



# FOCAL

Canadian Foundation for the Americas

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## Report from the March 2<sup>nd</sup> 2006 Ottawa Roundtable

### “Supporting Afro-Latino Communities, Is There A Role for Canada?”

#### Preamble: Senator Donald Oliver, Q.C.

Canada is known throughout the world as a country that has mastered an understanding of multiculturalism. With multiculturalism come issues of diversity and pluralism. Many developing countries look to Canada as a model upon which they would like to base their development toward an understanding of immigration and treatment of people. In Canada, we have a Charter of Rights and Freedoms as part of our constitution and we have passed a number of laws, such as the Human Rights Act and the Employment Equity Act, to help us implement many of the intrinsic principles of diversity.

I think that many Latin American countries should use 2006 or 2007 as the Year of Multi-culturalism. They should move toward developing integration policies with the objectives of ensuring that in each of their countries<sup>3/4</sup> be it Venezuela, Brazil, Chile or elsewhere that equal rights, responsibilities and opportunities for everyone are available irrespective of ethnic and cultural backgrounds; that social cohesion is built on principles of diversity; and that social development is based on mutual respect in which everyone, irrespective of background, participates fully and shares a sense of commitment.

Each country should, as well, develop a national action plan to combat racism, xenophobia, homophobia and discrimination.

One of the things that Canada can do to assist in this regard is to offer advice and assistance in helping to strengthen democratic principles and principles of transparency and accountability in the parliamentary systems of the region. Our electoral systems must be such that they permit the participation and representation of all stakeholders.

One of the most important functions of Parliament is to ensure oversight of the Executive and hold the Executive accountable. This oversight function, parliamentary debates, committee deliberations, legislative development, the role of public accounts committees and dialoguing with civil society in a free media environment are all areas in which Canada can be of some assistance in the Afro-Latino dialogue.

In the colloquium sponsored by the Canadian Foundation for the Americas (FOCAL), “Supporting Afro-Latino Communities: Is there a role for Can-

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ada?” it was made clear that, by far, the most significant way in which Canada can continue to be of assistance is through the CanAFRO website. It is my hope that the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) will assist in providing the funding to facilitate that partnership between FOCAL and the Inter-Agency Coalition on Race in the Americas.

My hope is that there will be another conference on this very important subject again in Canada and that this time it will encourage the active participation of the members of the Executive of the new Government of Canada. Indeed, the Prime Minister should be invited to participate and provide an overview of where he sees this government going in terms of a role for Canada in supporting Afro-Latino communities.

The first step, the March 2nd conference in Ottawa, laid an important foundation upon which it is now possible to build.

The Honourable Donald H. Oliver, Q.C.



According to estimates by the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), approximately one third of the 150 million people living in Latin America are self-declared as African descendants, or Afro-Latino, and at least half of this demographic lives in poverty. Until recently, this has been a largely hidden issue in the region and one that has been without reference or attention in Canadian engagement in the Americas.

This absence stands in stark contrast to the stated aims of Canadian development policy—a focus on poverty reduction and on “supporting Canada’s core values of freedom, democracy, the rule of law and human rights around the world,” as outlined in the April 2006 Throne Speech. Given the correlation between poverty, marginalization and African descent in Latin America, if Canadian engagement in the region is to meet the established objectives of Canadian foreign and development policy, the political and economic marginalization and exclusion of Afro-Latinos must be addressed at the policy and program levels.

The absence of Canada in engagement and work on Afro-Latino issues also stands in sharp contrast to the image that Canada projects of itself, that of being a world leader in integration, multiculturalism and support for diversity. If there were some comparative advantage to Canadian engagement in the Americas, surely it would be found in sharing these values and our experience in building and sustaining institutions to support diversity and multiculturalism.

The question, then, is not **whether** Canada should be engaged in work with Afro-Latino communities; rather, the question is **how** Canada should be engaged.

The latter question was debated during a historic roundtable conference held in Ottawa on March 2, 2006. The participants were Canadian civil society organizations (including representatives of Afro-Canadian and First Nations groups) and Afro-Latino leaders and development agencies actively working with Afro-Latino communities. The meeting was a major step forward in this regard in two ways. First, it was instrumental in winnowing down a list of priorities for potential Canadian involvement. Second, and perhaps equally important, the exchanges at the meeting were critical to explaining what is possible from Canada and also to explaining why Canada has been absent from work with Afro-Latinos. These are two questions that have perplexed those outside Canada who have been working on the issue.

Both sides of this discussion are detailed in the report that follows. But it is worthwhile here to briefly review the list of possible areas of Canadian intervention. None of these suggestions require the investment of significant new resources on the part of Canadian agencies, although some shift in focus and marginal additional funding would be required.

