

# Forging A New Ties

FRESH

APPROACH

TO U.S. POLICY

IN

LATIN AMERICA



WASHINGTON OFFICE  
ON LATIN AMERICA

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# Forging New Ties

## A Fresh Approach to U.S. Policy in Latin America

**F**or nearly twenty years, the United States has preached the same simple message to the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean: governments in the region should pursue free trade, expand free markets, and hold regular elections. For many in the region, the tone rankles, reminding them of the paternalism that once marked U.S. policy. Moreover, the message has proven inadequate. U.S. economic prescriptions, where they have been applied, have done little to improve the lives of ordinary Latin Americans. Yet the United States has continued to insist that free trade agreements and unregulated markets, if given time, will generate the growth needed to lift up the poor and ease chronic poverty and inequality. When faced with political upheaval, the United States has focused narrowly on electoral processes, paying insufficient attention to the need for equality and justice that, together with elections, give democracies their depth and vitality. In short, to hundreds of millions of Latin Americans, the United States looks at best indifferent to their societies' most pressing problems, if not partly responsible for them.

The Bush Administration has begun to recognize that it must approach the region on a new footing. The president went on a five-nation tour of Latin America in 2007, where he spoke about working with partners to advance the cause of social justice in the hemisphere. Beyond the rhetorical shift, however, little has changed in U.S. policy. The United States has continued to invoke the same set of policy recommendations, even as Latin America's political dynamics have undergone a drastic change.

With half the region's population still living in poverty, Latin American governments find themselves under increasing pressure to remedy the economic injustice affecting millions of their people. Populist and social democratic movements of all stripes have emerged to grapple with the problem of poverty, some more effectively and democratically than others. Respect for individual human rights has improved in Latin America, and governments now are chosen through formal electoral processes almost everywhere in the hemisphere. In many countries, a vibrant civil society has emerged. But in no other part of the world is there such a huge gap between the rich and the poor—in income, health, and opportunity, in quality of life on every level. There are growing and insistent demands to begin resolving this fundamental inequity.

U.S. policy makers have yet to grasp the magnitude of the new dynamics in the region and the implications for our own country. For the United States, these developments bring both challenges and opportunities. Our media and politicians need to think about Latin America

in terms that go beyond the current debates over immigration issues or the drug trade. Old approaches need to be discarded and new relationships forged.

## I. Why Change Course Now?

### *Challenges Facing Latin America*

Latin America as a whole has not yet found a development strategy that succeeds in raising standards of living, developing a large and viable middle class, and reducing inequality. Beginning in the early 1980s, the United States and its allies in the international financial institutions urged Latin American governments to adopt a package of economic policies often referred to as the Washington Consensus. Most regional governments did so, to varying degrees. The package included reduced regulation and government control and greater reliance on market forces and the free flow of capital. Today, throughout the region, there is growing disillusionment with these economic policies. An estimated 290 million people in Latin America—more than half the population—live in poverty, 81 million of them in extreme poverty. Income and wealth inequalities have increased since 1990 in most countries of the region.

Poverty and inequality are particularly acute in rural areas, which suffer from lack of investment, below-poverty wages, and minimal protections for rural workers. Central

**A new policy should be based on a sense of hemispheric community that goes beyond shared markets. All of us in the Americas benefit from reducing poverty, inequality and social exclusion.**

America and the Caribbean are highly vulnerable to natural disasters, which hit the poor hardest. In several countries, the cultivation of illicit drug crops remains an important means of survival for farmers as the rest of the rural economy withers. This chronic lack of economic opportunity and people's inability to escape poverty no matter how hard they work creates enormous pressures for migration, especially in Mexico and Central America.

Many of the development strategies that governments are currently pursuing not only fail to lift people out of poverty; they also have significant environmental costs. Deforestation is a major problem in Central America, the Amazon River basin, and elsewhere. Failure to enforce environmental safeguards in mining, logging, and industry has contributed to air and water pollution throughout the hemisphere.

Latin America's age-old scourge of military dictatorship has all but ended; in most of the region, people have been living under elected governments for a generation or more. Members of previously excluded social groups have been elected to public office. Yet democratic institutions and traditions are young and remain weak. In some countries, civilian leaders have even called for the military to take over some policing functions.

