

Summit of Latin American and Caribbean States Aims At Peace, Social Justice and Sovereignty

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Featured image: Brazil's President Dilma Rousseff waves next to Ecuador's President Rafael Correa ahead of the CELAC head of states meeting in Quito, Ecuador, Jan. 26, 2016. | Photo: EFE

The heads of State of the 33 nations Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC) met in Quito, Ecuador, on Wednesday. On the agenda are increased cooperation, Latin American unity, social justice, mitigating extreme poverty, inter-connectivity, safeguarding national sovereignty, economy, and conflict resolution.

The CELAC summit is the fourth since the establishment of the regional organization in 2010. One of the goals with the establishment of the block was to establish an alternative to the Organization of American States (OAS), which is widely perceived as dominated by the United States. Ecuadorean President Rafael Correa, who is pro tempore president of CELAC noted that:

“The CELAC should replace the OAS, we have no need to discuss our issues in Washington. ... That his country is not afraid to think, propose, dream and even get it wrong in this proposal because the OAS is now more anachronistic than ever.

The agenda of the CELAC summit was established at a meeting of the 33 country's foreign ministers on Tuesday. The summit will also focus on the eradication of poverty and the reduction of inequality in the region. Some Latin America and the Caribbean countries are among those with most inequality in the world. The summit will focus on an action plan for 2016 that will also address this pressing issue. With 614.4 million people, the region represents 8.6 percent of the world's population of which 28 percent live in poverty.

The summit also aims at working toward five points of the 2020 Agenda during this fourth summit. These are, the reduction of extreme poverty and inequality; the development of science, technology and innovation; a strategy against climate change; the establishment of infrastructure and connectivity and financing for development.

Mitigating extreme poverty, bridging the wealth gap, working toward greater inter-connectivity and other of the goals set forth by CELAC has become a greater challenge due to the plunging oil prices. The CELAC - OAS “competition” is in part mirrored in terms of bilateral relations between respective member States, depending on changing governments. That is, governments that are either leaning towards a more socialist or a more neo-liberal or conservative policy and economy.

A statement of Ecuador's foreign minister, Ricardo Patiño exemplifies the CELAC - OAS competition, saying that there is a need for the region to create a different economic model to capitalism. He said Latin American countries should invest their wealth in their people to "advance social and economic development."

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Ecuadorean President Rafael Correa will transfer the pro tempore chairmanship of the bloc to his Dominican counterpart Danilo Medina. The Ecuadorean head of state said his country is delivering a bloc that has all the ability to address conflicts like the one in Colombia. "CELAC has the ability to support the verification of cease-fire and surrender of weapons in Colombia," he said and recalled that the region was declared a "peace zone" in 2014.

CELAC members Cuba and Venezuela have been playing leading roles in brokering the bilateral ceasefire between the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia - Peoples' Army (FARC-EP) and the Colombian government.

The ceasefire came into effect on January 1, 2016. Peace talks have been held in the Cuban capital Havana since 2012. Both the [FARC-EP](#) and the Colombian government aim at signing a final peace accord in 2016. Both sides agree that the main threat to peace and security in Colombia and beyond today comes from right-wing neo-paramilitaries like Los Urabenos.

[CELAC](#) was established in 2010 under the primary initiative and patronage of the late Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez. The block gathers 33 countries that represent 17 percent of the United Nations member states.

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