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LAC states create new regional bloc

José Antonio Zabalgaitia

(La traduction française suit)

The region is getting closer to speaking with a single voice on the world stage.

Latin American and Caribbean leaders gathered in Mexico on Feb. 22 and 23 for the Unity Summit, convened by President Felipe Calderón. The summit merged the 21st Rio Group Summit with the second Latin American and Caribbean Summit for Integration and Development (CALC). Twenty-six heads of state or government—the highest turnout ever for a regional meeting—participated in the meeting to discuss a unified agenda stemming from the rich and diverse thematic heritage of the Rio Group and from CALC's mandates. It was also an important step in an endeavour to give rise to a unified, stronger and better co-ordinated Latin America and Caribbean (LAC) region that can speak with one voice on the world stage.

The Declaration of Cancún released after the meeting demonstrated a broad regional consensus on main areas of concern such as the global financial crisis, democracy, development, energy, environment, human rights, infrastructure, natural disaster prevention and relief, public security and, notably, co-ordination and convergence among sub-regional institutions and mechanisms.

Creating a unified regional agenda under common goals and interests would have been a sufficiently significant achievement. However, the Unity Summit's most significant result was the leaders' historic decision to constitute the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States.



Photo: Office of the President of Mexico

Mexican President Felipe Calderón opens the Unity Summit.

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FOCAL Views: A corporate accountability bill of no avail

Bill C-300 is seriously flawed and needlessly risks irreversible damage to Canada's mining industry.

As an independent think-tank at the juncture of civil society, academia, government and the private sector with extensive work in corporate social responsibility (CSR) and indigenous governance in mining, we feel confident saying that the *Corporate Accountability of Mining, Oil and Gas Corporations in Developing Countries Act*, or Bill C-300, has to be in the running for the worst piece of legislation before Parliament.

The bill creates an illusion of action to improve Canadian company behaviour abroad. In reality it adds nothing to CSR standards already required by Export Development Canada (EDC) and used by Canadian companies.

Worse, the bill would weaken one of Canada's most competitive industries by imposing Canada-only costs on companies that, contrary to the bill's assumption, are acknowledged global CSR leaders. Asian and especially Chinese companies —recognized leaders in social irresponsibility— face no such burdens and would benefit.

We have seen this train wreck before. Well-intentioned, but naive Canadian NGOs chased Canada's Talisman Energy out of Sudan only to see it replaced by a Sino-Indian joint venture that immediately gutted Talisman's belated but serious CSR initiatives: Sudan lost, Canada lost and the oil still flowed. But Canadians felt better about themselves.

Bill C-300 sets us down this path again. It mandates the international trade minister to develop "human rights and environmental standards based upon the International Finance Corporations (IFC) Performance Stan-

dards on Social and Environmental Sustainability; the Voluntary Principles on Security and Human Rights and any other standard consistent with international human rights standards" to judge complaints against Canadian extractive companies.

Why? Canadian companies are already de facto bound by the Equator Principles, a benchmark based on the IFC Performance Standards and used by EDC, all major Canadian banks and 70 of the world's largest financial institutions to manage social and environmental impacts of projects they finance. Banks using the principles simply do not lend for projects not passing muster. Unless financed by the Government of China, any extractive company has to comply with the Equator Principles.


Standards evolve and the IFC is revising the Performance Standards. Yet, at least these standards and the Equator Principles are transparent: if changed, a company knows what it will face. But Bill C-300's "any other standard" qualifier is simply absurd. How can anyone be held accountable now for a standard that will be determined later and could perpetually change?

It gets worse. Under the bill, complaints could be brought by anyone regardless of whether they are impacted by a company's activities. Accessibility to complaint procedures is crucial, but the bill practically invites the disgruntled or irresponsible to seize this officially sanctioned, and very public, platform to slander companies through baseless accusations.

Office space in New York or London is looking attractive to companies not to

escape responsibility, which is impossible given the prevalence of the Equator Principles, but to avoid the headaches and competitive disadvantages of staying in Canada.

The real shame here is that Canadian companies are working to improve conditions in communities where they operate. As just one example, Canadian mining company Placer Dome won the prestigious World Bank Development Marketplace award for its innovation in community health work. Instead of encouraging this type of activity by having the government provide resources and assistance similar to what the U.S. and European governments use to leverage CSR activities by their companies, Bill C-300 would only add costs and thereby cede ground to our competitors.

Canadians want to see improvements in communities where extractive industries operate. They also want to see Canadian companies compete. But Bill C-300 would achieve neither; it would only reinforce a Canadian competitive disadvantage —that of shooting ourselves in the foot. The bill may make a few Canadians feel better, but it will not help anyone else. 

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LAC states create new regional bloc

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This decision came after President Calderón initially proposed at the Santo Domingo 20th Rio Group Summit in 2008 to create a mechanism that could “be the foundation of a genuine conference of Latin American and Caribbean peoples.” It is, at the same time, the starting point in a process to define the nature of this Community, its capabilities and future characteristics.

It will most certainly give rise to a complex negotiation process, requiring both consistent political will from all states to bridge differences, as well as imagination and creativity to build a dynamic mechanism that effectively promotes LAC common interests. Fortunately, leaders have provided a blueprint to guide these negotiations in the Declaration of the Unity Summit.