While the number of serious human rights violations has dropped dramatically over the last decade, there are continuing human rights problems throughout the hemisphere, especially in relation to indigenous peoples, children, and Afro-descendants. Respect for human rights has not been institutionalized, and there is little support for the rule of law. As a result,

impunity too often remains the norm, and most Latin Americans have little confidence in the fairness or effectiveness of their judicial systems.

Political conflict is intensifying in some countries and insecurity is a growing public problem in many. In Colombia, there is no end in sight to a long-running internal armed conflict, despite high levels of U.S. military and economic aid. In many countries, soaring levels of common and organized crime undermine confidence in the democratic system. The inability of elected governments to control crime effectively could have serious consequences for the future of democracy in the region.

## *Latin American Responses*

For many years, civil society, churches, community groups, and governments throughout Latin America have worked hard to reduce poverty, generate economic development, and strengthen democracy and citizen security. In recent years a wide range of social and political movements have emerged in the region in response to continuing poverty and inequality, most of them voicing disillusionment with the Washington Consensus policies that have lionized the market and sidelined the state. Leaders as varied as Néstor Kirchner, Hugo Chávez, Evo Morales, and Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva have achieved power through elections by promising to pursue alternatives to the economic prescriptions and trade arrangements promoted by the United States.

The movements with which these politicians are associated vary widely in terms of both their economic prescriptions and their political attitudes. Some are populist, some more explicitly social democratic; some are committed to models of liberal democracy and some are not. Certain political tendencies rely on anti-American feeling as a rallying point. Despite many differences, what these movements have in common is that they criticize the economic and trade policies that the United States has advocated for the region.

## *A Strained Relationship*

The U.S. government's credibility and prestige in Latin America have plummeted. Strong and deep ties continue between many communities, churches, and civil society groups in the United States and their colleagues and partners in Latin America. But official U.S. economic prescriptions are under attack, and the United States government is widely perceived as heavy-handed in its approach to Latin America and indifferent to Latin Americans and their concerns. The U.S. commitment to democracy and respect for human rights in Latin America (and in the rest of the world) is seen as limited and insincere.

The long history of U.S. involvement in Latin America reinforces a view from the region that the United States is a unilateral actor without great regard for the impact of its actions on other countries. This view is reinforced by the U.S. war in Iraq and further strengthened by the indefinite incarceration of detainees at Guantánamo Bay, Cuba. Overall, U.S. credibility is low, and anti-Americanism is running high. A recent Pew Global Attitudes survey found that the image of the United States has eroded since 2002 in every one of the Latin American countries surveyed.

## *Time for a New Approach*

A new approach to the challenges facing Latin America today should start with a few basic realizations.

We must recognize first that Latin America matters to the United States. The countries of the Americas are bound together, and the United States will inevitably interact with, influence, and be influenced by our closest neighbors. As travel, technology, migration, business, and cultural contact reduce the distance between the United States (and Canada) and Latin America, our problems, opportunities, and futures are ever more tightly interwoven. Thus the

**The U.S. government, and especially the next administration, should build bridges to Latin America's democratically elected governments and work more closely with them than in the past on common problems.**

United States will benefit from widespread economic growth in Latin America and from the development of a stable, viable middle class in the region. Growth with equity in Latin America will reduce the incentives for illegal migration. Commercial relations will grow, and our economy will grow with them. The United States will become more secure as strong, effective national governments in the region extend the rule of law and strengthen citizen security.

Second, we must understand that the populist currents that have emerged in Latin America in recent years—and that in many countries have won free and fair elections and now wield political power—are a response to real problems that confront the region. The United States should respond positively to the impulse behind these movements.

Fearmongers sometimes portray populist movements and governments in the region as potential threats to the United States and its security. This is a mistake. Latin American armed forces do not pose military threats to us. Whatever their views of the United States, these governments are unlikely to offer havens to terrorists. And though they may wish to renegotiate the terms of trade with the United States, they are unlikely to cut off vital trade resources. Even Venezuela, on whose oil supply the United States relies, and which has needled Washington with its strident anti-American rhetoric and relations with Iran, poses challenges better handled through diplomacy and dialogue than through confrontation. In fact, U.S. national security interests in Latin America depend in the long term not on thwarting those who disagree with us but on helping the region deal with the poverty and inequality that are the catalysts of these movements.

The U.S. government, and especially the next administration, should build bridges to Latin America's democratically elected governments and work more closely with them than in the past on common problems. From dealing with gang violence to improving public education to reducing air and water pollution, U.S. communities face many of the same problems that Latin American governments face. We in the United States have experience and technical assistance to share, and our neighbors in Latin America have experience and expertise to share with us. This could be the foundation on which the United States rebuilds the confidence and trust of ordinary Latin American citizens.