1. **Participation.** First and foremost, Canada simply needs to become involved. Even though several participants from Canada cautioned the visitors against over-glamorizing the Canadian experience, it was still recognized by all that Canada has much to contribute in terms of experience, institutions, laws involving gender and Aboriginal policies. But its



experience is not informing policy formation in the region because Canada is absent. In this area, two steps are required. First, a collection or inventory of Canadian experience should be made, with a view to what might be needed in the region. Second, Canada needs to become active in forums such as the Inter-Agency Coalition on Race in the Americas. In addition, CIDA could hire staff with responsibility for race and participate in, as well as contribute to, financing, regional forums and meetings on race. Raising awareness within Canada of Afro-Latino issues is also important, and CIDA could contribute to stimulating research at Canadian universities on Afro-Latino issues.

2. **Data collection.** It is not known whether Canadian official development assistance is having any impact on Afro-Latino communities. Generally, there is an assumption that if funding is directed toward an area where a significant percentage of the population is of African descent, then the aid is reaching these communities. But this assumption has often proven false. CIDA already has systems in place to collect information about the gender impact of its development spending. It should require an almost insignificant cost to extend data collection to impacts according to race. Identification of African descendants is, of course, more difficult than gender identification and requires more work, but several aid agencies—including those present at the March 2<sup>nd</sup> Ottawa conference—have done work in this area and have offered to provide assistance.
3. **Indigenous–Afro-Latino dialogue.** Relations between emerging African-descendant organizations and long-standing Indigenous organizations in Latin America have not been a case study in harmony and united struggle. Competition for scarce resources, mistrust and other issues have contributed to a climate of distrust and animosity between these two groups, although the two actually have much in common and could benefit from mutual collaboration. Canada offers a more neutral ground for beginning and expanding a dialogue between Indigenous and Afro-Latino groups.

Implementing programs and initiatives along these lines would not impose significant new burdens on Canadian aid agencies. The benefits, however, would be significant. Most important among these would be improving the reach and effectiveness of Canadian development assistance in the Americas as well as having that aid meet its intended goal of reflecting Canadian values.

## Introduction



**O**n March 2, 2006, Afro-Latino leaders and representatives from a number of development agencies came to Ottawa for a historic roundtable discussion with Afro-Canadian, First Nations and civil society organizations. The development agencies participating were those that have extensive programs benefiting Afro-Latinos.

The primary objective of the roundtable was to determine whether there is a role for Canada in supporting Afro-Latino communities. There was strong agreement among participants that Canada should play a role, with many insisting that Canada should take on a leadership role. Discussions quickly moved to determining how Canada could play a role and to identifying the comparative advantages that Canada has to offer in working on issues of race in the Americas. This was an indication that several of the participants, Afro-Latino leaders as well as officials from development agencies, had been thinking about the issue of Canadian participation for some time. There was consensus from Canadian participants that Canada is well placed to take a leadership role in addressing this issue because of its historical experience as an advocate of, and role model for, multiculturalism.

As a caution against irrational exuberance, Canadian government representatives reminded participants that proponents of greater Canadian engagement would have to address several policy guidelines that govern Canadian development policy. First and foremost, it has to be recognized that, both financially and logistically, Canada cannot do everything that it would like to do in the arena of development and it must be careful not to overextend itself. In addition, the Government of Canada seeks to treat all groups in society, at home as well as abroad, with fairness and equity. Consequently, it was argued that Canada would need to ensure that support for Afro-Latino communities does not come at the expense of other groups in Latin America.

Both of these issues, however, are addressed by the fact that Canada has, for some time, had targeted programs in Latin America to provide development assistance to women and to Indigenous groups. Regarding the first issue, the existence of these targeted programs means that the institutional arrangements (such as job classifications for gender and Indigenous specialists, incorporation of targeted outreach to these groups within a country's larger strategies and methodologies for data collection) needed to develop effective policy can be ported to, or adopted within, Afro-Latino communities at minimal cost. Regarding the second issue, the existing targeted development assistance programs have not sparked concerns about equality in or outside the Canadian development community. Further, Afro-Latinos have been identified in World Bank and IDB reports as among those who least benefit from development assistance. Providing directed programs and targeted support would help this group achieve the same level of access and support that other groups in the region currently receive. In other words, targeting programs and assistance to Afro-Latinos would promote equality in Canadian foreign aid, and not doing so promotes inequality.



The Chair, former Secretary of State for Multiculturalism and the Status of Women Jean Augustine, opened the meeting, followed by introductory remarks from Senator Donald Oliver. Next, there were substantive exchanges with Naresh Singh, Director General for the Governance and Social Development division at CIDA, who outlined those elements of CIDA's framework for developing new projects that would be relevant to developing a program of engagement with Afro-Latino communities.