First and foremost, this declaration stresses the need for LAC to have its own regional space in order to consolidate and project a shared identity. Several leaders noted at the Unity Summit that LAC was perhaps the only major region in the world that did not yet have its own forum. This situation highlights a need that is all the more pressing in a multilateral context where essential global issues are increasingly dealt with through regional group negotiations.

The Declaration of the Unity Summit establishes a direct link between the newly created community and both the Rio Group and the CALC, which provide it with basic values and principles, purpose and a core future agenda.

In this regard, the Rio Group’s two decades of experience in political co-

ordination and confidence-building among LAC governments will be essential to provide self-designed solutions to manage the region’s own conflicts. Moreover, the Rio Group’s hard-earned commitment to democracy and to full respect and observance of human rights that is reflected in the Community’s founding text is also a key building block. In fact, the declaration states that “democracy is one of our region’s most valued conquests, that the peaceful transmission of power through institutional means and with strict compliance to the constitutional rules in each of our States is the product of a continuous and irreversible process on which the region admits no interruptions or stepping backward.”


The Community will also draw upon the Rio Group and CALC experiences in fostering co-ordinated actions and harmonization with the several sub-regional integration institutions and mechanisms in LAC. By establishing clear priorities, promoting communication and taking advantage of synergies, it is possible to achieve greater efficiency and proper allocation of scarce resources, and to avoid duplication of efforts by seeing convergence as a main long-term goal.

The Community will focus on developing and implementing LAC co-operation and sustainable development strategies, using the Rio Group and CALC agendas and mandates as starting points. At the Unity Summit, leaders took a significant step in committing to contribute to relief and reconstruction efforts in Haiti, and to co-ordinate LAC aid with international organizations based on the needs and priorities determined by

the Haitian government.

In time, the Community should become the region’s most representative interlocutor vis-à-vis main international actors, other groups of countries and regional organizations. According to its founding declaration, its members will encourage this type of dialogue “in order to strengthen the presence of the region in the international arena.” In doing so, it will be able to promote “the Latin American and Caribbean agenda in global forums and better position Latin America and the Caribbean in the face of relevant international developments.”

The historic significance of the Unity Summit lies in this contribution to LAC’s institutional architecture. Once the Community has taken its final form, LAC’s voice and participation in the United Nations and other regional organizations will be strengthened. Likewise, it will be able to contribute more effectively to the attainment of the goals and objectives of these organizations.

The LAC region can benefit from a unified, stronger and better co-ordinated Community that advances toward development and engages responsibly in international affairs. This will allow Canada and other nations to work with a valuable and reliable partner, to co-operate, exchange viewpoints, share concerns and pursue common interests both in our hemisphere and on the world stage. 

Ambassador José Antonio Zabalgoitia is Mexico’s National Co-ordinator for the Rio Group.

Les États latino-américains et caribéens créent leur bloc régional

José Antonio Zabalgaitia

La région cherche à parler d'une seule voix sur la scène internationale.

Les 22 et 23 février dernier, les leaders d'Amérique latine et des Caraïbes (ALC) se sont réunis au Mexique pour le Sommet de l'Unité convoqué par le président Felipe Calderón. Celui-ci rassemblait ainsi le 21^e Sommet du Groupe de Rio et le deuxième Sommet de l'Amérique latine et des Caraïbes sur l'intégration et le développement (CALC). Le Sommet de l'Unité a réuni 26 chefs d'État ou de gouvernement —la plus grande participation jusqu'ici à une réunion régionale— pour discuter d'un programme d'action commun tributaire des thèmes riches et variés hérités du Groupe de Rio et du CALC. Ce rendez-vous marquait aussi une étape importante vers la création d'une communauté latino caribéenne unie, forte, mieux coordonnée et capable de parler d'une seule voix sur la scène internationale.

La Déclaration de Cancún qui a suivi la réunion reflète un large consensus sur les enjeux clés dans la région, à savoir la crise financière mondiale, la démocratie, le développement, les droits de la personne, l'énergie, l'environnement, l'infrastructure, la prévention des catastrophes naturelles et l'aide d'urgence, la sécurité publique et, notamment, la coordination et la convergence au sein des institutions et des mécanismes sous-régionaux.

La création d'un programme d'action régional guidé par des objectifs et des intérêts communs aurait représenté un résultat assez significa-



Photo: Bureau du Président du Mexique

Le président mexicain Felipe Calderón et sa femme, Margarita Zavala, souhaitent la bienvenue au président haïtien René Préal lors du Sommet de l'Unité.

tif. Mais, la réalisation la plus importante du Sommet de l'Unité aura été la décision historique des leaders de créer la Communauté des États latino-américains et caribéens.

Cette décision est intervenue après que le président Calderón eut proposé, lors du 20^e sommet du Groupe de Rio en 2008 à Santo Domingo, la création d'un mécanisme qui pourrait « être la base d'une véritable conférence des États d'Amérique latine et des Caraïbes ». La décision est en même temps le point de départ d'un processus en vue de définir la nature de la Communauté, ses capacités et ses particularités.

