

Toward a New US-Latin America Foreign Policy

Latin America Solidarity Coalition Grassroots Organizer's Talking Points

The Latin America Solidarity Coalition Coordinating Committee has adopted the following talking points for use by local activists to educate their communities and influence opinion makers and elected officials. With a new administration installed in Washington, DC it is time for progressive activists to demand a new foreign policy toward Latin American and the Caribbean.

The Latin America Solidarity Coalition (LASC) is an association of national and local US-based grassroots Latin America and Caribbean solidarity groups, many of which have long histories of working with grassroots organizations throughout Latin America and the Caribbean. LASC's mission is to define common goals and shared strategies for these groups. LASC's work circles around several hemisphere-wide issues as well as country-specific topics.

We operate and structure our work from a solidarity model: we operate on the principle of self-determination; it is not up to us to determine what our partners in the Global South should or should not do. Nor is it up to us to determine the strategies and methodologies they use. We determine our strategies based on the needs of our partners in Latin America and the Caribbean.

Visit our web page at www.lasolidarity.org to learn more.

1. Close the Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation also known as the School of the Americas.

The School of the Americas (renamed the Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation) is an example of the conventional thinking that military repression is a solution to social and political problems. The existence of the SOA/ WHINSEC is part of a larger failure in U.S. foreign policy towards Latin America. It is a symbol of oppression and U.S. domination for most Latin Americans. Graduates of the school have a long history of human rights violations. From the atrocities in El Salvador and Guatemala in the 1980's to recent violations in Colombia, graduates consistently appear in reports on human rights abuses in Latin America.

SOA/ WHINSEC training has resulted in civilian massacres, assassinations, disappearances, death threats and has led to both attempted and successful coups of democratically elected governments in the hemisphere. Closing the SOA/ WHINSEC, whatever its name, would demonstrate that the United States is willing to make a clean break from the tragic history of the school and its graduates. Argentina, Bolivia, Costa Rica, Uruguay and Venezuela all denounced the school for its connection to human rights abuses throughout the Americas and vowed to cut its ties to the SOA/WHINSEC.

The issue of investigating and closing the notorious SOA/ WHINSEC is one that is widely supported well beyond the Latin America Solidarity movement. Last year a vote to prohibit funding for the school failed by a small margin of six votes. The AFL-CIO, AFSCME, the United

Auto Workers, the United Steelworkers, the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers, the NAACP, the United Methodist Church, the Presbyterian Church, the United Church of Christ and over 100 U.S. Catholic Bishops all advocate the institute's closure.

Despite efforts to evade criticism by renaming the school and implementing cosmetic changes, the SOA/ WHINSEC continues to be linked to human rights and drug trafficking crimes throughout Latin America. A number of Colombian military officials, over half of whom took classes or even taught at the school, were recently arrested for aiding drug cartels. This included two instructors of 2004 classes at WHINSEC. In three recent cases, known human rights abusers have been admitted to the school, despite documented instances of serious crimes.

For more information: www.soaw.org.

2. Close the International Law Enforcement Academy in San Salvador.

In recent years, US military aid to Latin America had increased dramatically. Secretive training of Latin American military and police personnel that used to just take place at the notorious School of the Americas (SOA), in Fort Benning, Georgia—including torture and execution techniques—is now decentralized. The 2008 US federal budget includes \$16.5 million to fund an International Law Enforcement Academy (ILEA) in El Salvador, with satellite operations in Peru. Each academy will train an average of 1,500 police officers, judges, prosecutors, and other law enforcement officials throughout Latin America per year in

“counterterrorism techniques.”

According to ILEA directors, the facility in El Salvador is designed to make Latin America “safe for foreign investment” by “providing regional security and economic stability and combating crime.” Most instructors come from US agencies such as the Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA), Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), and the FBI. Most of the school’s expenses are paid with US tax payers’ dollars.

Salvadorans refer to the ILEA as a new SOA for police. Suspicions are exacerbated by comparable policies of secrecy. As with SOA, the ILEA list of attendees and graduates is classified, as is course content. Suspicions are further aggravated by the US-mandated immunity clause that exempts ILEA personnel from crimes against humanity.

