



## STUDY SESSION ON HUMAN TRAFFICKING\*



"We have a great challenge before us: to bring the problem of human trafficking into the public consciousness." Edda Acuña, senator, 1st Vice-president, COPA

This past July, a study session on the theme "Human Trafficking: A Threat to Children and Teens" was held in the Senate Chamber of the province of Buenos Aires, Argentina. It was organized by senator Edda Acuña, chair of the Committee on Childhood, Adolescence and Families.

One of the participants, Buenos Aires Minister of Social Development Daniel Arroyo, underlined the importance of creating opportunities for dialogue in dealing with problems, such as human trafficking, affecting children and adolescents. In addition, noted Mr. Arroyo, policies aimed at these groups must not only address the situation of persons whose rights are being trampled, but also focus on prevention and intervention.

Ms. Acuña noted that the purpose of the study session was to make society more aware of the problem of human trafficking. She added that such an occasion provided an ideal opportunity to bring all those involved to join this important struggle against a phenomenon whose scope has not yet been sufficiently grasped. According to the senator, a very well organized trade is at the root of the problem, which means that it is essential to go after the large-scale networks of corruption that encourage the perpetration of such crimes.

Ms. Acuña mentioned that a copy of the bill on human trafficking introduced jointly by herself and Senator Adela Segarra had been sent to the Minister of Social Development so that it could be supported by provincial programs to help victims recover their rights and reintegrate society.

Also in attendance was Mother Martha Pelloni, whose human rights work has earned her an international reputation. In the early 1990s, Mother Pelloni organized the "marches of silence" in the province of Catamarca, which would eventually help shed light on the murder of a young woman named María Soledad Morales. During the study session, Mother Pelloni denounced the fact that a good number of Argentina's powerful political and economic leaders had no interest in combating the traffic in women, children and adolescents. She also drew attention to the link between the availability of sexual services and the exceptionally large influx of tourists to the country.

The legal aspects of the problem of human trafficking and how such crimes are treated by the court system were discussed by lawyer Viviana Camino, juvenile court judge Horacio Barberis, and Ricardo Saénz, General Prosecutor before the Buenos Aires penal and correctional court.

Forencia Cremona, professor of social communications with the Faculty of Journalism and Social Communications at La Plata University, and Griselda Branda, president of the College of Psychology at that institution, presented their views on aspects of sexual inequality and social stereotypes associated with human trafficking, sexual exploitation and violence against women.

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### CONTENTS

Edda Acuña – Senator	1
Obama President	2
18th Ibero-American Summit	3
Haití	4
ECLAC	4
México – Cuba Agreement	4
Contact Information	4



Barack Obama wrote a new page in the history of the United States by becoming the first African-American to be elected President. "It's been a long time coming, but tonight, because of what we did on this date in this election at this defining moment, change has come to America," said the President elect to the jubilant crowd gathered in Chicago to celebrate his victory. Obama won 29 of the 50 states, including states such as Indiana, Florida and Ohio that were classified as "undecided" in the surveys leading up to the election but in the end swung in favour of Obama.

As soon as the ballot counts started, exit polls placed the Democratic Party candidate ahead of his Republican rival, John McCain. Shortly after, the major media, including the BBC, predicted that Obama would secure enough electoral college votes to become the 44th President of the United States.

Once his victory was confirmed, amid much rejoicing, Barack Obama spoke to the tens of thousands of supporters waiting for him in Chicago's Grant Park, on the shores of Lake Michigan. "I will never forget who this victory truly belongs to. It belongs to you. It belongs to you," Obama told his supporters. "If there is anyone out there who still doubts that America is a place where all things are possible, who still wonders if the dream of our founders is alive in our time, who still questions the power of our democracy, tonight is your answer."

When it became obvious he would not be able to overtake Obama, McCain conceded the presidency and called his rival to congratulate him. "The American people have spoken, and they have spoken clearly," McCain told his supporters. "This is an historic election, and I recognize the special significance it has for African-Americans." McCain urged all Americans to come together and pledged to do all in his power to help Obama, despite their differences.