D'autre part, cette décision donnera lieu très certainement à un processus de négociation complexe

exigeant à la fois de tous les États une ferme volonté politique pour rapprocher les divergences ainsi que de l'imagination et de la créativité pour bâtir un mécanisme dynamique capable de promouvoir efficacement les intérêts communs de la région. Heureusement, les chefs d'État ont, dans la Déclaration du Sommet de l'Unité, fourni un cadre devant orienter ces négociations.

Tout d'abord, cette déclaration souligne la nécessité qu'à la communauté de se créer un espace régional pour renforcer et projeter une identité commune. Lors du Sommet, plusieurs chefs d'État ont observé que l'entité ALC est peut-être la seule région importante au monde à ne pas avoir son propre forum. Cette

situation fait ressortir un besoin urgent dans un contexte multilatéral où les grandes questions internationales sont de plus en plus traitées à travers les négociations des groupes régionaux.

La déclaration établit un lien direct entre la Communauté qui vient d'être créée et le Groupe de Rio ainsi que le CALC auxquels elle doit ses valeurs et principes de base, sa raison d'être et ses futures orientations.

À cet égard, l'expérience acquise par le Groupe de Rio depuis 20 ans en matière de coordination politique et de renforcement de la confiance entre les gouvernements de la région sera indispensable pour trouver des solutions viables aux conflits. Un autre élément clé pour la construction de la Communauté se trouve dans l'engagement ferme —à l'image de celui du Groupe de Rio— envers la démocratie, le respect des droits humains et leur observance qui se reflète dans son texte fondateur. De fait, la déclaration stipule que « la démocratie est l'une des conquêtes les plus précieuses de notre région et la passation paisible des pouvoirs, dans le respect des institutions et des règles constitutionnelles de chaque État, est le résultat d'un processus irréversible et face auquel la région n'admet aucune interruption ni recul ».

La Communauté tirera parti aussi des acquis du Groupe de Rio et du CALC pour encourager des actions concertées et l'harmonisation des institutions et des mécanismes sous-régionaux d'intégration. En établissant des priorités claires, en favorisant la communication et en profitant des synergies, il est possible d'accroître les gains d'efficacité, d'affecter convenablement des ressources limitées et d'éviter la dupli-


cation des efforts, la convergence étant alors un objectif important à long terme.

La Communauté élaborera et mettra en œuvre les stratégies en faveur de la coopération et du développement durable en partant du programme d'action et du mandat du Groupe de Rio et du CALC. Au Sommet de l'Unité, les chefs d'État ont fait un pas considérable en prenant l'engagement significatif de contribuer aux efforts d'aide et de reconstruction d'Haïti et de coordonner cette aide régionale avec les organisations internationales selon les besoins et les priorités déterminés par le gouvernement haïtien.

Avec le temps, la Communauté devrait devenir un interlocuteur privilégié pour les principaux acteurs internationaux, d'autres groupes de pays et les entités régionales. Fidèles aux principes énoncés dans la déclaration fondatrice, les États membres favoriseront ce type de dialogue « afin de renforcer la présence de la région sur la scène internationale ». Ce faisant, la Communauté pourra promouvoir « le programme d'action de l'Amérique latine et des Caraïbes dans les forums mondiaux et mieux positionner l'Amérique latine et les Caraïbes face à l'évolution, au niveau international, de la situation qui les concerne ».

La signification historique du Sommet de l'Unité réside dans sa contribution à l'architecture institutionnelle de la région latino caribéenne. Une fois qu'elle aura pris sa forme finale, la voix et la participation de la Communauté au sein des Nations Unies et auprès des autres entités régionales seront renforcées. De même, la Communauté pourra contribuer plus effi-

cacement à l'atteinte des objectifs de ces organisations.

La région formée par l'Amérique latine et les Caraïbes gagne à être une communauté unie, plus forte et mieux coordonnée, qui progresse dans la voie du développement et s'engage dans les affaires internationales de manière responsable. C'est à ce prix que le Canada et d'autres nations y trouveront un partenaire précieux et fiable et avec lequel coopérer, échanger des opinions, partager des préoccupations et poursuivre des intérêts communs aussi bien à l'échelle de notre hémisphère que sur la scène internationale. 

José Antonio Zabalgaitia est Ambassadeur et Coordonnateur national du Mexique au sein du Groupe de Rio.

Health and society

UNAIDS calls for an end to stigma

Michel Sidibé, the executive director of the United Nations Joint Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS), has called for a stop to penalizing laws that impede the AIDS response in the Caribbean.

He said that reducing homophobia and removing laws that criminalize sex between men create the right conditions for achieving universal access.

Eleven of the 16 Caribbean countries currently have anti-sodomy legislation, and in many countries, men who have sex with men are not reached with HIV prevention and treatment.

Still invisible: Persons with disabilities in post-quake Haiti

Cassandra Phillips, Steven Estey and Mary Ennis

Now that the camera crews have gone, what will be done for people with existing and new disabilities?

When the world was attentive to the shocking reports and images out of Haiti in the aftermath of the January earthquake, nothing was heard about what was happening to people already living with disabilities.

