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## Canada and the New North-South Divide in the Americas

Gordon Mace

The meetings in Cancun, Miami and Monterrey, held in the autumn of 2003 and winter of 2004, have revealed a new North-South fracture, evident at both the international and regional level. This is a new confrontation that appears to be significantly different from that which dominated the international agenda during the 1960s and 70s.

With regard to the Americas, the Miami ministerial, above all, revealed the existence of a new Argentina-Brazil-Venezuela axis, with which other South American governments could align themselves. Since Miami, these governments have acted to oppose that which is commonly referred to as the "Singapore agenda" (investment rules, convergence policies, transparency in government procurement, and trade facilitation) as long as the industrialized countries, led by the United States, refuse to put anti-dumping measures and agricultural subsidies on the negotiating table. They intend to open their markets to services offered by firms from industrialized countries only when the developed countries open their own markets to products produced in the South.

One of the important results of the Special Summit of the Americas in Monterrey, on the other hand, was Mexico's assertion of its position as a North American country. President Vicente Fox, in effect declared that his administration was henceforth going to work towards constructing a more efficient North American system. He also committed the Mexican government to a strategy of supporting the creation of the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA) according to the original timetable.

This new division of the hemisphere, between North America and South America is extremely dangerous for the future of regionalism in the Americas because we are in the presence of a North-South relationship that, in at least three aspects, is very different from that of the 1960-70s. First, the new challenge from the southern countries is of a different nature, than that of earlier years, in the sense that the governments of these countries do not question the international economic order as a whole. Their approach is at the same time more pragmatic because it works within the regular channels of the international system, principally the World Trade Organization, and more ethical because it aspires to greater fairness in international trade.

Secondly, the new challenge is less vocal and more systematic than during the 1970s. Delegations from several countries of the South, emerging economies in particular, are more competent and better prepared when they take on international

economic negotiations. They better understand what is at stake as well as the rules of negotiation. The result is that they are less likely to accept than before, arrangements in which they do not make relative gains.

Lastly, the governments of the South, must today pay much closer attention to public opinion at home. New information technologies make sure that the populations of the southern countries, and what is termed civil society in particular, have become better informed about what their governments say both inside the country, but also in international fora. Governments of the South thus, must now practice a new form of diplomacy, which is not a two-level game, as formulated by Robert Putman, but rather a three-level game including foreign negotiators, local ministries and departments, as well as civil society.

These three factors work, as has been evident since September of 2003, to block international trade negotiations. This new state of affairs, is not, as some would like to think a passing phenomenon. There is every reason to believe that the international agenda will be dominated by a new North-South relationship for the immediate future. And this will be a North-South relationship that is much more difficult to manage than it was thirty years ago due to the hardening of attitudes and positions among the governments of the South.

In the Americas, this new North-South divide has already claimed a victim: the initial project of a deep and broad FTAA. The compromise reached by the United States and Brazil, and reluctantly endorsed by the other governments of the region in Miami, last November, constituted an important dilution of the original project. As a result, the only common obligation will consist in a program of tariff reductions. The rest will be composed of buffet-style agreements in which trading partners can sign bilateral agreements and accept the disciplines of their choice.

Such a result is problematic for Canada to the extent that the FTAA constitutes for this country both an economic and a political imperative. From an economic point of view, the original project would have allowed Ottawa to create a regime that in the long-term, would have permitted a broadening of the economic relationship with the rest of the region. In the short-term, the original project would have been equally useful to frame and limit, as much as possible, the foreign trade policy of the United States.

But the real strategic usefulness of a broad FTAA for Canada was without a doubt more political than economic. The FTAA constituted for Canada, the fundamental tool of hemispheric regionalism, for reducing its North American imprisonment, and thereby conserving the little room for manoeuvre that remains in Ottawa's foreign policy. This is what many critics of the Canadian position have never understood.

How should Canadian diplomacy manoeuvre in this new "hub and spoke" environment? If the first imperative of the Canadian involvement in the FTAA, and in wider terms, in the regional system of the Americas is of a political nature, it will be necessary for Canada to adjust its behaviour. This could be done in several ways, beginning along the two following axes. In the first

case, the Canadian government should present itself as being more receptive to some Mexican proposals to institutionalize or at least increase the multilateralization of the North American sub-system. Everyone agrees that certain issues such as softwood lumber must be addressed bilaterally between Canada and the United States. But, one must also see that other issues, like transportation and phyto-sanitary regulations for example, would be better treated within a trilateral framework. And this means understanding that North American trilateralism can serve as an instrument to protect Canada's sovereignty.