## CONGRESS

The Democrats seem set to take seven Senate seats from the Republicans—North Carolina, New Mexico, Virginia, New Hampshire, Colorado, Oregon and Alaska—thus improving the slim edge they had going into the election. The Democrats currently have a 51-49 majority in the upper house thanks to **two independents who voted with them**.



The Democrats will now hold 58 Senate seats and the Republicans, 40. Two seats went to independents who vote with the Democrats. The remaining two seats still hang in the balance in Minnesota where official ballot counts are still underway.

## A Third of the Senate and All of the House

Only 35 of the 100 Senate seats were up for grabs in this election, compared with all 435 of the seats in the House of Representatives. Before election day, the Democrats controlled the House with a 235-199 margin. According to the latest official figures, Obama's party now dominates the House with 256 seats against 175.

It appears the Democratic Party will not, however, garner the 60 seats it needs in the Senate for a filibuster-proof majority, a majority not seen in the Senate in 30 years.

## Governors

The Americans also elected 11 governors. The closest contests were in Washington, North Carolina and Indiana. Democrats kept or recaptured seven gubernatorial seats.



North Carolina elected its first female governor, Beverly Perdue. She is taking over from Democrat Mike Easley, who is stepping down because of term limits. The Democrats picked up gubernatorial seats previously held by the Republicans in Montana, West Virginia and New Hampshire. In Delaware, Jack Markell, also a Democrat, easily won the vacant seat.

The Republicans held on to the gubernatorial seats in North Dakota, Vermont and Utah.

These results translate into a 29-21 majority for the Democrats and a shortfall the Republicans can try to make up only in 2010, when 36 states will elect governors.

It appears that some 130 million Americans showed up at the polls, the highest voter turnout since 1960.

Source: BBC in Spanish.

Update: 11/27/2008



## 18th IBERO-AMERICAN SUMMIT

The 18th Ibero-American Summit was held from October 29 to 31, 2008, in San Salvador, El Salvador. The heads of state and government of the region's 22 countries attended the summit and discussed issues such as youth, development and the international financial crisis. The Summit concluded its proceedings with the Declaration of San Salvador, the main points of which are as follows:



### DECLARATION OF SAN SALVADOR

We, the Heads of State and Government of the 22 member countries of the Ibero-American Community meeting in the city of San Salvador, Republic of El Salvador, on the occasion of the 18th Ibero-American Summit on the theme of "Youth and Development", aware of the importance that meeting the needs of young people has for the present and the future as they are the stakeholders in and beneficiaries of development and public policies aimed at guaranteeing the highest levels of equity, social justice, solidarity, participation and inclusion for our peoples;

Recognizing the central role of the family as an agent of socialization, a source of nurturing and a teacher of values in the overall development of young people, as well as its role in helping them grow up to be responsible adults and in fostering greater inclusiveness and social cohesion;

Considering the valuable contributions to the theme of "Youth and Development" that emerged from the various sectoral ministerial meetings, the seminars held in San Salvador, Buenos Aires, Sevilla and Mexico City and the proposals formulated at civil society and industry meetings and parliamentary forums and by local governments; and

Reaffirming our commitment to the values, principles and agreements that make up the Ibero-American heritage,