When the injured were dug out from the rubble, many were horrified to discover that hundreds of amputations were performed under canvas, without proper equipment. Now that the camera crews have packed up and moved on, how much will be done for people with existing and newly-acquired disabilities? And how will they be included in the rebuilding of Haiti?

The quake killed up to 200,000 people, injured many others and left one-third of the country's population of nine million in need of emergency aid. Approximately 800,000 Haitians were already living with a disability, and in the first few weeks after the quake, 2,000 to 4,000 amputations were performed.

Sadly, it is expected that the number of persons living with physical disabilities will continue to rise. Lack of mobility aids, such as crutches, can lead to limb shortage and permanent disability. The lack of clean water and poor sanitation can result in secondary wound infection, gangrene and amputation. For the same reason, those with newly-acquired amputations may need another amputation higher up on the body if the stump gets infected.

In Haiti, myths about disability pose barriers to assistance for per-

sons with disabilities. Many Haitians view disability as a curse or punishment. For instance, children experiencing epileptic seizures are presumed possessed. Family hardship is blamed on the child with a disability. As a result, children with disabilities are either hidden from sight or abandoned in sewers.

In this context, what type of protection is available for persons with disabilities? The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) that came into force in 2008 is an international human rights instrument that should guide both relief work and long-term reconstruction in Haiti. The CRPD outlines state obligations to persons with disabilities during humanitarian crisis, including right to life, right to access, right to protection of integrity and right to community inclusion.

Immediately following any major disaster, many persons with disabilities flee their homes, leaving behind wheelchairs, braces and crutches. They rely on others to carry them to safety and to fetch them food and water in the makeshift camps. These settings are too often a breeding ground for the violation of their human rights.

Later, in post-disaster situations when people are moved out of camps into outlying areas, transition can be difficult for persons with disabilities; they may have longer distances to travel to find food, pump water and obtain medical



Photo: With permission © World Vision, 2010

It is expected that the number of persons living with physical disabilities will continue to rise.

care or rehabilitation services. Even when they are able to access basic necessities, some lack the stamina to carry them home.

People with existing and newly-acquired disabilities may be physically unable to continue with their previous employment. New homes or schools may be inaccessible, increasing once again their dependence on others.

In Haiti today, Valerie Scherrer of the German NGO Christian Blind Missions (CBM) states that "persons living with disabilities before the earthquake remain invisible. They are not given priority since everyone is trying to survive."



Photo: With permission © World Vision, 2010

Amidst the destruction of the earthquake, roughly 800,000 Haitians were already living with disability. In the first few weeks after the quake, 2,000 to 4,000 amputations were performed.

Nonetheless, the intent of international humanitarian organizations is to reach all those in need. Patrick Sooma at World Vision International (WVI) reports from Haiti that, “disability is considered in all aspects of the humanitarian response effort. A Protection Team supervises food distribution to ensure equal access, and outlying communities are given advance notice of deliveries so that persons with disabilities can get someone to pick up their supplies.”

Clearly this is a step in the right direction, but is it enough? WVI’s efforts are an excellent start, yet Scherrer claims that food baskets are often too heavy for persons with disabilities to lift. Others state that orphaned children with post-traumatic stress disorder wander their ramshackle villages, stealing food from neighbours.

Co-ordinating the relief effort in a country with an already weak infrastructure is no easy task. At this time, there are many stakeholders, both international and local, who want to be involved. Scherrer notes that many of these groups have no disability-related experience.

Rebuilding Haiti will be a complex process. Disabled Peoples’ International (DPI) views persons with disabilities as the experts on disability issues. As such, they should be consulted on reconstruction, education, employment training and accommodation needs. Hopefully, funding for rehabilitation programs will respond to adults and children with a variety of disabilities, not just children with amputations. Yet to be addressed are educational programs to shatter cultural myths and stereotypes about persons with disabilities. Finally, greater respect for international humanitarian law as a means of enhancing the protection of those who have had to flee their homes will go a long way to ensure that the rights of persons with disabilities are upheld. 🌐

Steven Estey is Human Rights Officer, Disabled Peoples’ International (DPI). Mary Ennis is Executive Director, DPI. Cassandra Phillips, PhD (University of Saskatchewan) is the Editor of Disability International, a publication of DPI, and the Editor

of DPI’s Electronic Newsletter. DPI is the largest cross-disability grass-roots organization in the world with a network of 134 national assemblies, mostly in developing nations. For more information, visit <http://www.dpi.org>.

Canadian politics

Kenney criticized for refugee policy

Jason Kenney, Canada’s immigration minister, announced in late March that the federal government will be allowing more refugees into the country, but it won’t be footing the whole bill. He announced that an additional 2,500 refugees will be permitted each year, but private organizations must sponsor 2,000 of these refugees and give them financial and social support, leaving the government to sponsor the remaining 500.

Further, the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) is slated to choose the 2,500 additional refugees.

This is an adjustment from the plan in place today: currently, the government covers the costs of resettling 70 per cent of roughly 12,000 refugee claimants to Canada per year.

Janet Dench, the executive director of the Canadian Council for Refugees, has said this strategy is the wrong approach. She says that refugee determination should be based upon the case of each individual, and adds that the new policy seems disrespectful to private sponsors.