In the second case, Canadian diplomacy must succeed in building bridges with other governments in the Americas with a common concern for safeguarding and deepening the regional system of the Americas. This assumes first of all a rapprochement with Brazil, which itself requires management of certain bilateral disputes. It assumes as well that coalitions should be created with countries such as Argentina, Chile, Costa Rica and Mexico, in order to advance certain regional issues and perhaps greater institutionalization of the system.

But, perhaps the fundamental problem for diplomacy and the government of Canada is one of attitude. It is apparent that Canada will never be a part of the Latin-American "family" as the term is understood by Latin Americans. But Canadian diplomacy could find in Latin America functional partners for building an efficient regional system, as long as we accord to these governments the respect and consideration that we give to our partners in the industrialized world.■

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## Fragile Stability: Mesa's 90 Days are Up

Laurie Cole

When current Bolivian President Carlos Mesa took office on 17 October 2003, the stability and length of his tenure were uncertain. Mesa assumed the post after former President Gonzalo Sánchez de Lozada was forced to resign following nation-wide demonstrations. As President, Mesa acted quickly to distance himself from the previous government and to gain the trust and confidence of the Bolivian public. Mesa's initial manoeuvres were successful and early in his term key opponents, whose support was crucial for the longevity of his stay in office, offered their tentative support, granting him 90 days to prove that he was committed to change. Failure to do so, it was warned, would result in renewed demonstrations and social protest. As January 2004 drew to a close, so did Mesa's ninety-day "grace period." While he has managed to make some important changes during this time, he faces the ongoing challenge of building public trust, fostering economic growth that has a visible impact in the lives of Bolivians, and balancing the demands of powerful but diverse opposition groups, who will no longer give him the benefit of the doubt.

### A Difficult Legacy

Mesa came to power after 6 weeks of violent protest that took the lives of 59 people. The most important demonstration, which mobilized large portions of the Bolivian population, was sparked by a government plan to sell natural gas to the United States via a Chilean port. However, the uprising also reflected a growing national discontent with the government, which was increasingly considered unresponsive and out of touch. Elected in 2002 with only 22.5 percent of the popular vote, Sánchez de Lozada's popularity rapidly declined. As the government and the traditional political party system have been increasingly unable to represent or respond to public demands, various opposition movements have evolved to articulate the interests of those marginalized by the existing system. Growing in strength and numbers, powerful opposition voices including those of the labour movement, the indigenous movement led by Philip Quispe, and traditional coca farmers (*cocaleros*) led by Congressmen Evo Morales, are challenging the government at the polls and on the streets. Their organized collective action was a key factor in Sánchez de Lozada's resignation.

While representing different issues and goals, these movements were largely in agreement that the governments' open market policies and backing of the US-led program to eradicate coca production, a long-time traditional product and key cash crop for many farmers, acutely worsened the situation for the majority of Bolivians. Pervasive poverty, inequality and racism, as well as ongoing news of government infighting and corruption led many critics to believe that benefits from the proposed natural gas plans, as like many government projects, would go to the government and elite, and do nothing to alleviate the situation for millions of the nation's poor.

### Results of the Grace

Mesa, a former journalist and historian and Vice-President under Sánchez de Lozada, has proved to be a savvy politician than many had initially expected. Once in office he acted quickly to quell discontent and bring calm to the divided Andean nation. His inaugural address introduced the five key projects that would guide his term[A1]. He promised to hold a referendum on the export of natural gas; confront impunity and corruption; rewrite the constitution by constituent assembly; implement a policy of fiscal austerity, and form a non-partisan cabinet.

Within days he put some of his inaugural promises into motion. He appointed a new non-partisan 15-member cabinet that contained two indigenous representatives, and created a new Ministry for Indigenous Affairs (FOCAL POINT, 10/03). On February 1, Mesa introduced his economic policy for the nation, which drew on the five main themes. Mesa initiated his austerity program by cutting his own salary by 10 percent. Senior officials were hit with a 5 percent salary decrease and annual \$4,000 bonuses were also abolished. Tax reform included a new 1.5 percent asset tax on those with an income over \$50,000, as well as a 0.3 percent charge for all banking transactions. Other proposals include a plan to increase house ownership and the creation of a foundation to fight poverty in cities of the high Andes. A 3 percent pay increase in the minimum salary was also offered in late January, but quickly rejected by the labour confederation, which is demanding a 120 percent increase, while demanding a 70 percent decrease in the salaries of senior public servants.