### **Applying Elements of CIDA's Framework. Organization of Afro-Latino Communities**

According to CIDA, the first step taken by Canada when working in developing countries is to facilitate dialogue with local organizations that are active in the areas in which Canada would like to participate. By looking at the degree to which local groups are organized and motivated to co-operate, Canada can determine how best to work with them and assess its probability for success. In this regard, it is evident that Afro-Latino groups are becoming increasingly organized, both within Latin America and within their diasporas abroad. Judith Morrison, Executive Director of the Inter-Agency Coalition on Race in the Americas (IAC), observed that in recent years there has been an increase in the number of Afro-Latinos attending conferences that address issues related to their communities. In addition, there has been an increase in the number of organizations and individuals within Latin America that are actively working toward promoting support for Afro-Latino communities. A few of these individuals were presenters during Session 1 of the March 2nd conference. Thus, there is an existing framework for co-operation with Afro-Latino groups and individuals that Canada can use to build its success upon. Through open and transparent dialogue, even higher levels of organization can be achieved.

### **2. Existing Programs and Potential Partners**

The second step for Canada, as outlined by Singh, is identifying existing donor commitments and potential partners. By doing so, Canada can determine where assistance may be needed and with whom it can co-ordinate assistance to enhance the efficiency and success of aid.

In this regard, Canada can access a network of organizations that support Afro-Latino communities by collaborating with the IAC. This organization, which was formed at a World Bank meeting in 2000, is a consultative group of seven international development institutions working together to address issues of racial discrimination against, social exclusion of and related concerns of African-descendant populations in Latin America. The core members of the IAC are the IDB, World Bank, Pan-American Health Organization (PAHO), British Department for International Development (DFID), Ford Foundation, Inter-American Foundation (IAF), and the Organization of American States (OAS) Commission on Human Rights. The Inter-American Dialogue was chosen as the IAC Secretariat and tasked with analyzing data



and consulting institutions that are examining the inclusion of African descendants. This network is growing. Both FOCAL and the IAF are interested in becoming further involved in this co-operative effort. In addition, Canada can work with other donor countries, such as the United States and Britain, who have recognized the importance of this cause and support the organizations that are pursuing it. The existing development agency programs of the World Bank, IDB and IAF are addressed in greater detail in Session 2.

### **3. Canada's Comparative Advantage**

CIDA's approach toward its development policies is to relate Canada's strengths to its projects in the developing world. This approach allows Canada to utilize its resources effectively in order to make the greatest possible impact upon developing countries. Therefore, determining whether there is a role for Canada in a new project area must involve an assessment of Canada's comparative advantages.

During the opening remarks at the March 2nd Ottawa conference, all participants recognized that Canada has a number of comparative advantages that could be utilized in support of Afro-Latino groups. It has become known as a world leader in the area of multiculturalism. In particular, Canada has done pioneering work in support of minority groups in developing its policies with Canadian Aboriginal peoples. From its multicultural experiences, Canada can contribute its technical expertise, data collection and analysis capabilities, and knowledge about the development of multicultural policies and promotion of diversity. These initial observations and recommendations were expanded upon during Session 3, which involved a free-flowing roundtable discussion on "What is Canada's role?" in supporting Afro-Latino communities.

### **4. Linking Policy Approaches With Demands**

The final part of CIDA's framework for developing a policy approach is to link the new policy prescription to existing commitments. The establishment of such a link allows for a smoother transition as the new policy is adopted. It also helps to determine whether the policy complements current objectives.

The link between Canada's existing commitments and increasing support for Afro-Latino communities was readily identified during the opening remarks. In particular, Canada's commitment to achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in Latin America would be strengthened by supporting these communities. Afro-Latinos are among the region's most vulnerable people and constitute around one sixth of Latin America's poor. A strong correlation between race and poverty has been established, and this underscores how important it is for Canada to consider such groups when determining its development agenda. If Afro-Latino groups are not given attention, Canada cannot begin to help them. Without solid disaggregated data, Canada cannot get a true picture of whether the MDGs are being met. In this



way, Canadian support for Afro-Latinos is linked to Canada's MDG commitments.

Another area where Canada's existing commitments could be related to support for Afro-Latino communities is within the realm of human rights. Canada endorses a range of human rights principles and is a signatory to a number of United Nations agreements that prioritize special, vulnerable groups. Within its policies at home and abroad, Canada strives to adhere to these principles of fairness and equity. It was suggested that, by taking a human rights approach to the development framework, an opportunity for Canadian participation<sup>3/4</sup>and even leadership<sup>3/4</sup>could be created.