Although lack of transparency makes it impossible to know the content of courses, the conduct of the Salvadoran police—who compose 25 percent of the academy’s graduates—has shown an alarming turn for the worse since the ILEA was inaugurated. In early May 2007, the Archbishop’s Legal Aid and Human Rights Defense Office (Tutela Legal) released a report implicating the Salvadoran National Police (PNC) in eight death squad–style assassinations in 2006 alone.

The PNC has played an active role in a crackdown against civil liberties, aimed at curbing both crime and social protest. The provisions in free trade agreements like CAFTA have been highly contentious, and President Antonio Saca’s administration passed an anti-terror law in September 2006, modeled on the USA PATRIOT Act, that has been used to arrest everyone from anti-water-privatization activists to street vendors.

US run Latin America police training programs were shut down in the 1970s after Congressional investigations revealed serious human rights abuses. The next president should close the ILEA and end current training programs.

For more information: www.cispes.org.

3. Stop funding Plan Colombia and cut off all military aid to that country.

The United States has spent more than \$5 billion via Plan Colombia since 2000, primarily in training, equipment and intelligence for the Colombian Armed Forces, in what was promoted as a plan to reduce in half the cultivation of coca leaves, a primary ingredient of cocaine, by 2005. Yet the most recent data released by the State Department show that more land in Colombia was cultivated with coca in 2006 -- 388,000 acres -- than when the effort began in 2000.

Plan Colombia supports a Colombian military that has an atrocious human rights record and has been linked to drug-trafficking. Many units of the Colombian Army have been credibly reported to have collaborated with paramilitary

death squads declared by the US State Department as terrorist organizations.

The armed conflict in Colombia, which has raged for nearly 50 years, is rooted in economic disparity and has led to the internal displacement of 3.8 million people and the deaths of tens of thousands. Many of those murdered by right wing paramilitaries, with ties to the government and military, have been peace activists, union organizers (2,000 over 15 years), and teachers. Afro-Colombian and Indigenous communities have been especially affected.

The U.S.- Colombia Free Trade Agreement that is currently being discussed would consolidate and increase existing inequality and poverty, which are at the root of the current conflict. The FTA would devastate Colombia’s small and medium farmers, who cannot compete with subsidized U.S. corporate agribusinesses.

They face a situation similar to the 2 million farmers who were displaced from their lands in Mexico under NAFTA. Colombia’s Ministry of Agriculture projects that income for farmers could drop by as much as fifty percent once tariffs are fully eliminated. Farmers are likely to be forced off their land or to turn to coca production as a source of income. Coca production in turn leads to increased drug trafficking and its increase causes further destruction of the Amazon rainforest.

We urge the next US administration to oppose the U.S. - Colombia FTA and to immediately end all U.S. aid to the Colombian military. Neither the FTA nor the military package that is Plan Colombia will lead to a more secure society for the people of Colombia.

For more information: <http://www.forusa.org/programs/tflac/tflac.html> and www.colombiasolidarity.org/ and www.witnessforpeace.org/.

4. Stop funding the Merida Initiative and the militarization of the US/Mexico border.

The Merida initiative is a multi-year aid package to Mexico and Central America that seeks to further militarize the region under the guise of the U.S.’s “War on Drugs/ War on Terror.” Congress approved President George W. Bush’s request for \$400 million for Mexico and \$62 million for Nicaragua, Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador, Costa Rica, Belize, Panamá, the Dominican Republic and Haiti in the FY08 Supplemental after stripping the already vague human rights conditions.

The FY09 budget proposal includes \$450 million for Mexico and \$100 million for Central America. The budget is destined for helicopters and surveillance aircraft, increased US participation in policing, communications surveillance technologies, and “non-intrusive” inspection equipment, ion scanners and canine units for Mexican customs, the new federal police and military to “interdict trafficked drugs, arms, cash and persons.”

The Merida Initiative, also known as Plan Mexico,

and the militarization of the US/Mexico Border follow the failed strategy of trying to combat social and political problems with military means.