On the issue of gas, progress has been mixed. Mesa introduced a new hydrocarbons law that will see gas companies paying higher taxes on profits. However, opponents claim that a tax is not sufficient and that the gas industry should be nationalized. Promises to hold a nation wide referendum on the sale of natural gas have also encountered some setbacks and the vote will not take place as scheduled. The National Electoral Council (NEC), which will oversee the referendum, needs a minimum of 90 days to prepare for the vote. However, they must wait until three remaining congress seats are filled to begin the procedure.

However, US policy towards the country – focused sharply on the eradication of coca – has not changed as a result of recent events in Bolivia. As Mesa assumed office, the US government was quick to send a message to the new president underlining their commitment to the coca eradication policy and urging the new government to safeguard “clear rules” for foreign investors, issues which some analysts claim are closely linked to ongoing US aid (FOCAL POINT 10/03). This is a critical issue for opposition groups: for the *cocaleros* the US policy directly affects their ability to make a living; while for others it is a powerful symbol of Bolivia’s lack of independence vis-à-vis the US.

## Peru

Peruvian Prime Minister Carlos Ferrero announced the appointment of seven new members to cabinet on February 15. The shuffle was intended to restore confidence in President Toledo’s government (El Comercio, 15/02/04). Notable amongst the appointees was the reinstatement of Pedro-Pablo Kuczynsky as Minister of Economy and Finance. He left the post in 2002 following protests against his privatization policies (LatinNews.com, 17/02/04).

The Cabinet reshuffling occurs in the wake of two more crises in the Toledo government. Former legal advisor to President Toledo, Cesar Almeyda was arrested for his dealings in December 2001 with General Oscar Villanueva, a member of Vladimiro Montesino’s (Alberto Fujimori’s security strongman) corruption web. Almeyda was the head of the *Consejo Nacional de Inteligencia* at the time. In the same week, Vice-President Raul Diez Canseco resigned due to allegations of preferential tax treatment towards the father of his lover. These crises are part of a string of incidents that have led to numerous resignations, five cabinet reshufflings, four different Prime Ministers and the steady decline of Toledo’s approval rate.

The most recent poll shows Toledo’s approval rate at 10 percent (El Comercio, 18/02/04). Calls for a more independent Cabinet with broader powers have not gone unheeded. The appointment of the seven independent Ministers was decided upon after consultations with civil society and political parties. Toledo has announced that he will support, not direct, a Cabinet which now has the freedom to act as necessary (El Comercio, 17/02/04). However, the Cabinet reshuffle is a thin solution to more deep-rooted problems. If Toledo’s government cannot come up with solutions to the conflicting political, economic and social demands of his country, he may find that the next reshuffling will be his own.

## Mesa’s Prospects

Despite these changes, labour, indigenous and farm leaders have begun to express their dissatisfaction at Mesa’s progress so far, claiming that he has not done enough to address their concerns. However, to date, opponents have taken no action to destabilize Mesa’s regime. Despite these challenges, and contrary to his initial suggestions, Mesa has indicated that he will remain in the Presidency until 2007, the term granted under the constitution. While his prospects hang in the balance, Mesa is currently reported by national sources to have 77-80 percent popular approval rating (Economist 01/22/04).

First and foremost, however, Mesa must continue to implement the plans that he has laid out and quickly produce concrete results that are visible to Bolivians. It is also critical that he maintain the faith and support of diverse opposition groups by maintaining his openness and his distance from the traditional politics of the past – ensuring that stakeholders remain engaged in dialogue and active in national decision making. To facilitate this it would be very much in Mesa’s interests, however difficult it may appear, to gain some space and flexibility from the US in its policy towards Bolivia. A more flexible US policy would give him much needed room to enter into good-faith negotiations with *cocaleros* and other interest groups.

Finally, Mesa faces the challenges of governing without the support of traditional political parties – who despite their ineffective governing capacity, have customarily controlled the bureaucratic and political structures of the state. Ongoing and concerted effort is required if Mesa is to successfully reconcile the distinct interests of these diverse and powerful groups, while producing real change for Bolivia.■

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## Canada and Illicit Drug Issues in the Americas

Stephen Bolton

There are compelling reasons for Canadians to take a hard look at the drug situation in the Americas. Even in the new world of international security after September 11, the related problems of drug trafficking, organized crime, and substance abuse continue to constitute serious threats to the stability and security of many states in the Americas. They undermine the ability of these states to govern effectively and to protect their citizens from drug-related violence. Ensuring the security of the citizens of our countries is of course not only a desirable end in itself, it is also a critical component of institution-building and good governance – in fact, it is a *sine qua non* of the establishment of the rule of law, the promotion of economic and social development, and the protection of democratic rights and entitlements.