### UNDERTAKE

- to recognize the central role of the State in setting public policies aimed at improving young people's quality of life and building a more inclusive, just and secure society that ensures the protection and promotion of their rights, the application of the principle of gender equality, respect for diversity and the consideration of intergenerational realities;
- to frame and fashion an overall development strategy conducive not only to the development of young people through programs and activities geared to eradicating poverty and guaranteeing access to medical services and quality education, decent work, and food and nutrition security, but also to the actualization of their full potential in a setting that offers equal opportunities, and thus to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals;
- to recognize the right of young people with a disability to develop in the best conditions and circumstances that may be offered by an inclusive society determined to ensure they can live in dignity, achieve their overall development, integrate the labour market and reach their full potential;
- to promote young people's broader participation in political and democratic life by supporting youth-oriented organizations, associations and networks in Ibero-American countries and in the recently created Ibero-American Youth Space, while taking into account their full autonomy;
- to intensify efforts to prevent and combat migrant smuggling and human trafficking, with greater attention paid to the victims of these scourges;
- to acknowledge the coming into force of the Ibero-American Convention on the Rights of Youth; and
- to encourage the ministries and bodies concerned within our respective countries to move ahead with implementing the San Salvador Commitment for Youth and Development, in close collaboration with the Ibero-American General Secretariat (Secretaría General Iberoamericana (SEGIB)) and the Ibero-American Youth Organization (Organización Iberoamericana de Juventud (OIJ)), and to ask them to submit a progress report at the 19th Ibero-American Summit to be held in Portugal in 2009.

We, the Heads of State and Government of the member States of the Ibero-American Conference, endorse this Declaration, which was co-drafted in Spanish and Portuguese, both versions being original texts and having the same legal authority, in the city of San Salvador, El Salvador, on October 31, 2008. Source: <http://www.iberoelsalvador.org.sv/index.html>

## UN PRESSES DONOR COUNTRIES FOR \$60 MILLION IN HUMANITARIAN AID FOR HAITI



John Holmes of the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs called on donor countries to urgently raise \$60 million to help Haiti recover from the storms and hurricanes that have devastated the country in recent months.

At a press conference, Holmes noted that only 40 percent of the \$107 million requested by the UN for humanitarian efforts and reconstruction over the next six months has been pledged and stressed that 40 percent is not enough to face the disaster that has so cruelly affected the country.

In under four weeks in August and September, Haiti was hammered by four successive storms and hurricanes that left 800 dead and caused agricultural losses and material damage estimated at \$1 billion by the World Bank. Holmes, who travelled to Haiti last week, explained that the goal of his visit was to appeal to the international community for accelerated resource mobilization. He added that there is already a resource gap and it will only get worse if donor countries fail to respond more generously to the UN's appeal for funds and to mobilize to address the situation. Holmes pressed donors for quick action to meet the dire need for assistance in the wake of the disaster.

Source: UN News Service.

## IN LATIN AMERICA, 25% OF TEENAGE GIRLS BECOME MOMS BEFORE AGE 20, ACCORDING TO ECLAC

A study published by the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) reports that 25% of Latin American girls become mothers before age 20. According to the study, the percentage of adolescent mothers is linked to the fact that school-based sexual education programs are non-existent or inadequate and that young people do not have ready access to birth control. The fertility rate among Latin American girls in the 15–19 age group is 75%, compared with 53% in the rest of the world.



The study points out that teenage girls in industrialized countries generally use birth control as soon as they become sexually active while their peers in Latin America are offered contraceptives only once they have had a child.

These findings are based on research conducted in eight countries within the region—four South American countries, three Central American countries and the Dominican Republic. Colombia and Brazil are the only Latin American countries where most teenage girls use birth control before they have children. The study recommends that specialized health centres be set up to meet the needs of adolescent girls. Source: UN News Service.

## MEXICO-CUBA AGREEMENT



The Mexican and Cuban governments have put the finishing touches on preparations for the coming into force of the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) on Migration and Consular Affairs they signed on October 20, 2008. Under the MOU, the Mexican government is to grant 3,000 visas per month to Cubans. Mexico currently grants between 500 and 2,000 visas to Cuban citizens wishing to enter the country as tourists, for business or to study.

It is hoped Mexico will streamline its visa application process and requirements for Cubans. The MOU provides that Mexico will accept any Mexican citizen deported from Cuba and that Cuba will accept only those of its deported citizens who were imprisoned in Mexico for illegal entry by land or sea. Both parties, however, have reserved the right to not grant entry to dangerous offenders.

Source: Reforma de México daily newspaper.

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