In the realm of economic policy, it is time to move beyond the debates over economic orthodoxies and look for new approaches that recognize the depth of poverty and exclusion



in Latin America. New economic policies must take a more proactive approach to solving these problems and should be flexible enough to allow communities and nations to pursue innovative development strategies. To be successful, policies must yield real improvements in living standards for all sectors, not just stimulate economic growth that can mask a widening income gap.

Now is the moment to inaugurate such an approach. Over the last few years, a wave of elections in Latin America has brought forward a new set of leaders with mandates for change. The United States should see these leaders and the challenges facing them not as threats but as opportunities to construct a more fruitful relationship with the region, one that strengthens our historic ties and benefits the people of Latin America and the United States alike.

## II. Three Key Principles

U.S. relations with Latin America should be built on a new foundation of respect. We have much to offer our neighbors in the hemisphere, and also much to learn from them. We should forge stronger ties with individual governments and civil societies, but we should also place greater emphasis on working multilaterally—with the Organization of American States, the United Nations system, and regional bodies such as the Central American Integration System (SICA) and the Southern Common Market (Mercosur).

Three key principles should underlie this new approach:

- 1 The United States should support economic development strategies oriented to both growth and equity in Latin America. This means supporting development strategies that target poverty and the gulf between rich and poor, benefiting the people of the region and reducing political polarization.
- 2 The United States should help strengthen the civilian institutions that provide citizen security in Latin America. We can bolster cooperation that supports effective civilian policing, strengthens justice systems, and works with Latin American governments and civil society groups to combat drug trafficking, organized crime, and other threats to security in both Latin America and the United States.
- 3 The United States should support the development and consolidation of democratic institutions and respect for human rights in Latin America. This must include providing more effective assistance and support to governments seeking to strengthen and deepen democracy, good governance, and the rule of law.

## III. Implementing Our Principles

A new U.S. policy toward Latin America should be consistent with domestic policies that promote democracy and justice at home. It should be founded on core American values of democracy, equal opportunity, and respect for the rights of all people to determine their own future. A key test for our Latin America policy, just as for our domestic policy, should be whether it improves the lives of ordinary citizens.

A new policy can and should be based on a sense of hemispheric community that goes beyond shared markets. Over the last decade, the economies of the Americas, north and south, have become increasingly integrated. That economic integration means that we have common interests as a community of nations.

All of us in the Americas stand to benefit from reducing poverty, inequality, and social exclusion, and from regulating the migration flows that have emerged as people flee these oppressive conditions. All of us have an interest in strengthening our imperfect democracies and in building the capacity of governments to address the region's problems. All of us can profit from working together to address the regionwide problems of environmental degradation, crime, corruption, and drug trafficking.

**All the elements of a new policy should work together. U.S. support for growth with equity, for strengthened citizen security, and for democratic governance should be coordinated so that the various strategies support rather than undercut each other.**

The United States must take these issues as priorities in our relations with our neighbors in the Americas and work as partners with them to find solutions. We need to overcome the perception,

widespread in Latin America, that the United States does not respect the sovereignty of Latin American nations, is deaf to Latin American priorities, and takes for granted Latin American support for U.S. initiatives. A new policy must treat Latin Americans as equals and as partners.

The Latino community in the United States has a special interest in the well-being of their families and communities of origin in Latin America. They are already developing partnerships of their own between the United States and the region through the remittances they send to family members, the civic projects they support in their hometowns, their business investments in the region, and their continuing political and social participation in their countries of origin. They can be key actors in developing new U.S. policy approaches.

All the elements of a new policy should work together. U.S. support for growth with equity, for strengthened citizen security, and for democratic governance should be coordinated so that the various strategies support rather than undercut each other.

For the sake of credibility, we must first look inward. The United States must reject without ambiguity the use of torture and end the indefinite detention without trial of alleged terrorists before we can once again speak with credibility about human rights abroad.

For each of the three basic principles outlined above, the following sections enumerate key policy measures that the next U.S. administration should take to forge new ties with Latin America.

***Principle 1. The United States should support economic development strategies oriented to both growth and equity in Latin America.***

Policies in support of this principle fall into two basic categories: proactive measures that target poverty and inequality, and trade policies that encourage equitable development.