Determining Canada's ideal role regarding the hemispheric drug problem is difficult, given that the country is a relative newcomer to the Organization of American States (OAS). Additionally, in terms of social policy Ottawa is in some ways much closer to London or Paris than it is to Mexico City or Quito. Nonetheless, there are key niches for Canadian drug control strategies that correspond to a human security focus in the post 9/11 context. It is suggested here that a Canadian approach to the drug situation in the Americas could be informed by the following four principles: *a multilateral approach*, *strategic investments*, *demand reduction*, and *encouraging an open dialogue*.

### A Multilateral Approach

First, Canada could re-affirm its commitment to addressing the drug problem in the region primarily through multilateral channels. This means ensuring that crime and drug issues continue to receive adequate attention within the Summit of the Americas process. This can also be done by continuing to highlight the productive work being undertaken by the OAS, and in particular its work through the Inter-American Drug Abuse Control Commission (CICAD) of the OAS. Canada was elected Chair of the CICAD Commission at its most recent session, held in Montreal last November. The CICAD Chair affords Canada an excellent opportunity to demonstrate leadership on critical drug issues within the region, and to encourage creative responses to these problems.

One key multilateral tool to address the problem is the Multilateral Evaluation Mechanism (MEM). At the Second Summit of the Americas in 1998, OAS states committed to developing a process to evaluate anti-drug efforts in the hemisphere objectively, encourage collaboration, and highlight best practices. Canada has taken a substantive and visible leadership role in developing the MEM, and should encourage countries to continue to strengthen it, and to use it to target drug control deficiencies in the Americas more effectively.

### Strategic Investments

Second, Canada can encourage the countries of the OAS to focus on the concept of "strategic investments" in the area of public safety. A strategic approach to law enforcement, for example through intelligence-led policing, encourages countries to dedicate scarce resources to the most critical areas of the drug trafficking and organized crime problem. It also encourages countries to get together to target organized crime groups, and then to undertake joint actions to attack these groups. With that in mind, the main theme for the Canadian Chairmanship of CICAD has been identified as *Border Co-operation*, focusing on improving policing and law enforcement, particularly in relation to borders – sharing best practices, setting priorities, and developing strategic approaches.

Integral to a strategic approach to the drug problem is augmenting programme accountability, as well as effectiveness. Canadian officials should encourage their counterparts in their hemisphere, as a critical part of enhancing policing and border control techniques, to ensure respect for human rights and the rule-of-law. One way of increasing the number of overall accountability tools within the OAS would be for Canadian government officials to share their now-extensive experience in programme evaluation and risk management, particularly the expertise in performance measurement tools and accountability frameworks.

### Demand Reduction

Third, while the issue of demand reduction is paid a certain amount of lip service throughout the hemisphere, too often there is little action to follow the rhetoric. Canada, as a leader in addictions research, could work to raise the profile of substance abuse issues and increase demand reduction efforts in the Americas. For example, among the issues identified by CICAD countries through the first round of the MEM, and in the CICAD Expert group on Demand Reduction, are initiatives that require technical and financial assistance such as: estimating the costs of the drug problem; establishing minimum standards of treatment; training in prevention

## Mexico

The Mexican Presidential elections are still three years away, but in early February, there was a public debate about unofficial electoral campaigns that occur before the official campaign period, known as pre-campaigns and legislation to regulate them. On February 10, the Supreme Court ruled to allow federal and state congresses to establish time frames that limit the length of pre-campaigns for elected posts (Notimex, 02/10/04). This ruling plugs some of the holes in the existing electoral laws and comes in the midst of a series of scandals and declarations affecting the 2006 electoral race.

One of the scandals involves Martha Sahagún de Fox, the President's wife and a possible presidential candidate for the ruling *Partido Acción Nacional* (LA Regional Report, 02/10/04). Shortly after becoming the first lady of Mexico, she created a civil society organization called *Vamos Mexico* intended to help marginalized members of the society. Opposition parties have argued that the foundation is a platform for her own political career. In the second week of February, the Permanent Commission of the Congress ordered an exhaustive audit of the Office of the Presidency in order to determine whether or not there has been a diversion of public funds towards *Vamos Mexico*. The audit was approved the day after Sahagún admitted that she has intentions to present her candidature for the 2006 elections (Reforma, 12/02/04). Since that moment, Sahagún has downplayed any such ambitions (El Norte, 17/02/04).