Pensar la relación México-Canadá

Olga Abizaid

(English translation follows)

La relación bilateral es crucial para Canadá.

Durante más de un año la relación con México ha sido cuestionada en influyentes círculos dentro de Canadá, en los que se le responsabiliza a ese país por las crecientes medidas de seguridad que el gobierno de Estados Unidos está implementando a lo largo de la frontera con Canadá. Como evidencia de ello se han subrayado los problemas que viene enfrentando México en materia de seguridad pública en el contexto de la guerra contra las drogas y en particular en la frontera con Estados Unidos. La recomendación: trazar una línea limítrofe en el Río Bravo que separe a México del espacio que comenzamos a llamar Norteamérica. Si estos comentarios comenzaban a causar preocupación en México, la decisión del gobierno de Canadá de imponer un requisito de visado para los mexicanos el verano pasado ha sido interpretada por algunos como muestra fehaciente del deterioro del valor estratégico que se le da a la relación con México.

La realidad, no obstante, dista de ser así; es mucho más compleja. Sin embargo estos argumentos nos permiten examinar la relación bilateral con México, y en este ejercicio valorar el porqué esta relación es importante para Canadá.

Hasta ahora, la importancia de la relación México-Canadá se ha definido por la interrelación que existe entre las dinámicas regionales en América del Norte por una parte y la relación bilateral entre estos dos países por otra. Los intercambios que se

dan en el ámbito económico, político y de la seguridad se miran siempre a través de esa dicotomía.

Pensar en la relación con México es pensar en un socio comercial. Hoy por hoy, gracias al Tratado de Libre Comercio de América del Norte (TLCAN), México es uno de los principales socios comerciales de Canadá —precedido sólo por Estados Unidos, China, Japón y el Reino Unido— y es pieza clave en las estrategias de producción global de varias empresas internacionales, incluidas las canadienses, y lo será aún más conforme los precios del transporte se encarezcan. Sería entonces un error grave el pensar que la relación comercial de Canadá con Estados Unidos tiene lugar exclusivamente en el paralelo 49 y hacer recomendaciones bajo esa premisa; para muchas empresas canadienses, el acceso al mercado estadounidense se da también en la frontera de ese país con México.


Pensar la relación México-Canadá demanda también el reconocimiento de los cambios que han tenido lugar en México, los cuales han facilitado un acercamiento entre estos dos países y sentado las bases para una agenda política fuerte tendiente al fortalecimiento de instituciones en un amplio abanico de temas que abarca, entre otros, procesos electorales, federalismo, acceso a la información, modernización del servicio público y derechos humanos; el de más reciente inclusión ha sido el tema de seguridad, en el que se están abordando temas tan diversos como el fortale-

cimiento del sistema judicial, la capacitación y profesionalización de cuerpos policíacos a nivel federal y la cooperación para enfrentar al crimen organizado. México es hoy un socio político con el que compartimos visiones del mundo similares. Los intercambios a nivel político y en materia de seguridad, a su vez, se enmarcan dentro de esfuerzos regionales, tanto bilaterales como los esquemas de cooperación con Estados Unidos, así como en el contexto de la Alianza para la Seguridad y la Prosperidad de América del Norte (ASPAN). Si eso fuera poco, se espera que algunas de las iniciativas que se están llevando a cabo en el área de seguridad se vean beneficiadas por el Programa para Capacitación Anti-Crimen para las Américas lanzado por el Primer Ministro de Canadá Stephen Harper en Guadalajara el verano pasado.

Pensar la relación bilateral y la forma en la que ésta se inserta en Norteamérica es prerequisite también para entender, por un lado, que en esta región existe un nivel de interdependencia más grande del que se reconoce y que ello requiere respuestas adecuadas y coordinadas. El mejor ejemplo de que esto es posible cuando existe voluntad fue el manejo de la crisis provocada por la pandemia del virus H1N1 en el 2009.

Finalmente, si realmente estamos dispuestos a mirar el potencial de la relación, valdría la pena decir que muchos de los intercambios que actualmente se están llevando a cabo al interior de la agenda bilateral pueden

coadyuvar a la materialización de una idea que ha estado en el tintero desde hace mucho tiempo: la cooperación entre México y Canadá en América latina.

¿Podemos entonces pensar la relación con México de otra manera? 

Olga Abizaid es Directora del Foro de Investigación sobre América del Norte y puede ser contactada por correo electrónico en: oabizaid@focal.ca.

Multilateralism

OAS elections show consistency

Secretary General José Miguel Insulza and Assistant Secretary General Albert R. Ramdin were both re-elected to their Organization of American States (OAS) positions on March 24, 2010.

Insulza, who ran unopposed, now embarks on his second five-year term. In his speech during the Special General Assembly at the OAS headquarters in Washington, D.C., he encouraged member states to continue their efforts to build democracy, human rights and public security. He added that although the OAS had made progress on these fronts, it can still make a big effort to improve its work.

Insulza has been criticized by some in the past year for his handling of the Honduras political crisis following the June 2009 coup, his support for lifting Cuba's ban from the organization and his lenient ways with leftist governments in the region, including Venezuela.