**TARGET POVERTY AND INEQUALITY**

U.S. policy toward Latin America should reflect a serious long-term commitment to reducing poverty and inequality by giving priority to the U.N. Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). These goals call for ending extreme poverty and hunger, achieving universal primary education, promoting gender equity and empowering women, reducing child mortality and improving maternal health, combating HIV and other diseases, and ensuring environmental sustainability. Toward this end, the United States should:

- ▶ Evaluate its assistance programs (through the U.S. Agency for International Development and the Millennium Challenge Corporation) and its diplomacy by asking whether they are advancing the MDGs in real and measurable ways. Development strategies we have long advocated, such as the privatization of public services, should be reviewed and reconsidered based on whether they have effectively reduced poverty and inequity.
- ▶ Press others to work toward achieving the MDGs as well. We should use our influence within the World Bank and the Inter-American Development Bank to encourage those institutions to invest more resources in meeting the MDGs, devise growth strategies that bring measurable improvement in equity, and rethink failed approaches to development. We should urge Latin American governments to commit their own budget resources to meeting the MDGs by increasing effective tax collection rates and by enacting more progressive taxation. And we should also seek to mobilize private resources—from corporations, foundations, and nongovernmental organizations—to meet the MDGs.
- ▶ Encourage experimentation in Latin America, recognizing that there is no single formula for poverty reduction and development. National governments need to commit substantial resources to reducing poverty and achieving growth with equity; they ought to have flexibility in how they develop and implement such programs. And national governments should offer similar flexibility to local communities.
- ▶ Make a specific and ambitious commitment to rural development and the alleviation of rural poverty in Latin America. This requires an integrated approach that goes beyond funding isolated projects. The United States should revise its own domestic agricultural subsidy programs, which often harm small and medium producers in Latin America and disproportionately benefit the largest producers in the United States. U.S. assistance programs in the region should focus on these small and medium producers, who are key to the rural economy, and steps should be taken to strengthen and expand successful U.S. initiatives in microcredit, agricultural credit, marketing, and technical assistance. Programs that increase access to land and other productive resources for the rural poor, bringing them into the formal economy, should be developed.
- ▶ Recognize that poverty is often sectoral in character, and that programs to reduce poverty and increase equity often must target specific communities. Programs with

these goals have to address the social exclusion of indigenous people, Afro-descendants, and women, and should build on the organizing and advocacy that these communities are already doing on their own behalf.

### **PROMOTE TRADE FOR GROWTH AND EQUITY**

For too long, the United States has seen trade promotion (and the market liberalization that has accompanied it) as the major vehicle for development in Latin America. Trade is and should remain an important part of our relationship with countries of the region. However, because trade will not by itself bring equitable development, trade policies need to be engineered in the context of other strategies that target poverty and encourage growth with equity. Trade agreements should be structured not to maximize short-term advantages for U.S. investors and exporters but to encourage long-term growth, development, and poverty reduction in both Latin America and the United States. Trade should help build economically and politically stable partners in Latin America, including a growing middle class in the region.

The United States should start by assessing the impact of trade agreements to date, looking not only at economic flows but also at the impact on communities. This review should consider the impact of trade on migration as well as on economic and social indicators.

Future trade discussions should be framed as part of a new hemispheric partnership in which governments and the private sector seek to ensure that the benefits of trade, foreign investment, and integration are broadly shared, both in the United States and in Latin America. The negative impact of integration on citizens, workers, and communities in both regions must be addressed. Toward this end, we should develop procedures for trade negotiations that are transparent and that include meaningful mechanisms for civil society to take part in the negotiations process.

In developing new trade agreements, the United States should:

- ▶ Ensure that workers' rights, as prescribed by the International Labour Organization, are officially recognized, and that trade agreements include meaningful provisions for monitoring and enforcement of those rights.
- ▶ Ensure that trade agreements recognize the state's role in regulating markets to ensure more balanced growth and trade. Investors' desire to conduct business without restrictions should not be privileged over governments' responsibility to set reasonable trade and investment regulations that protect sensitive products or advance social and environmental goals.
- ▶ Consider independent, explicit, and publicly available assessments of the likely impact of particular trade proposals on social and economic sectors in both the United States and the region. This should include the impact on organized labor and on small producers, and the potential for particular trade arrangements to benefit the poorest sectors—especially rural sectors—in Latin America.
- ▶ Ensure that trade agreements include provisions for regular evaluation and review, and for renegotiation if the economic and social impacts of the agreements are found to be harmful.