Moreover, the scandal has fueled a debate on pre-campaigns in the Mexican Congress. On February 11, Jesús Martínez, representative of the legislative fraction of *Convergencia* Party (a minority opposition party), presented an initiative to modify articles 82 and 165 of the Constitution to prohibit spouses and immediate family members of elected officials from running for office. This would apply to all levels of government (El Norte, 02/12/04). In addition, Luis Carlos Ugalde, the President of the Advisory Board of the Federal Elections Institute (IFE), the official organ which organizes and monitors the electoral process in Mexico, urged the Congress to set limits on pre-campaign expenditures and timetables. Presently, the IFE has no authoritative power to regulate pre-campaigns (Terra Networks, 02/17/04).

As the Mexican Congress has proved unable to pass substantial and urgent reforms in other areas such as energy and labour, the small steps and discussions around the issue of pre-campaign regulations can be considered progress in the deepening of the State reform and the advance of democracy in Mexico.

and treatment; drug prevention and treatment in prisons, and; alternatives to sentencing for minor offences, such as through drug treatment courts.

### Encouraging an Open Dialogue

Fourth, Canada could work to encourage a frank and comprehensive discussion among the countries of the Americas, particularly in the CICAD Commission, on various critical issues related to drugs. This does not have to be a formal initiative, such as former Foreign Minister Lloyd Axworthy's "Hemispheric Dialogue on Drugs" from the late 1990s – it just has to be an honest and open dialogue on drug issues. For example, the ongoing economic crisis of the coca growers in Bolivia raises a number of questions regarding the efficacy of both alternative development and crop eradication practices, as well as fundamental issues related to land ownership. In addition, Canada's recently announced Drug Strategy, and the proposed cannabis reform legislation (decriminalization of possession), address alternative measures that some countries may find controversial. Canada could continue to raise these and other issues bilaterally and within the OAS, from the position of an "honest broker." ■

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The views expressed in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect those of the Government of Canada.



## Culture and Controversy at the Havana Book Fair

Ana J. Faya

The Havana International Book Fair, started in 1982 with the goal of disseminating literature from around the world to the Cuban population, has established itself as an important event within Cuban culture and society. The thirteenth book fair, which runs the whole month of February and travelled to 33 cities across the island, was attended by more than 250,000 people in Havana alone. Making use of this event to present official political positions, this year's book fair was marked by Cuba's disagreements with the European Union (EU), which was widely covered by the island's official media. In addition, the inclusion of a number of publications not normally permitted on the island, due to the content, or for having been written by Cuban exiles, gave the event an air of tolerance.

The political tone of the fair was defined at the inauguration of the "festival of the book" (as it is called in Cuba), which takes place in the colonial fortress of San Carlos de La Cabaña, in a speech by the president of the Cuban Book Institute (Instituto Cubano del Libro, ICL), Iroel Sánchez. In reference to the diplomatic sanctions imposed on Cuba by the EU last year, Sánchez accused the European Union of "complicity in an attempted cultural embargo" against the island, and of hindering cultural exchanges between Cuba and Europe. The EU representative in Havana immediately refuted these accusations saying that, "on June 5, 2003, the EU (simply) decided to reduce the presence of its member states at cultural events in protest against the imprisonment of 75 political dissidents in March 2003, all of whom remain in prison" (EFE, 07/02/04).

This prompted a written response by the president of the ICL who reiterated his accusations against the EU, and denounced Germany, France, Holland and Spain for trying to sabotage a number of events and exchanges with Cuba. The note referred to French and Dutch organizations that had withdrawn their financial support of US\$150,000 to the VIII Havana Biennial art exhibit, which took place last November.

An antecedent to the declarations by the ICL representative was the decision by Germany (the country to which this year's book fair was dedicated) not to participate officially in this event, following the sanctions imposed on Cuba by the EU. The island's authorities responded by cancelling Cuba's participation at the Frankfurt Book Fair and stepping up its promotion of the Havana event among the German publishing houses, resulting in a large German presence at the inauguration of the thirteenth fair. Cuban publishing houses presented 22 titles by German authors, published specifically for the occasion, notwithstanding the prevailing economic difficulties in Cuba. Also, 37 German out of approximately 60 foreign publishers, participated in this year's event, a presence surpassed only by Mexico and Spain in previous book fairs.

Public declarations by Cuba against the EU did not end with the harsh comments of Sánchez. At the official closing of the book fair, Ricardo Alarcón, President of the National Assembly, emphasized Cuba's success in

responding to efforts by "those that wanted to damage" the fair, and congratulated those German publishing houses present at the event despite the "prohibition" by their government.

