

Latin American and Caribbean Community; Its Challenges

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Havana, (Prensa Latina) Getting the Latin American and Caribbean Community underway will be a priority on the agenda of the regional countries in the forthcoming months, as they are convinced that just with an integrating view they will be able to overcome huge challenges.

The new organization, without the US tutelage, will bring together the 33 States in the area comprising a population of 560 million inhabitants, who live from the south of the Bravo River to Patagonia.

For the region, it is a transcendental and historical milestone that on the bi-centennial of most countries' independence, it has been agreed to step towards true unity, just as Latin American paladins had dreamt of.

"Pretending to make a single nation with only one link uniting their parts among them and with the whole is a bright idea", the Liberator Simon Bolivar used to say.

Meanwhile, José Martí wrote in his Our America: "It is time for recountering and marching united and we should move closed to each other, like silver in the Andes's roots".

Nowadays, in an increasingly globalized and interdependent world, unity is a must for facing and overcoming common problems and, at the same time, strengthening the voice of Latin American and Caribbean nations in the international arena.

The world economic crisis severely hit the region, which registered a 1,7 percent economic contraction of its GDP after having kept six years of continuous growth.

This situation brought about an increase in the number of impoverished people from 180 to 189 millions and that of needy ones from 71 to 76 millions, according to data from the UN Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLA).

International financial turmoils also caused an increase of unemployment, the fall of exports, remittances and foreign investments as well as the diminishment of trade and tourism, above all in Mexico, Central America and the Caribbean.

In a report presented at the recent Summit of Unity, held in the Riviera Maya, ECLA called for higher cooperation to cope with the crisis.

The body proposed that the leaders focus on efforts for promoting intra-regional investment

in infrastructure, social cohesion and reduction of assymetries, reform of the financial system and climatic change.

Although Latin America and the Caribbean is the second least greenhouse-gas-emitting region, it is undergoing the effects of global warming more than any other; and unless actions are undertaken, it could suffer great economic harms.

Important losses in agriculture, strong pressures on infrastructure and intensity of disasters are some of them.

An increase of temperature and the sea level will affect island states in the caribbean, but they will also harm mangrooves in shallow coasts of Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador and the Rio de La Plata coastline, in Argentina.

The phenomenon would bring about reduction of precipitation in the Amazon, thus causing deterioration of the wilderness owning the greatest bio-diversity in the planet, and it would reduce availability of water in South America as well.

These and other topics, such as the indigenous people's situation, the accomplishment of the UN's goals for the Millenium or energy problems will be drawing the attention of the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States, which could be launched at the next 2011's summit in Venezuela.

The new organization, which will deal favorably with small and vulnerable economies, will work on the bases of equity, social justice, flexibility and complementarity of actions.

"This is an organization allowing us to advance with our own views", said President of Ecuador Rafael Correa, while his Brazilian counterpart Luis Inácio Lula Da Silva, regarded it a big-dimension event.

For decades, steps at the sub-regional level in the area led to the implementation of integrating mechanisms such as the Central American Integration System, The Southern Common Market, the Caribbean Community and the Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America (ALBA, by its Abbreviation in Spanish), just to mention some of them.

ALBA even made progress towards establishing a common currency for member countries: SUCRE (Single System of Regional Compensation).

But up to now, it had not been possible to achieve articulation of collaborative actions among various mechanisms of integration and bring together all the countries in the area, without exclusion.

When referring to the decision of founding the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States, the leader of the Cuban Revolution, Fidel Castro, stated: "No other institutional deed in our hemisphere during the last century reflects such repercussion".

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