**We should develop procedures for trade negotiations that are transparent and that include meaningful mechanisms for civil society to take part in the negotiations process.**

***Principle 2. The United States should help strengthen the civilian institutions that provide citizen security in Latin America.***

Throughout Latin America, ordinary people live in fear of common crime to a degree not seen in the past. The region's homicide rates are now among the highest in the world. Violence in the street and family violence in the home are of deep concern to citizens. Drug trafficking and other forms of organized crime not only take lives but also corrupt political systems. Pervasive insecurity threatens political stability and support for democracy and civilian rule.

The United States can play an important role in curbing this problem by providing support for violence prevention programs, for police professionalization, and for effective strategies to reduce the demand for illicit drugs and combat the drug trade.

We know that a focus on strengthening primary education, and on keeping young people in school, has a major long-term impact on crime and violence. We know as well that there are effective community-based violence prevention programs that have reduced youth violence in the United States and in Latin America. We should encourage and support the extension of these programs in the region.

**STRENGTHEN CIVILIAN-BASED POLICING**

The United States should assist Latin American countries in training police and other law enforcement and criminal justice officials to respect human rights and due process as they establish order. U.S. diplomacy and U.S. assistance should emphasize more professional police, more effective prosecutorial and judicial institutions, and support for the rule of law. The emphasis in U.S. funding should shift from military assistance to measures that enhance public and citizen security, and assistance should be linked to respect for democratic institutions and respect for human rights. In response to concerns rooted in the history of U.S. training of foreign police, U.S. assistance programs should be transparent and open to civilian oversight. Many communities in the United States have experience with innovative, citizen-based policing techniques; we should share this experience with our Latin American neighbors, where applicable, as they grapple with their own crime problem. Toward this end, the United States should:

- ▶ Encourage and provide assistance for programs to strengthen primary education in Latin America and to increase school participation rates. We should support community-based violence prevention programs, offer technical assistance to communities and local and national governments that seek to develop such programs, and encourage governments to commit their own budget resources to these programs.
- ▶ Use diplomacy to encourage and support Latin American political leaders who exercise the consistent political leadership that is needed to overcome bureaucratic inertia and political resistance in advancing police and criminal justice reform. Support for comprehensive reform efforts should receive priority.
- ▶ Support coordinated efforts to modernize and professionalize both police and prosecutorial systems.

- ▶ Offer technical assistance and training for police professionalization, in coordination with other interested donors. This process should emphasize police academy training and doctrine, human rights and due process, leadership development, patrol structures, criminal investigation, internal and external controls, and community-oriented policing. Training and technical assistance should aim to advance institutional reform processes rather than focusing narrowly on specialized police units or specific policing techniques.

## **INSTITUTE MORE EFFECTIVE DRUG CONTROL STRATEGIES**

The most important thing the United States can do to enhance public security in Latin America is to reduce the consumption of drugs in the United States and help Latin American countries curb the illicit drug trade and the organized crime and corruption the trade fosters. After many years of trying to fight the drug trade at the source, with eradication programs in the Andes, we should acknowledge that forced drug crop eradication has failed. We should shift toward a more realistic focus on harm reduction, working to ameliorate the worst aspects of a perennial problem rather than continuing to indulge in the illusion that a decisive supply-side solution to drug abuse will materialize.

The United States should:

- ▶ Designate drug abuse as a public health crisis and invest seriously in U.S. domestic drug treatment programs. Treating addiction will benefit our own society and reduce the demand that drives international production and trafficking.
- ▶ Crack down on the illegal shipment of weapons from the United States to Latin America. The United States is a major source of weapons that end up in the hands of drug trafficking organizations and other criminals.
- ▶ Dedicate greater resources to investigate and prosecute the criminal networks that manage and profit from the drug trade. This would include prosecution of major drug traffickers, control of precursor chemicals, and enforcement of laws against money laundering. The focus should be on targeting those who actually direct trafficking operations and related criminal enterprises, rather than poor peasants.
- ▶ Provide a strong new focus on rural development and alternative livelihoods for farmers, in conjunction with cooperative manual crop eradication. Our long-standing emphasis on forced eradication of illicit crops, including aerial herbicide spraying in Colombia, has failed to stem drug production or reduce availability in the United States, and it has contributed to human rights violations and environmental concerns. Cooperative eradication accompanied by rural development has proven in some cases to be a more effective strategy for reducing production.
- ▶ Work with Latin American partners to strengthen police and judiciaries so they can effectively investigate organized crime and corruption of public institutions. This includes investigation of corruption in political structures and the criminal justice system, as well as the development of effective regulatory regimes to combat money laundering. Organized crime and its penetration of the state undermine democracy and must be combated. We should work with governments to build political support for this kind of investigation and prosecution.