The vote occurred just as U.S. legislators have been urging OAS reform.

Thinking through the Canada-Mexico relationship

Olga Abizaid

The rapport between the two countries is crucial for Canada.

For more than a year, our relationship with Mexico has been questioned in influential circles within Canada. This country is being blamed for the increased security measures that the United States is implementing along its border with Canada. As evidence of this, Canada has underlined the problems confronting Mexico in terms of public security in the context of the war on drugs, particularly close to the U.S.-Mexico border. The recommendation: drawing a line through the Río Bravo to separate Mexico from the area we are starting to call North America. If these comments had begun to cause concern in Mexico, the Canadian government's decision to impose visa requirements on Mexicans last summer has been interpreted by some as irrefutable proof of the decline in the strategic value placed on relations with Mexico.

The reality is much more complex. However, these arguments allow us to examine our bilateral relationship with Mexico and, in doing so, to assess why the relationship is important for Canada.

Until now the importance of the Canada-Mexico relationship has been defined by the interrelations that exist between regional dynamics in North America on the one hand, and the bilateral relationship on the other hand. The exchanges that have taken place in the economic, political and security spheres have always been looked at in light of this dichotomy.


To think about our relationship with Mexico is to think of a commercial partnership. At the moment, thanks to the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), Mexico is one of Canada's main trading partners —preceded only by the U.S., China, Japan and the U.K.— and a key factor in the global production strategies of various corporations, including Canadian ones. And it will become even more so as transportation costs increase. Therefore, it would be a serious error in judgment to think that trade between Canada and the United States only takes place at the 49th parallel and to make recommendations based on this premise. For many Canadian companies, access to the American market is also determined by dynamics at the border between the U.S. and Mexico.

Thinking about the relationship between Canada and Mexico also requires recognizing the changes that have taken place in Mexico, which have facilitated a rapprochement of the two countries. These domestic changes have also laid the groundwork for a strong bilateral political agenda intended to strengthen institutions across a wide range of areas including, among others, electoral processes, federalism, access to information, modernization of the public service and human rights. The most recent inclusion to the Canada-Mexico agenda in this area has been security, dealing with matters as diverse as the strengthening of the ju-

dicial system, the training and professionalization of police forces at the federal level, and co-operation to confront organized crime. Today, Mexico is a political partner with whom we share a similar world vision. Exchanges at the political level, and on the subject of security, are framed within regional initiatives, be it through bilateral initiatives including co-operation frameworks with the U.S. or in the context of the Security and Prosperity Partnership of North America (SPP). Furthermore, it is expected that some of the initiatives that are being carried out in the area of security will benefit from the Anti-Crime Capacity Building Program launched by Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper in Guadalajara last summer.

Thinking about the bilateral relationship and how this relationship fits in North America is also a prerequisite for understanding that there exists a level of interdependence in this region that is greater than we realize; this requires adequate and co-ordinated responses. Proof that such co-ordination is possible where the will exists was found in the joint management of the crisis caused by the H1N1 pandemic in 2009.

Finally, if we are truly willing to consider the potential of our relationship with Mexico, it is notable that many of the exchanges that are being carried out within the bilateral agenda could contribute to bringing about an idea that has long been on the drawing board: co-operation between Canada and Mexico in Latin America.

Can we, therefore, think of our relationship with Mexico in another way? 

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Advancing the agriculture for development agenda

Luc Lapointe

Education and training of temporary foreign workers in Canada can contribute to development efforts abroad.

The Future of Food, which was the theme for the 2010 Annual General Meeting of the Canadian Federation of Agriculture, rests heavily on increased co-operation and co-ordination for international labour mobility and capacity-building to support development in migrant-sending countries. Indeed, the farm workers of tomorrow are growing up outside Canada.

The majority of new entrants to the seasonal farm workforce are migrants and enter the country as temporary foreign workers. Their numbers continue to increase yearly, even in a period of economic slowdown, and some sectors such as agriculture depend heavily on this mobile and flexible workforce. In 2008, statistics released by Citizenship and Immigration Canada indicated that more than 27,000 workers came to Canada under the Seasonal Agricultural Workers Program (SAWP). Several more workers from countries that do not qualify under the SAWP program are increasingly leveraging the Temporary Foreign Workers Program (TFWP) to obtain access to the Canadian labour market.

This program has changed gradually to meet the demand of Canadian employers for skilled labour in various industries. There is no doubt that in the past years, most of the economic growth flowing

from construction, agriculture and trade was supported by temporary foreign workers.

Both programs require the direct involvement of several government departments at federal and provincial levels as well as third parties who operate in Canada and in sending countries. Many problems can arise because stakeholders—including employers, workers, governments, unions, human rights groups and recruiters—have diverging expectations. At times the complexity of this arrangement and poor co-ordination among stakeholders has rendered the SAWP and TFWP inefficient, and at others it has created adverse consequences for both workers and employers. Improved planning from all stakeholders and advanced training abroad for workers could help prevent accidents in the workplace and increase productivity.