Grassroots groups in Mexico and Central America call for anti-poverty and crime-prevention programs and charge that the Merida Initiative and the border militarization ignore the root problems that continue to compel regional involvement in drug trafficking and cause people to have to leave their homeland - poverty and unemployment.

Mexican police and military personnel are consistently involved in human rights violations in an attempt to silence civil dissent. In 2006 security forces responded to civil society protest in Oaxaca with hundreds of arbitrary detentions, acts of torture, and over 20 assassinations. The Salvadoran government criminalizes protest tactics commonly used by social movements. The US Ambassador to El Salvador has expressed explicit support for police crackdowns, condoning the use of police force in protecting US trade interests.

The separation between police and military in El Salvador and Guatemala, the top two Central American recipients of Merida Initiative aid, has declined dramatically. There has also been a resurgence of death squad-style murders, some linked to the police, in both Guatemala and El Salvador. The Merida Initiative's one-sided focus on strengthening repressive institutions would further erode human rights by supporting repression of the rights to free speech and protest.

For more information: www.cispes.org and www.ciponline.org/.

5. Close the National Endowment for Democracy and return USAID to its original foreign aid mission.

Founded by Congress and funded by taxes, the National Endowment for Democracy (NED) carries out foreign policy as a "private" institution, independently of any elected body. The NED is not subject to meaningful public oversight. The core institutes of the NED also receive funding from US Agency for International Development and the State Department in addition to NED allocations. By further subcontracting allocations, funding can get laundered so that it is almost impossible to track. As one of the founders of the NED, Allen Weinstein said, "A lot of what we [NED] do today was done covertly 25 years ago by the CIA"

NED, and increasingly USAID, focus their funding on right-wing opposition groups in countries which are rejecting the "Washington Consensus" of free trade and structural adjustment policies that have served Latin America so poorly over the last 30 years. Their manipulation of democratic electoral processes would be illegal in the United States and have caused a suspicion of all civil society groups in some countries. The NED coordinates campaigns of misinformation in order to

manipulate foreign elections. If that fails, the NED will even act to overthrow elected governments—like it did in Haiti and like it is trying to do in Venezuela and Bolivia.

USAID once demonstrated the "good" side of US foreign policy with its development grants aimed at poverty reduction, infrastructure improvement, and construction of schools and hospitals. Its mission has shifted dramatically under the Bush administration in the direction of election manipulation under the guise of "democracy building."

The next administration should increase foreign development aid while removing neoliberal conditions. USAID's mission should be restored to development and poverty reduction. The NED mission, on the other hand, is limited to the manipulation of democratic processes and has no place within the foreign policy instruments of a country that professes to be democratic and to support the growth of democracy world-wide. For more information visit www.respect4democracy.org.

6. Return President Aristide to Haiti, advocate freedom for all political prisoners and support the end of the UN occupation.

Haiti's lethal combination of poverty, weak governance and foreign interference leaves the country without the ability to enforce its laws or effectively execute disaster planning and response. United States government policies played an important role in reducing Haiti to its current state.

The US imposed a development assistance embargo on Haiti's government in 2001 because the US Government disagreed with the country's economic policies: a progressive social agenda that gave schools, markets, health care, infrastructure, and hope to Haiti's poor. That embargo succeeded in bringing the government to its knees.

The US-supported coup d'état in 2004 dismantled government programs and reversed a decade's progress in establishing democracy and the rule of law. The U.S. and other powerful countries limit the current Haitian government's ability to function by forcing the country to pay \$1 million a week to the World Bank and other "poverty-fighting" institutions, mostly to repay loans given to Haiti's past dictators. They have imposed the Structural Adjustment Policies that have undermined Haitian food production for the last 20 years

U.S. troops originally enforced the 2004 coup d'état, then were replaced by United Nations "Peacekeeping" Mission - the only such mission in UN history deployed without an actual peace agreement - took their place. MINUSTAH presides over an occupation that favors US government interests in collaboration with the wealthy elite of Haiti.

A program of repression against Fanmi Lavalas, the political party founded by Aristide and supported by a strong majority of Haitians when they have the opportunity

to vote democratically, is underway, evidenced by over 1,000 political prisoners still in jail, and in the kidnapping of human rights advocate Lovinsky Pierre-Antoine.