### ***Principle 3: The United States should support the development and consolidation of democratic institutions and respect for human rights in Latin America.***

The United States' history with respect to the promotion of democracy and human rights in Latin America is a checkered one at best. Many Latin Americans view U.S. support for democracy and human rights with skepticism, as pressure appears to be applied more often to governments that Washington dislikes. A new policy should recognize that there are grounds for this skepticism, that we have not always lived up to our principles in Latin America, and that the United States faces challenges of its own in strengthening democratic institutions at home.

While there is no single model for successful democratic governance, both at home and abroad the United States should strongly encourage basic respect for human rights and basic principles of democratic institutions. These include free and fair elections, regularly held; separation of powers, with checks and balances on government authority; majority rule with protection of minority rights; freedom of expression and tolerance for diverse views; and equal justice under the law, including for officials and traditional elites.

In order to credibly promote the consolidation of democracy and respect for human rights in Latin America, the United States should:

- ▶ Put its own house in order by closing the Guantánamo Bay detention facility. We should initiate legal proceedings against those held there, or release them.
- ▶ Make clear that our commitment to human rights and democracy will not be manipulated for political reasons, applied selectively, or used as an excuse to harass governments with which we disagree on other issues.
- ▶ Help the region's governments address the challenges of economic growth with equity and public security. Democratic governments need to deliver on these issues in order to retain popular support, and the United States can and should help them do so.
- ▶ Express concern when it sees governments in the region falling short of, or turning away from, democratic principles. This is true whether we are talking about Colombia or Mexico, Cuba or Venezuela. That said, the United States should recognize that multilateral approaches can be far more effective than unilateral U.S. criticisms and that dialogue, diplomatic criticism, and carefully crafted political pressure are often more effective than rhetorical blasts.
- ▶ Increase financial and technical assistance for effective governance at both the local and national levels in Latin America. Assistance should be available to governments that seek to strengthen a range of democratic institutions—parliaments, government ministries, local councils and municipal governments, town meetings, and community consultation mechanisms.
- ▶ Increase assistance for programs and institutions that strengthen the rule of law. In particular, programs that enhance coordination between police (especially detective units) and prosecutors, that increase police ability to gather evidence, and that help prosecutors manage their caseloads have been shown to be effective in increasing conviction rates and strengthening citizen belief in the rule of law. They should be expanded, where governments want them.

## IV. Key Country Challenges

### *Mexico*

Our closest Latin American neighbor, Mexico will always be a major actor in U.S.–Latin America relations. Public security and civilian policing are key long-term issues for Mexico, in the view of the United States and of Mexico itself. Economic development and growth with equity in Mexico are also major U.S. interests, as they can reduce the poverty and inequality that drive many Mexicans to emigrate to the United States.

We need to recognize that, in an era of globalization in which financial and commodity markets are becoming integrated, labor markets can and should be integrated as well. There is a special need for cooperation between the United States and Mexico to devise immigration policies that recognize the contribution immigrants make to both the United States and Mexican economies. These policies must protect civil and human rights, facilitate family linkages across borders, and regularize the immigrants' status in the United States.

U.S. policy toward Mexico should support Mexican efforts to strengthen civilian policing, implement needed reforms to the criminal justice system, and fight organized crime and drug traffickers. We should support greater collaboration between Mexico and the United States to address the problems of poverty, inequality, and unemployment that are strong “push factors” for emigration. In particular, we should review and reconsider the impact of NAFTA on Mexican employment levels and on the rural agricultural sector.

### *Cuba*

The U.S. trade embargo against Cuba has failed to encourage a political opening on the island, and it has been a long-term irritant in our relationships with other countries in the hemisphere. A new administration should end this failed policy and take a new tack in our relations with Cuba.

