything tangible. In fact, this question has dogged the Security and Prosperity Partnership (SPP) since its launch in March 2005.

The Leader's Summit brought commitments on a number of North American priorities for Smart and Secure Borders, further regulatory cooperation, enhancing counterfeiting and piracy protection, and developing environmental technologies. Many of these initiatives had been called for by the Canadian Chamber of Commerce.

To start, the development of Smart and Secure Borders through a

plan to facilitate cross-border commerce and coordinate the movement of goods and people during a border incident is critical to the smooth functioning of the border during and after a crisis. It also facilitates movement of critical goods, including medical supplies and emergency equipment, during a pandemic or even a terrorist attack.

Next, the regulatory framework announced by the leaders strengthens their commitment to work toward removing the thousands of small differences that undermine North American job creators. Third, the Intellectual Property Action Plan will strengthen enforcement and implement the SPP commitment for a “Fake Free Americas” to stop the flood of illegal and all too often dangerous goods into North America.

Finally, the leaders announced an integrated strategy on climate change and air pollution, along with

Round Two: Guatemala's Presidential Election

Guatemala held the second round of voting in its presidential elections on November 4. The two frontrunners in the race for president were moderate left businessman, Alvaro Colom (National Unity for Hope Party), and retired General Otto Perez Molina (Patriotic Party). Fifty people have been killed during the campaign, as the politicians and activists involved have become the targets of organized crime. In the first round of voting on September 9, neither Colom nor Molina achieved the 50 per cent majority required to win. Since then, polls have not indicated a decisive leader, with the exception of a recent poll done by El Periodico newspaper, which gave Colom 39.4 per cent of the vote, and Molina 35.1 per cent. The campaigns of both leaders suffered from the gang violence that plagues Guatemala. After the first round of voting in September, one of Colom's senior officials resigned in response to threats of violence. Molina's private secretary was shot dead in October. The race for president has been a close one, focusing on issues of rampant crime and the problem of poverty. As FOCALPoint went to print, the Guatemalan Electoral Tribunal figures showed Alvaro Colom as president elect with a 5.66 per cent lead over retired General Otto Perez Molina.

the development of environmental technologies to enhance a sustainable and competitive North America.

These practical, tangible, and achievable opportunities to boost our three nations' competitiveness and security are why the SPP was created. In fact, they are so achievable that the average Canadian would question why they have not already been done, especially as competitive pressures on North America intensify—progress is critical given the fast pace of countries in continental Europe and the emerging economies of China and India.

We only have to look at India to see the legislative and regulatory improvements since 1992 to understand that our incremental approach is too slow for us to compete on a global scale.

The most recent SPP announcements contain strategies for enhancing Canada's and North America's competitive positions while addressing our security concerns. However,

We only have to look at India to see the legislative and regulatory improvements since 1992 to understand that our incremental approach is too slow for us to compete on a global scale.

the time for talk has passed. We need action now.

Smart and secure borders require that businesses on both sides of the border are informed on who and what can cross the border both during an emergency and as the border is ramping back up to normal operations. There must be an established framework used to set priorities for the categories of people or products

that must get across the border in an emergency.

Expanding capacity at the Windsor-Detroit border crossing and increasing participation in the FAST and NEXUS programs will further facilitate cross-border trade and labour mobility. Finally, all governments must work in tandem to ensure that the Western Hemisphere Travel Initiative (WHTI) is efficiently implemented, by fully informing citizens

and businesses about the rules and regulations, and by ensuring that a critical mass of the required documents—including an enhanced drivers' licence—is in circulation before the WHTI begins.

The Regulatory Framework adopted by the North American leaders will only progress once it addresses the significant number of small differences between our regulatory re-

An Indigenous Diplomatic Mission

The Andean Coordinator of Indigenous Organizations (CAOI), representing the Andean peoples of Bolivia, Colombia, Chile, Ecuador and Peru, recently expressed concern over the Agreement of the Association of the European Union and the Community of Andean Nations (UE-CAN). This past month, a diplomatic mission made up of three members from CAOI visited various European countries to participate in seminars and important meetings with representatives of the European Union. The intent of the trip was to analyze the impact of the UE-CAN and free trade between the two continents on the indigenous populations of the Andes and the Amazon.

The dialogue developed principally around the large-scale projects of the Integration of the South American Regional Infrastructure (IIRSA) and the promotion of bio-fuels in which the European Union is involved. According to the CAOI, the areas that occupy these large projects are inhabited by indigenous populations that experience high levels of social and economic exclusion.

The indigenous diplomatic mission achieved a commitment from European parliamentarians to demand the protection of indigenous rights in the negotiation process of the UE-CAN agreement. Also, due to the CAOI's denunciation of the criminalization of protests by indigenous populations in Colombia, Chile and Peru, the parliamentarians also promised to solicit the governments of the countries implicated, to investigate the facts and to pursue the cessation of violating indigenous rights.


gimes that impose major costs on Canadian manufacturers, exporters, transport carriers, and Canadian and foreign customers—negating the benefits of tariff reductions.