Alarcón also highlighted that the Havana book fair is "a space where culture and liberty merge." This declaration, however, is contradicted by the problems experienced by the Cuban Collection, published by Plaza Mayor, a publishing house headed by Patricia Gutiérrez (daughter of Eloy Gutiérrez Menoyo, a former leader of an organization of Cuban exiles, who has been living on the island since last year and has been trying to obtain, so far unsuccessfully, legal status - see FOCAL POINT, 08/03). The presentation of its Cuban Collection, a set of works by Cuban writers, living on the island and abroad, has generated controversy by highlighting the limits to the island's cultural tolerance. Last year, Félix Luis Vera, a Cuban writer living in Mexico, was prevented by the Cuban authorities from attending the cultural event, although his novel *Un ciervo herido (Injured Stag)*, was exhibited at the fair. This year, while his novel *El éxito del tigre (The Tiger's Success)* was featured, Luis Manuel García, a Cuban writer living in Spain, was not allowed to attend the event.

In her remarks at the presentation of the Cuban Collection, Gutiérrez said that García "was not invited to Havana because he worked in *Encuentro*", a journal published in Madrid (founded by Jesús Díaz, the now-deceased Cuban writer who defected to Europe in the early 1990s), which includes works by Cuban intellectuals from inside and outside the island, and that over the course of the last few years has been the political target of Cuban authorities. Patricia protested the Cuban authorities' decision "on behalf of this young author that, precisely in Cuba, won the Casa de las Américas Award with his novel *Habanecer*, and the Critics National Award." She also read a note sent by García explaining his absence from the book fair, and a second note, by Antonio Alvarez Gil, a Cuban author who decided not to attend the fair in protest of the April 2003 arrest of 75 dissidents.

At the same time, this year's Cuban Collection included a rather wide spectrum of books, such as *Mi vida sexual (My Sax Life)*, an

autobiography by the New-York based Cuban saxophone and clarinet player Paquito D'Rivera, books by Pedro Pérez Sarduy, who lives in London, books by Félix Contreras, and last year's Plaza Mayor Award winner, Gregorio Ortega, both of whom live inside the island. However, works by other prominent authors from within the Cuban exile community, such as fiction writers Guillermo Cabrera Infante and Zoe Valdés, who are more critical of the Cuban political experience, have never been included in the fair.

While Cuban cultural officials demonstrate a degree of tolerance by including in the book fair a number of books considered controversial on the island, these remain out of reach for the majority of the Cuban public. As a result, they are read by a very limited number of more fortunate individuals. A key factor restricting distribution of these works is the fact that they are sold in US dollars, and are unaffordable to most Cubans. More often, individuals attending this event obtain national publications sold in Cuban pesos, many of which are launched during this occasion, and others that have been reissued, following their disappearance due to insufficient print runs.

## Cuba

James Cason, chief of the U.S. Interests Section in Havana, issued a statement on February 20, 2004 stating that no U.S. military action is planned against Cuba. The statement was distributed to international journalists in Cuba one week after Cuban President Fidel Castro challenged President George W. Bush to be clear about how Washington plans to realize a transition to democracy on the island. In his statement, Cason said Bush has repeatedly emphasized that Washington seeks a peaceful transition to democracy in Cuba brought about by Cubans. The statement also notes that the US Interests Section had asked Cuba's Ministry of Foreign Affairs to allow Mr. Cason to address the Cuban public through Cuban newspapers and television to let it know that the US had no intention to attack or invade Cuba, and that the Cuban government turned down this request.

For nearly a year, Castro and other Cuban officials have publicly expressed concerns the U.S. military planned to attack their country. Cuba started 2004 with a reinforcement of its military defenses, initiating a year of planned continuous military exercises and training among its military units, and rallying support among the general population through workplaces and neighborhood committees. Cason said the Cuban government is "fabricating the threat of a U.S. military attack to engender fear in the Cuban population, to spend scarce resources to maintain large military, security and intelligence structures and to justify extreme measures in a vain attempt to crush Cuba's nascent independent civil society." To date, there has been no response to Cason's statement by Cuban authorities.

The Thirteenth Havana International Book Fair, shadowed by the controversy with the governments of Europe that began last year and the ongoing censorship prevalent on the island, illustrates that in Cuba apolitical endeavours are not possible. Nor is it possible to make accessible to the Cuban public, avid for reading material, an extensive array of good literature. As the book fair illustrates, cultural development, as well as the work of Cuban writers and artists, remain hostage to official policy. ■

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## Civil Society Mobilizes for the Democratic Stability of the Dominican Republic

Miriam Díaz

After a decade of sustained economic growth and significant democratic advances, the Dominican Republic currently finds itself in a grave economic crisis, accompanied by worrying signs of political regression. In May 2003 the Central Bank made public records detailing a colossal case of fraud committed by the country's leading bank, BANINTER, involving more than \$US 3 billion, equivalent to 70 percent of the national budget.