Recent developments in Cuba present opportunities for fresh U.S. policies that can support Cuba's peaceful evolution toward more democratic political processes and a more open economy. Cubans will make the decisions about their own future, but U.S. actions will influence the environment in which those decisions are made. Engagement with Cuba is more likely than hostility and isolation to support such peaceful evolution, particularly as the country moves beyond Fidel Castro's leadership.

In the short term, the United States should lift the ban on travel to Cuba, which violates the rights of U.S. citizens and limits the people-to-people contact important to a new relationship. It should open discussions with Cuba on issues of mutual interest, including possibilities for restoring migration talks, expanding anti-drug cooperation, expanding Coast Guard cooperation, and cooperating on anti-terrorist initiatives and human smuggling. We should revise the Helms-Burton law to give the U.S. president greater flexibility to respond to changes in Cuba as the succession process there unfolds.



## *Colombia*

Our Colombia policy needs to be refocused. The counter-drug strategy we are pursuing there is deeply flawed, and our support for the Colombian government has been too focused on military assistance. In providing aid, the United States has taken insufficient account of human rights and justice sector issues, the situation of internally displaced persons and Afro-Colombian and indigenous communities, and the dangers that demobilized but still-active paramilitary groups pose to democracy and citizen security. The U.S. focus on crop eradication, particularly the expensive aerial fumigation program, has been ineffective in cutting production, much less in weakening the power of drug traffickers. We should redirect our support toward helping the Colombian government address social issues and strengthen democracy and the rule of law.

## *Venezuela*

A new government in Washington offers the chance for a fresh start with Venezuela that can put relations on a less acrimonious, more respectful footing—on both sides. President Hugo Chávez’s inflammatory rhetoric has not endeared him to most Americans, and his authoritarian tendencies are obvious. But Venezuelans have repeatedly elected Chávez as their president, and the United States should seek to engage him, recognizing his electoral legitimacy even as differences are aired.

Both countries stand to gain from improved relations, as both depend on the continued flow of Venezuelan oil to the United States. Venezuela is seeking to diversify the markets for its oil, and the United States should seek to diversify its oil suppliers and lessen its reliance on oil more generally. But for the foreseeable future, the two countries will remain highly interdependent.

The United States should offer direct high-level talks about the two countries’ agendas and what might be done to improve mutual understanding. Chávez may well spurn the offer, but if he does, the United States loses nothing, while we benefit if a less conflict-ridden relationship can be achieved. Such an overture should include talks about legitimate U.S. concerns, including aspects of Venezuela’s foreign policy such as its relations with Iran.

## *Haiti*

The United States needs to make a long-term commitment to the development and consolidation of democratic institutions in Haiti. The country faces serious challenges, including weak democratic institutions, widespread unemployment and poverty, and severe environmental degradation, all of which contribute to political instability, crime, and security problems. U.S. aid, training, and technical assistance must focus on poverty reduction, encourage growth with equity, and support nascent grassroots organizations throughout the country in their effort to seek economic and environmentally sustainable development. An emphasis on consolidating democratic institutions should include efforts to strengthen the criminal justice system, combat corruption and impunity, professionalize the police, and reform the prisons.

## V. The First 100 Days

A new policy should signal its arrival with some early actions that demonstrate the shift to a fresh approach. There are many steps a new administration might take; seven key ones are listed below. The new president should:

- ❶ Schedule a presidential trip to Latin America to articulate the new approach, visiting a number of countries in order to recognize the steps that governments in the hemisphere are taking to strengthen democratic governance and address poverty and inequality.
- ❷ Commit the United States explicitly to supporting the U.N. Millennium Development Goals in Latin America and announce that new U.S. foreign aid programs to Latin America will be geared toward meeting those goals, particularly those related to the elimination of extreme poverty.
- ❸ Call for a summit meeting with Mexico and Canada, our partners in North America, to lay the foundation for a new collaboration for North American development.
- ❹ Work actively with Congress to achieve comprehensive immigration reform that will regularize the status of undocumented people of Latin American origin established in the United States.
- ❺ Propose an inter-American summit meeting to reconsider drug strategies, placing emphasis on alternative livelihoods for small farmers, targeted enforcement against the most dangerous and violent criminals, programs to identify and prosecute money laundering, and programs to reduce demand.
- ❻ Close the Guantánamo Bay detention facility and either initiate legal proceedings against those held there or release them.
- ❼ Call on Congress to lift the ban on travel to Cuba, a gesture that would benefit American citizens and businesses and signal a fresh approach to a long-standing issue in U.S.–Latin American relations.

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