In particular, it was suggested that Canada could increase its participation and strengthen its role in promoting the Inter-American Convention Against Racial Discrimination. Currently, negotiations on this convention are taking place within the OAS under the leadership of the Brazilian President, Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva. While Canada has participated, it could increase its level of involvement since Canada is known worldwide as an advocate of anti-discriminatory policies and multiculturalism, which gives it the moral authority to play a greater leadership role. Canada could also help to rally support for this convention and identify other potential allies against discrimination. By strengthening its support for the broader anti-discrimination framework in the region, Canada would be aiding Afro-Latino communities. Other ways in which Canada could link its existing policies and commitments to support for Afro-Latino communities were further developed during the third session.



## Session 1: Current Status Of Afro-Latino Communities



This meeting represented the first time in five years that substantial dialogue on Afro-Latino issues had taken place in Canada. In the region, the first discussion of this kind had taken place during the Third World Conference Against Racism, held in Santiago, Chile, in 2001. The Santiago conference was an important landmark for Afro-Latinos as African heritage was formally acknowledged in a regional meeting, thereby transforming identity from simply being “black.” The recognition of being African descendants engendered a new sense of identity that has inspired the region’s African-descendant population to embrace a common ancestry as well as to more fully embrace the wider global and regional African-descendant movements.

### **History of Oppression**

Afro-Latinos emerged from a history of enslavement that spanned 350 years, but which is often marginalized or trivialized in Latin American history books. Institutionalized oppression and exclusion of African descendants is a chapter of Latin American history that is considered closed by many in the region. Yet, the panellists in this session questioned whether that is truly the case.

In particular, Brazil was analyzed critically for its past and current policies toward its large African-descendant population. It was asserted that the history of slavery in Brazil continues to manifest itself through continued social and economic exclusion of Afro-Brazilians. Of the more than 300 million slaves that were brought to the continent from Africa, one quarter entered Brazil. On the eve of Brazilian independence in 1872, 69 per cent of the Brazilian population were either black slaves or freed blacks. In spite of this reality, Brazil’s leadership at the time maintained that Brazil was a white state.

Brazil was the last country in Latin America to abolish slavery, doing so in 1888. Yet, racial segregation continued after the abolishment of slavery. Into the 1930s, the Brazilian state embraced European “whitening theories” and, similar to Canada, engaged in a policy of “whitening” the country by limiting immigration to whites. During the 60 years that this policy was in effect in Brazil, 4.5 million Europeans immigrated to Brazil while the entry of Africans was prohibited. Government-mandated skills training programs targeted the new European immigrants and excluded the country’s black population. It is this history of oppression and exclusion of African descendants that explains the current situation of marginalization facing Afro-Latinos in Brazil and throughout the Americas.

### **Democratic Exclusion**

Since slavery and its impacts are considered things of the distant past, Latin American leaders do not give sufficient, if any, consideration to the lingering problems resulting from slavery. One such problem is disenfranchisement. As one panellist observed, statistics indicate that the African-descendant population in Brazil continues to be disenfranchised.



Ending disenfranchisement of Afro-Latinos is important for many reasons, including the fact that it would help consolidate the growth of democracy in the region. In this regard, it was suggested that Canada could assist governments in the region to implement policies on equality and inclusion by sharing Canadian experiences as a multicultural democracy. Canada could also help promote the strengthening of exchanges between civil society and governments in Latin America.

### **Legislation**

While progress has been made in implementing legislation to improve the situation of women and Indigenous peoples, much less progress has been made in improving the situation of African descendants through targeted legislation. There is a need for further legislation to be designed in Latin American countries to help African descendants. Once it has been developed, the targeted legislation must be implemented and enforced.

### **Education**

Afro-Latinos are among the least educated people in Latin America. In 2001, a high percentage of African descendants in Brazil under the age of 15 years were illiterate. Many Afro-Latinos face institutional and structural constraints to attending university. Not only has formal legislation prohibited their attendance in the past, but also the distribution of wealth creates a barrier to education for Afro-Latinos today. While the Brazilian government has created access programs for African descendants, lack of education among this sector of the population remains problematic. Many Afro-Brazilians do not meet even the minimum educational standards to enter university. In addition, segregated education continues, as Brazil's private schools are attended mainly by whites.

### **Wealth Redistribution**

The majority of Afro-Latinos live below the poverty line. This reality cannot be accounted for by national underdevelopment. For instance, Brazil is hardly a poor country, yet 46 per cent of African descendants in that country are poverty-stricken. This is a significant issue for Brazil, considering the high percentage of the population that is of African descent.