It was alleged that for more than 14 years BANINTER withdrew personal bank deposits and invested them in dozens of companies owned by the bank's leading shareholders and board members. In addition, bank funds paid for foreign trips and credit card bills for current President Hipólito Mejía, and past President, Leonel Fernández. Both men also used vehicles donated by the bank. The bankrupt BANINTER also financed the electoral campaigns of the principal political parties, and had 70 military generals, police officers, dozens of politicians and hundreds of media correspondents, among others, on its payroll. The ruin of BANINTER caused the subsequent bankruptcy of two other important banks, the directors of which, according to national authorities, were also involved in fraudulent activities.

As a result of these accusations of fraud, 52 civil society organizations led by *Participación Ciudadana* held three massive demonstrations, one in the capital and one each in cities to the North and South of the country. These demonstrations demanded that those accused of fraud be brought to justice (including the dismissal and prosecution of those bureaucrats responsible), and that more information be published on why the supervisory agencies of the government did not detect the irregularities. These 52 organizations also created a *Coalition for Transparency and Institutional Integrity*, which, since July 2003, has demanded more efficient justice, and brought attention to the institutional abuses that have occurred in the country.

### The Election Controversy

In addition to this grave economic situation, civil society organizations are also concerned about possible steps backwards in the democratic process. One of these concerns was that the governing Dominican Revolutionary Party (PRD), was taking advantage of its congressional majority in order to reintroduce the right of presidential re-election into the Constitution. Constitutional reform was pursued by the government despite strong opposition from civil society, which advocated the maintenance of the ban on re-election. The government also designated a Central Electoral Board (*Junta Central Electoral*) to oversee the electoral process, and packed it with a majority of PRD party faithful. But, as in the re-election controversy, civil society also lost the fight for a Central Electoral Board, independent from the political parties.

Another cause for concern is that after nine months of infighting, the PRD remains divided. Candidates who aspired to lead the party in the next elections opposed President Mejía's re-election bid and denounced his anti-democratic manoeuvres and the use of state resources to support his candidature. Despite these divisions, President Mejía was supported by the Central Electoral Board, which issued a decision that effectively made his candidacy official and secured his control over the party.

Recently, civil society expressed its concern also about other aspects of the electoral process, following the December 2003 government proposal of a *Ley de Lemas* (or Cumulative Simultaneous Double Vote Bill). This bill would have allowed each political party to present up to five presidential and vice-presidential candidates on the electoral ballot. The cumulative votes earned by all candidates belonging to one party would be summed and attributed to the highest vote-getter within that party.

This proposal was opposed by all social sectors of the country, except government supporters, primarily because the proposed bill violated the constitutional principle of direct voting. Another important objection to the proposal was that it sought to modify the Electoral Law scarcely three months before the elections. Two of the three major parties, as well as the smaller parties, had already chosen their presidential candidates following the rules of the current legislation. In addition, in January 2004 the Central Electoral Board declared the electoral process underway, and had already moved forward on preparations for the election under the old rules. During the week of February 9 to 13, the National Congress, failed to approve the *Ley de Lemas*, when the opposition denied the government quorum in the Chamber

of Deputies. The President and the Deputies declared that it would no longer be on the government's agenda due to the strong opposition the proposal had generated.

### Civil Society Organizes to Defend Democracy

These threats to the democratic process caused representatives from more than 50 civil society organizations in the Dominican Republic met on Monday February 2 with the objective of discussing an action plan to reinforce and support the work of the *Participación Ciudadana* in observing the presidential elections set to take place in May 2004. *Participación Ciudadana* is a non-partisan civil society movement, created in 1993 as a way of increasing citizen participation in the construction of democracy.

*Participación Ciudadana* observed the 1996 and 2000 presidential elections, as well as the congressional and municipal elections of 1998 and 2002. In addition, it was invited by the principal political parties to observe the party primaries. Overall, the participation of observers has been considered an important factor contributing to clean elections in the Dominican Republic. – above all because *Participación Ciudadana*, in all the cases listed above, has also conducted a “quick count” of the election results. The Central Electoral Board grants permission and facilities to *Participación Ciudadana* as well as to representatives of international organizations.