MINUSTAH is charged with keeping the peace, but has been involved in a number of well-documented atrocities.

MINUSTAH operates with an annual budget of \$500 million. That is more than Haiti's entire annual budget under Aristide. MINUSTAH expenditures strengthen US hegemony over Haiti's affairs, bolster military/security forces, and finance monetary schemes and corruption that aim to destroy resistance to the occupation.

The next US administration should take the following actions concerning Haiti:

- Respect Haiti's sovereignty and the people's right to self determination.
- Allow the return of President Aristide to Haiti.
- Advocate freedom for all political prisoners.
- Support the end of the UN occupation.
- Support international debt relief for the hemisphere's poorest country without structural adjustment conditions.

For more information: www.haitisolidarity.net and www.haitiaction.net/.

7. End belligerence toward Venezuela and other Latin American countries whose citizens have elected left leaning governments over the past decade.

It was the Bush administration which began the rhetorical conflict with Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez which he endured for two years before beginning to respond in his own inimitable style, according to the anti-Chavez journalist Teodoro Petkoff. Rapid US recognition of the short-lived coup government of 2002 further soured relations between the Venezuelan government and the Bush administration.

The US has an Office of Transition Initiatives (OTI) in its embassies in Venezuela and Bolivia to direct US spending to opposition groups in the two countries. OTI's have only been used in the past in post-conflict countries for a maximum of two years. The OTI in Venezuela has been operating for over six years. The Bush administration shift of US Agency for International Development (USAID) grants from its traditional mission of development to grants for "democracy building" electoral manipulation projects has raised distrust of USAID throughout Latin America.

The choice of US ambassadors by the Bush administration, especially in Bolivia and Nicaragua where the former, who has been expelled, was involved in the dismemberment of Yugoslavia, and the latter with the US-backed contra war, have been seen as provocative. The highly politicized use by the US of "report cards" on such issues as cooperation in the so-called drug war and human trafficking are seen in Latin America as illegitimate and disrespectful.

The next US administration needs to normalize relations with Venezuela and Bolivia recognizing the importance of their oil and gas reserves. The administration needs to craft its public statements and its programs to show respect for its neighbors in the hemisphere rather than arrogance and belligerency.

The US should support efforts in Venezuela, Bolivia, and other Latin American countries to use their natural resource wealth to reduce poverty, increase health care and education, and to implement measures that increase democratic participation. The next administration should close the Offices of Transition Initiatives, return USAID to its development mission, and stop interfering in other countries' electoral processes in ways that we would not allow in our own. These guidelines will gain the US not only the friendship of Venezuela and Bolivia, but will go a long way to restore the respect for the United States that the Bush administration has spent eight years destroying.

For more information: www.vensolidarity.org and www.venezuelanalysis.com.

8. End the embargo against Cuba and normalize relations with our island neighbor.

A near total embargo of Cuba began in 1962 and has been tightened repeatedly since. This prevents US citizens from travelling to Cuba except when licensed for unusual purposes. In 2000 the US Congress passed the Trade Sanctions Reform Act which allows agricultural commercial sales and sales of medicines but the latter requires such bureaucratic paper work that such sales are not attempted.

Although this embargo was said not to hurt the people, and although we have no such embargo against China, Vietnam, or other communist nations, the 11 million Cuban citizens have suffered from the lack of many medicines and medical equipment. Two devastating hurricanes struck Cuba in 2008. Humanitarian considerations alone demand an end to the embargo now so that the Cuban people can rapidly rebuild their homes, schools, and hospitals.

The embargo has failed to drive a wedge between the government of Cuba and its people. US propaganda appears to be wrong in portraying a population trying to change their government. The economy is improving, the renowned health care and education systems are functioning well. Even many of the Cuban-Americans in Miami are now in favor of ending the embargo.

The UN votes each year overwhelmingly to end the embargo, with only the US and 1 to 2 other nations opposed. US-based, non-profit organizations are calling for an end to it. IFCO/Pastors for Peace in July 2008 completed its 19th Friendshipment with 100 US citizens and 50 tons of medical supplies defying the law to travel to Cuba unlicensed. This marked 19 years of civil disobedience, delivering life-saving items to the

Ecumenical (Churches) Council of Cuba.