Areas begging for further co-operation include the automotive industry, food industries, financial services, and the defence industry, in the context of the International Traffic in Arms Regulations (ITARs), which restricts the export of defence articles and services from the United States. Streamlining regulations is one way of making North America more competitive, and next year's leaders' summit will provide an excellent opportunity to evaluate

whether the improvements we have made are sufficient.

Achieving progress through the Intellectual Property Action Plan requires strengthening enforcement—including adding the ability to do random search and seizure and confiscate proceeds from these crimes—and increase resources for enforcement to prevent the reproduction, manufacturing or importing of counterfeit and pirated goods. A number of these recommendations are already found in two parliamentary committee reports. Implementing them is imperative for our competitiveness and security.

The SPP announcements laid

the foundation for increased North American security and competitiveness. While these priorities are a positive step forward, they are still only proposals, and progress on strengthening North American competitiveness is still too slow. We urgently need our governments to move faster to implement these strategies. The global marketplace only gets fiercer from here, and our three countries must work in partnership to protect the prosperity of our citizens and businesses. 

The Hon. Perrin Beatty is President and CEO of the Canadian Chamber of Commerce.

BUSH ANNOUNCES NEW U.S. POLICIES TOWARDS CUBA

On October 24 and in his first speech addressing Cuba in four years, U.S. President George W. Bush announced various new policy initiatives intended to foster a shift away from communism. The speech took place at the State Department in Washington during a gathering attended by members of Congress, foreign diplomats and relatives of jailed Cuban dissidents. Highlights of the speech included:

- Unwavering support for the U.S. economic embargo.
- Support for freedom over stability and disinterest in seeking accommodation with “a new tyranny” in the interest of stability.
- An offer to give non-governmental and faith-based groups U.S. licenses to provide computers to Cubans, if the Cuban government ends its restrictions to Internet access.
- An offer of scholarships to young people, if the Cuban government allows them to freely participate.
- A call to the international community to put aside its differences and work together with him to establish a multibillion-dollar “Freedom Fund for Cuba” to help rebuild the country by providing grants, loans and debt relief to Cubans once Havana recognizes the rights to free speech, free association, freedom of the press, political parties and free elections. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice and Commerce Secretary Carlos Gutiérrez were named to lead the enlistment of foreign governments and international organizations for this initiative.
- Addressing the military, the police and government officials, Bush asked: “Will you defend a disgraced and dying order by using force against your own people? Or will you embrace your people’s desire for change? There is a place for you in the free Cuba...”
- Addressing ordinary Cubans, Bush declared: “You have the power to shape your own destiny. You can bring about a future where your leaders answer to you, where you can freely express your beliefs and where your children can grow up in peace...”
- Addressing the schoolchildren of Cuba, Bush stated: “You have a lot in common with the young people in the United States... Do not believe the tired lies you are told about America... Do not fear the future.”

President Bush's speech can be accessed at: <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2007/10/20071024-6.html>

For more information on recent developments in and about Cuba, see: <http://www.cubasource.org>

Cuba's Future: The Missing Variable

Racquel Smith

On September 6, FOCAL's Afro-Latino Program and the Centre for Developing Area Studies (CDAS) at McGill University convened two panels of eminent experts on Cuba to assess the economic, political and civic ramifications of the evidence of race-based inequality in Cuban society. The meeting was entitled "Afro-Cubans and Economic Development: What Role for Strategic Policy and Civil Society?"

The experts at the roundtable discussion represented a unique diversity of professional and academic backgrounds and conceptual, even ideological, lenses. Four of the seven panelists were from Cuba and the meeting included participants from Canada, the United States, Australia and the Caribbean. They weighed various aspects of historical and contemporary Cuban society, economy and institutions for their impact on race and gender equality in the island.

Analytical reference points were most often the republican period (Batista-1959), the revolutionary period (1959-) and the special period (1980s; denouement of Soviet block; domestic economic crisis and dualization) on Cuba's timeline. The experts not only shared excellent insight into the current

situation of Afro-Cubans, but ultimately advanced fresh thinking on the processes of change and new actors in both Cuba and elsewhere in the region that might inform strategic, high-impact development and foreign policy in Canada.