Reducing poverty among Afro-Latinos requires targeted interventions from domestic and foreign governments. But, at present, the issue is not being recognized. For example, there is no racial or multicultural vision enshrined in the MDGs. Given the racial component of poverty in the Americas, it is difficult to see how the MDGs can have any chance of being successfully attained in the region. There is a need for an "ethnic point of view" to generate public policies that target Afro-Latinos. Since African descendants compose the largest proportion, both in real and relative terms, of the poor in Latin America, any poverty alleviation strategy that fails to target Afro-Latinos will be implemented in vain.



### **Data Collection**

Since Afro-Latinos are not recorded in government census reports and other statistics, it is difficult to design policies to target Afro-Latino communities. There is a pressing need for new research and an investment in the capacity to collect and analyze data on this segment of the population. The resulting information would be of great assistance to foreign aid agencies. Canada can help by assisting regional governments to develop the capacity to collect data on race and ethnicity.

### **Empowerment**

Afro-Latinos were invisible during the 20th century. Fortunately, this is slowly changing. During the 1960s, black movements emerged and developed organizational capacity and political strength. In the process, they played an important role in the democratization of their countries. It is recognized that Afro-Latino communities need to work together to arrive at solutions that their governments can implement. At present, Afro-Latino organizations in Latin America are often weak, as they are dependent on other departments and frequently lack sufficient budgets. It was suggested that Canada could assist these organizations by contributing technical skills that will facilitate co-operation.

Leaders from Afro-Latino communities are calling for solutions that reduce the dependency of the people on their governments. There is a need to strengthen young African descendants, since the future of the Afro-Latino communities lies in their hands. Solutions to Afro-Latino problems must be framed around empowerment.

## Session 2: Development Agency Programs

The dialogue for Session 2 focused on what progress has been made in combating poverty in Afro-Latino communities. Although this has been a largely ignored issue, several development agencies have taken the lead in designing programs for economic, political and social development in these communities. The organizations that are at the forefront of this issue include the World Bank, IDB and IAF. Each of these organizations made presentations at the conference, and they represent positive examples for Canadian organizations to follow.

### **World Bank**

The World Bank provides vital financial and technical assistance to developing countries around the world to achieve their organizational *raison d'être*: working to make the world free of poverty. The World Bank has taken a proactive stance to addressing the disproportionate privation and social exclusion of Afro-Latinos.



It has developed a multi-faceted approach to the severe poverty that is common among African descendants in Latin America and the Caribbean. The World Bank's strategy for Afro-Latinos attempts to:

- strengthen the capacity of Afro-Latino civil society organizations and communities to play a greater role in the design and implementation of projects;
- tailor the World Bank's lending program to address the needs of Afro-Latinos;
- expand the knowledge base about Afro-Latino issues through analytical work;
- forge partnerships with other international agencies and organizations working to improve the conditions of Afro-Latinos;
- strengthen the Bank's capacity to more effectively respond to the needs of Afro-Latino men and women in its lending programs, policies and analysis.

The World Bank has published a number of influential studies that highlight the plight of Afro-Latinos. For instance, "Inequality in Latin America and the Caribbean: Breaking with History?" examines group-based inequities. It lays out a salient quantitative picture of the predicament facing groups that suffer structural and social exclusion. European-descendant men and their households generally score higher on a diverse set of social indicators, such as labour income, formal sector employment, assets, and access to health care and education.

This organization has collaborated with other multilateral organizations to co-ordinate conferences for addressing social inclusion. In November 2000, it held the first Todos Contamos (Everyone Counts) conference to raise awareness among demographers and government census personnel, as well as among Indigenous and African-descendant individuals and organizations in Latin America, about the need to include questions on race and ethnicity in national censuses. The conference sparked a positive reaction, and 10 countries in the region included questions about racial or ethnic self-identification in their censuses over the next two years. Todos Contamos II brought together more than 100 representatives to review the progress that had been made, discuss the lessons that had been learned, explore methodologies and share examples of how census questions could be improved.

The World Bank representative at the March 2nd Ottawa conference, Josefina Stubbs, emphasized in her presentation that building successful democracies inherently implies inclusion of all members of society. Inequality ruins social capital and only stimulates unrest and acrimony. When the political and social mainstream embraces the groups that have been traditionally excluded, democratic consolidation is deepened. This is especially important in Latin America and the Caribbean, where most countries are relatively new democracies.



## **Inter-American Development Bank**

The Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) is the main source of multi-lateral financing for economic, social and institutional development projects, as well as trade and regional integration programs, in Latin America and the Caribbean. Its mission is to “contribute to the acceleration of the process of economic and social development of the regional member countries, individually and collectively.” Claire Nelson represented the IDB at the conference.