US travel to Cuba is severely restricted. US businesses are losing out on investment opportunities (the US Chamber of Commerce is opposed to the embargo). And, the US govt. has failed completely in its efforts to bring about regime change. Most of the citizens of Cuba appear not to want such change.

For more information: www.ifconews.org and www.cubasolidarity.com/.

9. Stop initiating “Free Trade” agreements that benefit only corporations while destroying local agriculture and forcing Latin Americans to leave their homeland to work in the US.

Hundreds of thousands of people have been marching in Asia, Latin America, and elsewhere against “neo-liberalism” by which they mean corporate globalization. Their definition---and that of nearly 2,000 US-based Latin America solidarity groups--includes “free trade”, NAFTA, Fast Track, the World Trade Organization and the newly, secretly developing SPP (Security and Prosperity Partnership--of Mexico, Canada and the US).

Why is the resistance to free trade so strong?

1. Vastly increasing poverty around the world and the still increasing gaps between “have” and “have not” nations. Trickle-down economics did not work!

2. People forced to migrate from their homelands in search of work: Much of this is caused by NAFTA and similar FTA's. Why? Over one million small corn farmers in Mexico have failed. Their corn, without tariff protection, could not compete with still subsidized American corn. Over one million small businesses in Mexico have failed because of the competition of such US corporations as the 700 Wal-Marts in Mexico, Taco Bells, etc. And, the maquiladoras or sweat shops in Mexico (which have resulted in lower wages for Mexican workers and damaged the environment) are increasingly losing out to Chinese and other cheaper labor areas.

3. Undemocratic structures and processes: During the negotiations for DR-CAFTA, Congress and members of civil society were left on the sidelines. There should be public debate over substantive trade issues in the U.S. and in the other countries that are partners to agreements.

4. Decreasing national sovereignty for the nations of Latin America which have signed trade agreements: There must be space for national governments to pursue development strategies that support sustainable, locally-determined economic, social and environmental priorities.

5. And now the food crisis and starvation: The food self-sufficiency of Latin American nations is disappearing due to FTA rules requiring lowering of tariff barriers to subsidized US food crops. And food prices have not come down as promised but rather have risen. Most people cannot afford fast-rising food prices.

In Latin America what our media call “leftist” presidents have recently been elected in Brazil, Venezuela, Argentina, Uruguay, Bolivia, Chile, Ecuador, Nicaragua, and Paraguay. They are forming trade alliances which leave out the United States.

In the US many groups and coalitions (including the Alliance for Responsible Trade, Public Citizen, and the Stop CAFTA Coalition) are working for the renegotiation of NAFTA, defeat of the Colombia FTA and the monitoring of DR-CAFTA. They are working in coalition with groups in Latin America to change world trade policy from free trade to fair trade.

For more information: www.stopcafta.com and www.citizenstrade.org.

10. Publically state support for the legitimate elected government of Bolivia, condemn the separatist violence and take no actions to further inflame the crisis there.

Bolivia is the poorest country in South America and the greatest recipient of USAID funds. The recent violence in Bolivia and the continued campaign for “autonomy” in Bolivia's “media luna” prefectures, led by right-wing governors and large landowners, have their roots in over 500 years of racism and exploitation of the indigenous population of the country. More 60 years of civil struggle to right those historic wrongs most recently toppled three Bolivian governments in succession before the election of Bolivia's first indigenous president, Evo Morales in Dec. 2005.

Morales' efforts to write a new constitution guaranteeing civil, economic and cultural rights to all Bolivians, and to insure that Bolivia's natural gas wealth benefits the entire population, have been met with strong, and at times violent, opposition from Bolivia's largely European-descended economic elite. Morales won an Aug. 19, 2008 recall election with 67.76% of the vote, an increase in percentage and number of votes over his 2005 margin.