Fidel Castro himself offers a

It is not surprising to learn that some of strongest support for the revolutionary ideals of the past fifty years in Cuba can be found among the Afro-Cuban community.... Afro-Cubans will enter a post-Castro Cuba with specific grievances and needs that they will likely translate into concrete economic, social and political demands.

diagnosis of the problem of racial inequality in Cuba. In the 2006 publication *Cien Horas con Fidel: Conversaciones con Ignacio Ramonet*, the Cuban leader is quoted as commenting:

"The Revolution, beyond the rights and guarantees achieved for all citizens of whichever ethnicity or origin, has not had the same success in the fight to eradicate differences in the social and economic status of the black population of the country. Blacks live in the worst homes, have the worst jobs,

are paid less, and receive between five and six times less remittances in dollars than their white compatriots." (Author's translation, *Oficina de Publicaciones del Consejo de Estado, La Habana, 2006*).

One panelist noted that in a country in which everything has to come from the mouth of the president, this recent recognition is significant.

At a different point in Cuban history, at the start of the revolution in 1959, Fidel Castro also recognized the problem

of societal inequities as unmistakably correlated with race and openly declared battle on the problem. The radical policies with which the revolution was officially launched and that targeted the poor and working class, cutting across all social sectors (labor, education, housing, and social security policy), proved to benefit the historically disadvantaged blacks more

than any other group. Though he pronounced the complex problem solved only three years later, among many of the indicators to which he could make supporting reference was the fact that, by the time of the 1981 census, the life expectancy of people identified as "negros" or mestizos" in the census was only one year below that of whites—far better than in other multiracial societies in the region such as Brazil and the United States. It is not surprising, then, to learn that some of strongest support for the revolu-

tionary ideals of the past 50 years in Cuba can be found among the Afro-Cuban community.

Change in Cuba, therefore, is being driven in very palpable ways by access to the dollar, and that change is affecting blacks and whites differently. All do not have the same access to the dollar facilitated by new avenues for foreign direct investment, international tourism and remittance receipts, cornerstones of the government's response to the economic shock caused by the demise of the socialist trading bloc in the early 1990s. The research and anecdotal evidence presented by the panelists point to a variety of reasons: when the jobs open up in tourist facilities, they are given to lighter skinned or white Cubans, for the sake of "buena presencia" (good or pleasing appearance) that will help business; when the dol-

lars come in from remittances, it is mostly to white Cubans, from their family members among the predominantly white Miami exile community. In short, more than one panelist argued, the government's early revolutionary policies did not deal with a deeper culture and ideology of racism in Cuba. As a result, racial discrimination gains more power in determining social outcomes when the federal government has less power and fewer resources to "equalize" racial inequities.

Afro-Cubans will therefore enter a post-Castro Cuba with specific grievances and needs that they will likely translate into concrete economic, social and political demands. Herein lies the rub. Often, when we talk about change in Cuba, we focus on the leader(s) and speculate on the form that Cuba's interaction will take with the rest of the world. In

engaging Cuba, and especially in the scenario of change towards increasing liberalization in the economy, we cannot afford to leave out questions of the transmission mechanisms of that change: Who are the winners? Who are the losers? Who are the new voices and civil society actors competing for spaces of social and economic determination with the Cuban leadership? When we speculate on greater opening to capital investment in Cuba, for example, we must not forget that we are talking about the odds of an ownership structure more than likely to be dominated by the white exile community. Cuba scholars must plug the race variable into the equation when speculating on Cuba's future. 🌐

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Active Democracy Network Moves Forward

The month of October represented a significant milestone for the 24 civil society organizations across North, South, Central America and the Caribbean that comprise Active Democracy: Citizen Network for the Implementation of Summit Mandates. FOCAL, which co-manages the project together with two other leading civil society organizations from Chile and Venezuela, launched the distribution of a comprehensive but user-friendly methodology manual in each participating country across the Western Hemisphere.

The Active Democracy Network seeks to measure the level of implementation of government mandates emanating primarily from the Declarations and Plans of Action of the last two OAS Summits (Mar del Plata, Argentina 2005 and Quebec City, 2001) in four areas: 1) access to public information; 2) freedom of expression; 3) local government and decentralization; and 4) support for civil society participation in governance. The "Active Democracy" methodology describes the appropriate indicators that can be used to monitor government compliance in response to Summit commitments. Research areas will include Canada, and results will be released in March 2008.

As a civil society initiative, the project is innovative in the sense that creating a standard methodology for these reports by government has been a challenge to institutions such as the OAS, where more ad hoc reports from governments on their own implementation of Summit commitments are periodically presented.

The Network of civil society organizations is already proving its ability to influence decision-making in the Americas region. Most recently, Andrea Sanhueza of Corporación Participa represented the Network in a presentation at a high-level meeting at the Inter-American Dialogue in Washington, D.C. on reform of Inter-American Institutions and the Fifth Summit of the Americas, which will take place in Trinidad and Tobago in 2009. For more information about the project, visit www.democraciaactiva.com.