The cornerstone of this organization’s strategy for social and economic development in Afro-Latino communities is the Social Inclusion Trust Fund. With funding from the Norwegian Royal Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the British Department for International Development, the Fund supports initiatives that promote inclusion of groups that have been historically excluded from the economic, social and political spheres in Latin America and the Caribbean. Since its inception in 2003, the Social Inclusion Trust Fund has awarded more than US\$1,426,866 in grants for social inclusion projects, and it channels its support to excluded groups in three main areas:

1. Organizational strengthening and awareness raising,
2. Research and dissemination,
3. Support to bank operations.

Afro-Latinos are one of five groups identified by the IDB as being traditionally excluded. Of the projects that have been financed by the Fund, 33 per cent have been targeted toward Afro-Latino communities.

Ms. Nelson argued that, in addition to supporting the Social Inclusion Trust Fund, development organizations need to help create an environment of self-sustainability and prosperity within impoverished Afro-Latino communities. In essence, by working with grassroots non-governmental organizations and civil society, and ensuring that their plight is not forgotten, aid groups can help Afro-Latinos help themselves.

## **Inter-American Foundation**

The Inter-American Foundation (IAF) is an independent United States government foreign aid agency. Representing the IAF at the conference was Linda Kolko.

The IAF funds a variety of grassroots economic and social projects throughout the Americas. Since 1972, it has provided 4,578 grants totalling US\$586 million. Many of the funded projects are undertaken in collaboration with local non-governmental organizations. By working with grassroots groups, the IAF is able to empower the poor to take an active role in solving their problems. Other IAF grants allocate funding to larger intermediary organizations that provide beneficiary groups with credit, training, and technical and marketing assistance. Afro-Latino communities have been the recipients of a good proportion of these grants.



Since the Afro-Latino movement has grown tremendously in strength and organization in the past few years, the IAF no longer takes an active role in organizing Afro-Latino conferences. There is remarkable appetite and energy within the communities themselves for performing the planning function. Instead, the IAF is using its resources to fund these conferences, including the provision of travel grants to Afro-Latino community leaders to allow them to attend and speak at these conferences. These leaders are vital to the future success of the Afro-Latino movement, and if their issue is going to attract attention and funding, their voices must be heard.

### Session 3: Recommendations and What is Canada's Role?

The roundtable participants identified seven critical areas in which Canada can play a role in supporting Afro-Latino communities. These avenues for participation are as follows:

1. Providing funding,
2. Developing a holistic policy approach,
3. Empowering local communities,
4. Promoting accountability,
5. Engaging the diaspora,
6. Promoting and conducting research,
7. Raising awareness.

#### **Development Assistance**

One of the most serious issues facing African descendants is their lack of resources. One third of the Latin American population is Afro-Latino, and half of them are poor. Insufficient funding that targets this group guarantees their continued social exclusion and economic destitution.

Canada can certainly help alleviate the poverty of Afro-Latinos. While Canada does not have infinite resources to give, it does have an international aid agency that works toward the reduction of poverty. Since Afro-Latinos suffer most disproportionately from poverty, Canada's financial and technical assistance would make a huge impact.

#### **Major Recommendations Resulting From The Conference**

##### **Recommendation 1: Look at Existing Projects and Co-ordinate With Other Donors**

Canada can look at its existing development projects in the Americas and examine whether these programs might be improved by adding a focus on race. This does not mean a major upheaval in policy. Rather, by examining



each file through a racial lens, Canada may be better able to help the most disadvantaged people.

Canada can make a positive and genuine contribution to the Afro-Latino issue by co-ordinating with aid agencies that have existing programs targeted toward African descendants. These aid agencies are always looking to create strategic partnerships with new donors. By meeting with these groups, Canada can determine areas where funding is needed, and where it is saturated. In particular, CIDA has been invited to visit the IAC and its affiliate offices in Washington. By building strategic partnerships with other aid agencies and avoiding overlapping projects, Canada may be able to make its resources go farther.

### **Recommendation 2: Provide Long-Term Support and Targeted Assistance for Afro-Latinos**

Once financial support has been allocated for Afro-Latino communities, it is important to sustain this support. Many of the conference participants insisted that long-term funding needs to be secured for these communities. It was suggested that development institutions organize a constant funding network for Afro-Latino issues. In particular, Canada could provide ongoing support to the IDB's Social Inclusion Trust Fund.

Development strategy is heavily focused on gender and Indigenous groups. Afro-Latino groups suffer the same social and economic exclusion as these groups do, yet they are largely ignored by Canadian donors. A major problem is that the Afro-Latino issue is new and largely unknown to Canadians.