The strong ratification of the Morales government policies provoked a civil rebellion led by right-wing separatists in the Bolivia's “media luna” provinces. At least 30 peasants and indigenous people were murdered and hundreds millions of dollars of economic damage was done when an important international gas pipeline was sabotaged. Bolivia expelled US Ambassador Philip Goldberg over the appearance that he was collaborating with separatist leaders. The Bush administration declared Bolivia's ambassador to the US persona non grata and precipitously booted out his entire family including a daughter in college.

The United States should publicly endorse and support the resolution of 12 heads of state of the Union of South American Nations (UNASUR) which held an emergency summit in Santiago, Chile, on Sept. 15 and demanded respect for legitimate democracy in Bolivia. The US

should normalize relations with Bolivia, stop using USAID grants for so-called “democracy building” which has meant intervention in Bolivia’s sovereign affairs, and stop manipulating so-called “drug war” certification for political ends.

For more information: <http://boliviarising.blogspot.com/>

11. Extradite the terrorist Luis Posada Carriles to Venezuela, as required by extradition treaty, to stand trial for the fatal bombing of a Cubana Airlines flight that killed 73 people. Free the five Cuban anti-terrorist agents falsely convicted of espionage for infiltrating Cuban exile terrorist groups in Miami whose repeated attacks have killed over 3,000 Cubans and foreigners in Cuba.

The Cuban Five, Fernando Gonzalez, Rene Gonzales, Antonio Guerrero, Geraldo Hernandez, and Ramon Labanino, have spent 10 years in US prisons. Their “crime” is attempting to prevent acts of terrorism by right-wing Miami terrorist groups.

Those terrorist groups, led by Orlando Bosch and Luis Posada Carriles, carried out hundreds of terrorist actions, hand-in-hand with the CIA. A Cubana airliner was blown up in 1976, killing 73 civilians, Chilean diplomat Orlando Letelier and US activist Ronnie Moffat were killed in a car bombing in Washington, DC in 1976, and Italian tourist was murdered in 1997 during a series of hotel bombings in Havana.

Posada, an SOA graduate, was involved in a series of bombings in Miami. In the 1960s and 70s, as part of the Venezuelan secret police, he was behind the murder and torture of scores of activists. In the 1980s, he worked with

the Nicaraguan contras and Salvadoran death squads. He escaped from a Venezuelan prison in 1985, after being convicted for the airliner bombing. Arrested in 2000 in Panama for attempting to bomb Fidel Castro there in 1980, he was freed by their out-going president in 2004. In 2005 he illegally entered the US, and remains free in Miami, even though wanted for extradition by both Venezuela and Panama.

Cuba sent the Cuban 5 to Miami in the 1990s to infiltrate anti-Cuban terrorist networks in Miami. They collected evidence of ongoing terrorist plots against Cuba, and then informed Cuban and US authorities. Instead of arresting the terrorists, in 1998 the FBI arrested the five, the very people working to prevent terrorism. Outrageous charges leveled against the five included conspiracy to commit espionage and murder.

Their trial took place in Miami amid many irregularities and an anti-Cuban witchhunt. They were convicted and collectively sentenced to four life terms and 75 years. The five were placed in the “hole” and have been separated into five different prisons to break them. They were denied family visits for years at a time.

The U.N. found their convictions “arbitrary and in violation of international law.” An 11th Circuit Court of Appeals panel overturned their convictions in 2005, but that decision was reversed by the full court later. Their case is now on appeal to the Supreme Court.

The next president should free the Cuban Five and extradite Luis Posada Carriles to Venezuela as required by the bilateral Venezuela-US extradition treaty.

For more information: www.freethefive.org and www.freethecuban5.com.

Latin America Solidarity Coalition Steering Committee

Alliance for Global Justice
INTERCONNECT
Taskforce on the Americas
Committee in Solidarity with the People of El
Salvador (CISPES)
Venezuela Solidarity Network
SOA Watch
Mexico Solidarity Network

Nicaragua Network
U.S.-El Salvador Sister Cities
Haiti Action Committee
Campaign for Labor Rights
Network in Solidarity with the People of Guatemala
(NISGUA)
No War On Cuba Movement
National Immigrant Solidarity Network

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