FOCAL Hosts Haitian Senators

Leslie Fillion-Wilkinson

On October 29-31, FOCAL hosted a delegation of six senators from the Republic of Haiti on their visit to Ottawa and Montreal. The delegation, led by senate vice-president Madame Edmonde Beauzile, travelled to Canada on a fact-finding mission to meet senior government officials, parliamentarians and decision makers. The trip demonstrates Haiti's recent gains in political stability and signals the upper house's renewed engagement toward its governing responsibilities.

The senatorial trip to Ottawa and Montreal followed a similar visit to Washington, D.C. in early October. In recognition of Latin America's growing engagement in Haiti, the delegation plans to visit Brasilia, Santiago and Mexico City in the near future. The visit was a private initiative by the senators who enlisted FOCAL's expertise to organize and coordinate both the Canadian event and their upcoming trip to Mexico.

The composition of the delegation—the members belonged to four different parties—was a reflection of Haiti's plural parliament and the policy of governing by consensus which has prevailed since President

Préval's election in 2006.

The primary objectives of the visit were to allow representatives from the Haitian senate to personally exchange views with Canadian decision makers and to enhance understanding of key issues in the current Canada-Haiti relationship. The trip was also an opportunity for members of the senate to convey appreciation for ongoing Canadian support for Haiti.

While in Ottawa, the senators met with members of parliament from the Conservative, Liberal and Bloc Québécois parties as well as officials from the Parliamentary Centre, Elections Canada, Foreign Affairs and the Canadian International Development Agency. They were also invited to observe question period. Discussions focussed mainly on the need to change how aid monies are spent in Haiti. According to the senators, funds must increasingly be channelled toward local communities and eventually be tied to Haiti's national budget priorities. De-centralizing government and empowering local administrations, training managerial staff, and promoting investment are of particular concern to the Haitian parliament, as is improving Haiti's general capacity to

absorb aid funds.

In the final leg of the visit, the senators met with Haitian diaspora groups in Montreal. The government of Haiti recognizes the seminal economic role that the diaspora plays and hopes to harness the full potential of this sizeable demographic. Discussions on this topic revolved around ways to entice qualified diaspora workers back to Haiti and stem the brain drain.

The Haitian parliament's new proactive stance on moving the country forward is a sign that democratic institutions in Haiti are taking hold and that Canadian investment in good governance is bearing fruit. Haiti still has a long way to go, but the senators hope to solidify gains by undertaking more trips to study foreign parliaments and open channels of dialogue with Haitian partner countries. Visits to Latin America are crucial to garnering support, as these countries receive little news from Haiti yet have the potential and will to contribute considerably to the country's development. Canada's support for the proposed senatorial trips is therefore critical in proving its commitment to foster viable democratic institutions. 🌐

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UNITED STATES PROPOSES ANTI-DRUG PLAN FOR MEXICO

On October 22, U.S. President George W. Bush unveiled the "Merida Initiative," a new plan for combating the flow of drugs, arms and laundered money across the Mexican-American border. It is estimated that 90 per cent of the cocaine entering the U.S. arrives via Mexico. The total cost of the Merida Initiative is \$1.4 billion over two years. Bush asked Congress for a first instalment of \$500 million to help combat a drug trade that generates billions annually. Both the U.S. and Mexican governments wish to avoid comparisons between the Merida Initiative and Plan Colombia, a controversial anti-narcotics strategy initiated by the U.S. in Colombia in 2000. Some members of Congress are displeased that they were not involved in developing the plan. Also, the party politics preceding the American election may impede Congressional approval of the funding. Experienced drug enforcement personnel agree any successful plan must focus on tracking the flow of drug money and getting reliable intelligence.

PUBLICATIONS

Torres, Vladimir (FOCAL Project Manager). "Canada in the Americas: The Ebbs and Flows of Assuming a Significant Role" in *Brazil and Canada in the Americas*. Rosana Barbosa, Editor. Co-Publication of the Canada Visiting Research Chair in Brazilian Studies and the Gorsebrook Research Institute, Saint Mary's University, Halifax, NS, 2007.

EVENTS

November 8: FOCAL is hosting "Canada and the Americas: A Roundtable". This event will include an open roundtable with key government and civil society actors from across the Western Hemisphere on Canada's role in the Americas, as well as a presentation of a recent poll conducted by Léger Marketing on Canadian perspectives of Latin America and the Caribbean. Space is limited. For more information, please contact Rachel Schmidt at rschmidt@focal.ca.

November 29: FOCAL's Indigenous Governance Project is hosting an Advisory Committee Meeting. Please contact Jean Pierre Chabot at jpchabot@focal.ca for more details.

Write for FOCALPoint

Articles between 700-1000 words in English, French or Spanish are welcome. All submissions are on a volunteer basis and must be exclusive to FOCALPoint. For full submission guidelines, please contact rschmidt@focal.ca or visit www.focal.ca.

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