CIDA operates regional desks, which concentrate on a given area. While many of its projects target gender inequalities, CIDA does not do the same with racial inequalities. In addition, Latin American countries are considered to be within the middle-income range of countries. As a result, development dollars have been targeted toward other countries, which are considered to be poor as a whole. However, this approach does not consider how the socio-economic status of Afro-Latinos is not representative of that of other Latin Americans: the conditions that Afro-Latinos face are more comparable with those in the poorest countries of the world.

### **Recommendation 3: Take a Holistic Development Approach**

There is a need for the Canadian government to adopt a more holistic way of approaching development aid in the world. By not directly targeting Afro-Latinos, Canadian aid agencies are missing a sizable portion of the region's poorest citizens. Poverty alleviation programs should help the most destitute, and in the Americas the poorest are Afro-Latinos. It is therefore necessary to target this group when allocating development funding.

Some may argue that allocating resources for Afro-Latino communities may take resources away from other causes, thereby creating an adversarial situation and playing off Afro-Latinos against women or Indigenous people. But resource allocation does not need to work in such a manner. The advance-



ment of the most impoverished does not necessarily come at the expense of others. There should be an agenda that reflects not just one approach but others that complement existing initiatives.

Canadian developmental strategy does not need to be mutually exclusive. For instance, while many women in the Americas are poor, Afro-Latino women are the most poverty-stricken. Canadian donors can look at the IDB's Social Inclusion Trust Fund as a model for funding development projects that cross-racial and gender boundaries. In total, 39 per cent of this organization's funding has gone to crosscutting projects, with gender issues mainstreamed into all projects. Canada should design its own policies accordingly, by also making racial issues a crosscutting theme in its own development projects.

#### **Recommendation 4: Promote Capacity Building and Organization in Afro-Latino Communities**

The empowerment of Afro-Latino communities is essential to the long-term success of policies pertaining to them. One of the Latin American non-governmental organizations that participated in the conference emphasized the importance of empowering civil society groups within the region to reduce their dependence on their governments for support.

In addition, local communities must be empowered to shape development policies that affect them. A relatively new trend in development is the concept of "ownership." Essentially, development is no longer a one-way street. Target communities need to be actively involved in the development process: it is important that the demand come from the communities themselves. Donors should look to the efforts of local civil society groups as a guide, and help them to achieve their objectives.

Facilitating the organization of Afro-Latino communities is another key to their empowerment. It was suggested that Canada could provide some media equipment, expertise and training to Afro-Latino communities to give them a voice and enable them to organize themselves.

#### **Recommendation 5: Promote Collaboration Among Groups**

Knowledge sharing by women's and Indigenous/First Nations groups would be invaluable to African descendants. There are many similarities between Aborigines and Afro-Latinos; as a result, there are opportunities for these groups to collaborate and to learn from each other's experiences in dealing with their shared problems.

Advocating solidarity and co-operation among these groups could be an essential ingredient in mutual advancement. Promoting collaboration and bringing these groups together would be a major triumph for Canada.

#### **Recommendation 6: Press for More Government Accountability**

The Santiago Plus 5 agreement was signed, in Chile, by Latin American countries in 2000. At the time, the signatories made commitments on issues





pertaining to Afro-Latino communities. However, it is unclear whether progress has been made in implementing the agreement. Accordingly, Latin American countries need to report on what has been done and be accountable for their commitments.

In addition, it is evident that Latin American governments are not fully meeting the needs of their Afro-Latino communities. In the past, Canada has exerted pressure on these governments with regard to other issues, such as environmental protection and women's rights. It is now time for Canada to apply pressure on these governments to be more accountable to their Afro-Latino citizens.

### **Recommendation 7: Share Statistical Expertise, and Develop New Tools and Methodologies**

Canada has expertise in the area of statistical research and analysis. It could use that expertise to help Latin American governments and development agencies in compiling and analyzing statistics on Afro-Latinos. Without statistics that are segregated by race, meaningful attempts to support Afro-Latino communities cannot be made.

It is important that new tools and methodologies continue to be developed to look at racial issues. Recently, racial diversity indicators have been applied to the Cuba program at CIDA. These indicators on race could be extended to programs for countries throughout Latin America. This would help improve understanding of Afro-Latino communities and would facilitate the development of programs for them.

### **Recommendation 8: Promote Research on Afro-Latinos**

It is imperative that more research be conducted to promote awareness of Afro-Latino issues in Canada. There is currently very little interest in these issues among academics. However, as other sectors become interested, academia will likely follow. The Canadian government could support university or other institution-based research programs on these communities. If the government takes no interest in Afro-Latino communities, their plight may go completely unnoticed. Similarly, CIDA and other organizations could engage in field research on Afro-Latino communities, which would lead to a better understanding of their situation on the ground. At the conference, it was suggested that Canada could also fund learning exchanges whereby it could promote the sharing of technical knowledge and experiences in support of Afro-Latino communities.