Many have called for an overhaul of this program and changes to address the needs of temporary foreign workers and employers. With a few minor adjustments, this program could become an innovative tool for meaningful development in both countries. Canada needs a more effective mechanism to bring these workers to Canada and to create a win-win situation from which the sending country can see increased opportunities for development.

Stakeholders should acknowledge that migration can increase access to education and training for workers. The opportunity to gain Canadian know-how can open the door for enhanced trade, sustainable development and increase respect for human rights in the sending country.

In Canada, the term 'temporary foreign worker' is almost universally associated with farm workers, and very often with abused, impoverished and exploited farm workers. Our collective memory of this experiment with temporary labour has not aged well, and to this day it haunts proposals to bring more workers in agriculture or other sectors to Canada. Generally, the Canadian ideal of an immigrant favours hard workers who will save up money, perhaps start a business and succeed in their adoptive country. Temporary foreign workers also come to earn and save money, but they are not coming to stay, which is not in line with Canadians' expectations.

According to the Inter-American Development Bank, in 2008 migrant workers from around the world sent US\$69.2 billion in remittances to Latin America and the Caribbean; this flow kept millions of families above the poverty line. The TFWP offers a unique opportunity to look beyond remittances and foster more sustainable development by creating opportunities for training in Canada.

The agricultural sector could be, once again, a catalyst for change in immigration. The dynamic of mobility alone has profound implications for immigrants and for Canada's healthy labour market growth. Some Canadian NGOs and analysts

do not see a benefit to temporary migration; their single greatest objection to a TFWP may have nothing to do with the well-being of migrant workers.

The TFWP and SAWP could be based on the concept that education and training is at the heart of immigration efforts. Without human resources training and capacity-building, these programs run the risk of limiting the intended results of our development programs in developing countries. A renewed TFWP could focus on a series of actions directed at helping migrants become important development actors by increasing their knowledge and skills to bring about the desired changes in their home country.

The agricultural sector can be a catalyst for change in immigration.

Elsewhere, functional temporary migrant worker programs have created a series of incentives to encourage workers to come back to their country on completion of their contracts. Some, such as South Korea's, withhold money until workers return. Other countries such as the Philippines actively enlist the help of receiving governments to ensure safe working conditions for Filipino temporary workers among other things.

Despite these encouraging efforts to frame temporary migration, the Canadian government decided last year to take a different approach and proposed changes to

the Immigration Refugee and Protection Act, introducing restrictions on temporary foreign workers that would reduce mobility and access to the Canadian labour market.

Of course, the moral calculus for increased co-operation should take into account both the well-being of temporary foreign workers and the need for an immigration scheme that respects the preferences of Canadians. But Canada's role in development co-operation cannot be defined exclusively on the basis of self-interest. Increased opportunity for circular migration, capacity-building and training would bring immediate benefits to producers, migrant workers and developing countries.

Agriculture can contribute to development in many ways. It contributes to development as an economic activity, as a livelihood and as a provider of environmental services, making the sector a unique instrument for development.

The World Bank's *World Development Report 2008: Agriculture for Development* warns that agriculture must be placed at the centre of the development agenda if the goals of halving extreme poverty and hunger by 2015 are to be realized. In the wider context of migration, Canadian farmers' organizations should step up to the challenge so that discussions on the future of food in Canada and on food security in developing countries include a dynamic agriculture for development agenda. 🌍

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Cuba in the 2010s: Creative reform or geriatric paralysis?

Archibald R. M. Ritter

Grassroots push forces regime to consider political and economic changes.

Is Cuba at the threshold of a reform process, pushed by economic imperatives and forces from below? Or will it continue to be paralyzed by a gerontocracy obsessed with political control? So far, economic and political sclerosis have dominated. However, there have also been some modest changes and critics within Cuba are still able—though barely—to speak up with candour and courage, irrepressible so far despite intimidation and harassment.

Hope for change rose when Raúl Castro came to power in July 2006. A number of aggravations for Cuban citizens were removed: they were allowed to visit tourist hotels and to purchase electronic items; private taxis were liberalized; small farmers were permitted to obtain long-term leases on unused state farmland, a reform with major potential if implemented and supported vigorously.

Yet political reforms have been undetectable. The arrest of 'dissidents' continues under the so-called 'contempt for authority' and 'dangerousness' laws that permit incarceration as a 'pre-criminal' security measure. According to a 2009 Human Rights Watch Report, *New Castro, Same Cuba*, "The Cuban government bears full and exclusive responsibility for the abuses it commits."

To the credit of the government, it has not shut down the indepen-

dent bloggers. But on Nov. 7, 2009, the high-profile blogger Yoani Sánchez and three others were picked up on the street by state officials and later deposited in another part of the city in a very clear but unsuccessful attempt at intimidation. At the end of that month, a concerted character-assassinating attack was levelled against Sánchez—and indirectly against the other independent bloggers—by government-sponsored bloggers, by foreign pro-Castro journalists and in a major article on the website of *Granma*, Cuba's main newspaper.

More recently on March 21, 2010, the Ladies in White, a group of wives, daughters and mothers of political prisoners incarcerated in 2003, were attacked by government-sponsored gangs during a march in yet another unsuccessful intimidation effort.