*Participación Ciudadana*, will undertake an electoral observation role and deploy 6,000 observers to all the polls in the country, and conduct a quick-count of the election results. Electoral observation has been conducted since 1996, due to a long history of fraudulent elections in the Dominican Republic. *Participación Ciudadana* may yet be joined in its observation of the upcoming elections by a number of international organizations, including the Organization of American States, as well as representatives of the United Nations and the European Union. ■

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## Editorial

### Another Human Disaster by International Stalemate

Each day the international community equivocates about sending relief and security forces into Haiti magnifies the human disaster. The skeletal remains of a rag-tag structure of law and of police enforcement are being rapidly demolished by gangs with the equivalent legal and moral authority of Hell's Angels. On an average day most Haitians face a precarious struggle to feed themselves and their families. Journalists in the Northern departments of Haiti report alarming accounts of food shortages and the spectre of starvation. A health pandemic is a real and looming concern.

At a more mundane level, the cost to the international donor community is immeasurably higher when that community waits for the politically convenient moment before rushing in. Rebuilding a devastated infrastructure is always more expensive than patching up a damaged one.

President Aristide has agreed to the terms set out by Canada, the United States, France and the Caribbean Community countries, but these countries remain uncomfortable about committing police and other stabilization forces without agreement from the non-violent Haitian opposition, which insists "no deal until Aristide goes." Discomfort is reinforced by Aristide's record of incompetence, human rights violations, neglect of democratic institutions, plummeting popular support and disintegrating control. Republicans in Washington have made no secret of their longstanding distaste for the Haitian President. However, the temptation to pull what's left of the carpet out from under Aristide is tempered by the knowledge that the non-violent opposition has an ephemeral political base and agrees on almost nothing except the departure of Aristide. At present there is not even agreement among these groups on disassociating themselves from the violent gangs of "freedom fighters." Members of the Organization of American States (OAS) like Canada are also restrained from urging Aristide to go by their commitment to the Inter-American Democratic Charter, which pledges respect for democratically elected leaders. Holes driven through the Charter by decisions on Haiti that ignore the Charter would undermine the defence of democracy elsewhere in the hemisphere.

Unfortunately, there is also division within the international community. With an election coming on the United States is wary of another engagement, which contains the prospect of casualties. The opposition feels, no doubt correctly that time is on its side and their obduracy is now being fed by signals from Foreign Minister Graham, Foreign Minister Villepin of France and Secretary of State Colin Powell that Aristide's departure would not be a bad result – a policy change by Canada that has surprised those looking for swift international action. Some hopes turn on a voluntary resignation by Aristide - turning over power to the Supreme Court and his Prime Minister. Having been ejected once from power, Aristide adamantly refuses. Meanwhile there are more victims, more revenge killings and Haiti dissolves into chaos.

Complexity and division delay choices. However, the case to move at all possible speed into Haiti is clear. NGOs, traditionally wary of foreign intervention, like Human Rights Watch, are urging the international community to take action. This was the case 10 years ago when long procrastination in the face of the brutalizing military government that had overthrown Aristide in 1991 was finally ended three years later by President Clinton's decision to back up a UN resolution with force (Canada sat pusillanimously on the sidelines at the time agreeing only to help with policing once the country had been secured). Those three years in which international assistance organizations were unable or unwilling to work in Haiti caused almost incalculable damage to those institutions engaged in basic community, health and education activities.

Haiti is important to Canadian national and regional interests. As a middle power Canada cannot be all things to all peoples. It must choose where and how to engage based on interests and capabilities. Haiti meets both these tests. Language is a factor and there are over 100,000 Canadians of Haitian descent who follow events with passionate concern.

Foreign Minister Graham has dispatched a reconnaissance team to assess security and the "potential for intervention." One of the many reasons why Haiti is collapsing is the speed with which preceding international interventions have sought an exit strategy – leaving police, judicial training and other institutional reform projects incomplete and soon invisible. The French are apparently talking of a 10-year commitment. Quite apart from the benefits of rebuilding a Franco-American bridge, long-term engagement together with a decision to move is the responsible choice. That decision should be taken now while there is still an elected President who is anxious to legitimize action by the international community. Sadly, the Haitian crisis is showing classic signs of being allowed to descend into a major human disaster by international stalemate.■

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John W. Graham is Chair of the FOCAL Board of Directors.

## FOCAL Abstract

FOCAL Brief, *Cuba 2003*, provides a succinct overview of the major developments that took place in 2003 and highlights key trends to watch for in 2004. Themes covered include the crackdown on the dissident movement in March and April and its impact on the island's international relations, Cuba's economic performance and the Cuba-US relationship. Looking ahead at 2004, the paper highlights the likelihood of worsening relations with the US, as this country gears up for a presidential election, continued strengthening of relations with governments in the Americas on the left of the political spectrum, and increased scarcity and social unrest inside the island.

You may access *Cuba 2003* directly from Cubasource, FOCAL's website on Cuba: <http://www.cubasource.org/html/publications.htm>

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