### **Recommendation 9: Support the CanAFRO Website**

One way to promote academic awareness of and research on Afro-Latino issues is to provide support to the new CanAFRO website that was initiated by FOCAL, with tremendous support from the Centre for International Governance Innovation (CIGI), using their database system known as "Igloo." CanAFRO is one segment of a growing community of networks on Igloo.



A CIGI representative presented the new CanAFRO database at the roundtable, and was met with resounding approval and support from the participants. The representative called the CanAFRO website a “point of exchange between researchers, government officials, students and practitioners for collaboration, open forums, submitting research and documents, as well as facilitating better coordination.”

Participants saw the CanAFRO initiative as an exciting means to promote research on and awareness of issues pertaining to Afro-Latino communities. To ensure the continued success and development of the CanAFRO website, further support is required. This is a meaningful Canadian-led initiative to which the Government of Canada can lend its support.

### **Recommendation 10: Organize and Promote Conferences**

This roundtable conference was considered groundbreaking, and many participants proclaimed the importance of keeping the momentum going and ensuring that the dialogue continues. With this in mind, many felt that Canada could play a vital role in organizing dialogue-promoting conferences, as well as participating in conferences where it could help place Afro-Latino issues on the agenda. With regard to the latter point, the upcoming Santiago Plus 5 Conference was specifically mentioned as a venue where Canada could lend its support.

Canada has played a strong role in initiating conferences in the past. While some of these conferences dealt with topics such as corporate responsibility, they did not include Indigenous or Afro-Latino voices. Accordingly, Canada can support Afro-Latino communities by helping them to participate in conferences on issues that affect them.

It was also suggested that Canada could help organize and support a meeting of all agencies that are involved in collecting disaggregated data and are willing to share it. As mentioned previously, Latin American data that are disaggregated by race could be used to facilitate greater understanding of Afro-Latino issues, and to help establish the precise direction for future conferences and policy development.

One way to promote both awareness and institutionalization of this issue is by helping to organize and fund an annual forum on the condition of Afro-Latinos. Participants strongly supported the idea of making the roundtable an annual event. With an annual meeting, while interest may rise and fall, the issue will never be completely wiped off the agenda.

### **Recommendation 11: Champion the Cause**

With its expertise pertaining to multiculturalism and diversity, Canada is well placed to play a leadership role on this issue. Not only could Canada, as a country, become an important leader in supporting Afro-Latino communities, but the primary champion for the cause of racial inclusiveness throughout the Americas could also come from Canada. In particular, the Governor General of Canada, the Right Honourable Michaëlle Jean, would be a re-



markable intermediary for the Executive in the Canadian government, the Afro-Latino diaspora within Canada, and Afro-Latino communities abroad. Her personal understanding of Afro-Latino issues, and her position within the Government of Canada, would make her an ideal champion for the cause.



# FOCAL

Canadian Foundation for the Americas  
Fondation canadienne pour les Amériques  
Fundación Canadiense para las Américas  
Fundação Canadense para as Américas



## Agenda and Speakers

# Supporting Afro-Latino Communities: Is There a Role for Canada?

## Experts' Briefing and Review of Development Agency Programmes and the Regional Agenda

Thursday, March 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2006

Ottawa, Canada

[Web cast live on-line - http://www.theigloo.org/](http://www.theigloo.org/)

### Schedule

#### 11h00 – 11h15 **Welcome and Opening Remarks**

Honourable Jean Augustine, MP, PC, Meeting Chair

Carlo Dade, Senior Advisor, FOCAL

Judith Morrison, Executive Director, Inter-Agency Coalition on Race in the Americas

Naresh Singh, Director General, Governance and Social Development, CIDA

#### 11h15-12h30 **Current Status of Afro-Latino Communities**

Benedita da Silva, Benedita da Silva Foundation, Brazil (*invited*)

Wania Sant'anna, Former Secretary for Human Rights, State of Rio de Janeiro

Romero Rodriguez, Alliance of African Descendent Organizations, Mundo Afro

#### 12h30-13h00 Working **Lunch: Presentation of Canadian Afro-Latino Forum for Research On-Line (CanAFRO)**

Centre for International Governance Innovation (CIGI)

#### 13h00-14h30 **Development Agency Programmes**

Josefina Stubbs, Senior Social Development Specialist, World Bank

Claire Nelson, Operations Officer, Inter-American Development Bank

Linda Kolko, Vice President, Inter-American Foundation

#### 14h30-16h00 **Roundtable Discussion: What is the Role for Canada?**

Canadian government, civil society organizations and [universities via the Internet](#)



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