On an economic level, the global recession hit Cuba hard. The intense foreign exchange shortage has made the need for reforms urgent. The dual monetary system continues to generate a behaviour-warping incentive structure deforming people's work and lives. The internal blockade against small enterprise suppresses people's initiative and entrepreneurship. Centralized economic control results in pervasive micro-economic absurdities as well as large-scale fiascos.

Infrastructure and housing deteriorate steadily due to the lack of

maintenance and new investment. There are, for example, an estimated 1.2 building collapses per day in Central Havana alone. The manufacturing crisis continues: production in 2008 was at 52 per cent of the 1989 level, according to official statistics.


Once a large net agricultural exporter, Cuba has become a huge net food importer, mainly from the United States. The 2010 sugar harvest is coming in at roughly one million tons, a historic low compared with an average of roughly 8 million in the 1980s.

Cuba has become dependent on Venezuela for subsidized petroleum, financial credits and state-to-state payments for Cuban doctors' services abroad. Worst of all, Cuba's average inflation-adjusted real wage in 2008 stood at 24 per cent of the 1989 level, according to analysts from Cuba's leading economic research institute, the *Centro de Estudios sobre la Economía Cubana*.

To deal with the crisis, Raúl Castro's government has exhorted citizens to consume less, save more and work harder. He has also postponed payments to foreign suppliers and investors. There has been some public discussion of discontinuing rationing although the system currently covers less than half of people's food needs. Apparently, reforms such as liberalizing small enterprise and monetary reform have been considered within rel-

evant ministries. In March 2010, an experiment in co-operative ownership in beauty parlours in Central Havana was started, which could become significant if broadened considerably. But the leadership has been conservative and has militated against reforms in fear that that such a process could spin out of control, in Gorbachev-era *glasnost* style.

There are signs of ferment at the grassroots level. The most obvious example is the independent and outspoken blogs and websites of dissident analysts, although these have limited visibility within Cuba where the rate of Internet access is the lowest in the Western Hemisphere. Citizens increasingly say publicly what they think privately. Young people are becoming more independent, critical and defiant. The desire to leave the country is at a fever pitch. The regime appears to be losing moral authority as well as its confidence.

At his trial in 1953, following the apprehended insurrection at the Moncada Barracks in Santiago, Fidel Castro said to the judges: "Condemn me. History will absolve me." Contrary to his hopes, it is hard to see how history could absolve him given his 50-year denial of basic rights for Cuban citizens. However, if Raúl Castro, or more likely his successor, were to initiate basic economic and human rights reforms, history and the Cuban people could absolve him. Improbable? Yes, but increasingly possible. 

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El siguiente nivel del conflicto colombiano

Juan Camilo Clavijo Martín

(English translation follows)

Choques entre bandas criminales en las urbes transforman el conflicto.

El conflicto colombiano se encuentra actualmente en un estado que no se había presentado antes. La guerra ha llegado de manera frontal a las ciudades. Esto ha planteado la tesis de la reformulación de la seguridad democrática como política en Colombia.

Entre 2003 y 2005 surgieron nuevos grupos paramilitares, que el gobierno colombiano ha identificado como Bandas Criminales (BACRIM). Éstas han heredado los negocios del narcotráfico, tráfico de armas y estructuras de las antiguas Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia (AUC). Las BACRIM están llevando a un incremento de los índices de violencia en todo el país debido a la guerra entre sí.

El origen de estos grupos se da cuando los grandes comandantes de las AUC se desmovilizaron y fueron extraditados a Estados Unidos. Los mandos intermedios, al saber que no tenían jefes por encima de sus rangos, decidieron tomar el poder de estos grupos. Esto se hizo a través de una guerra que ha llevado al conflicto colombiano a un "siguiente nivel".

Se observa el fortalecimiento de la presencia de estas bandas en las ciudades. El ejemplo más claro es la ciudad de Medellín, donde la criminalidad se ha incrementado hasta niveles bastante altos. El microtráfico de drogas, los homicidios y el "ajuste de cuentas" se han convertido en sucesos de la cotidianidad paisa.

Según el Informe de Derechos Humanos de la Personería de Medellín, a finales de 2009 se han incrementado los homicidios en distintas comunas de la ciudad con relación al 2008. El estudio, que recoge cifras oficiales y de las organizaciones que conforman el Comité Municipal de Derechos Humanos, hizo énfasis en el alarmante número de homicidios en ese año. Según la Personería, de Enero hasta el 31 de Octubre de 2009 se registraron 1.717 homicidios, mientras que en el mismo periodo de 2008 fueron 830, lo que representa un incremento del 106,9 por ciento.

Este estado en el que se encuentra la guerra en Colombia está causado por el enfrentamiento entre distintas bandas por el control de pasajes estratégicos en lo rural y por la posesión de ciertos sectores en las capitales colombianas. Así, los actores armados en Colombia han evolucionado al igual que lo ha hecho la estrategia militar de la fuerza pública colombiana.

Durante la administración de Álvaro Uribe, la política de seguridad democrática implementada en 2002 ha tenido un impacto que la ciudadanía colombiana reconoce. Esta política ha propiciado la desmovilización de las AUC y la recuperación de las zonas rurales del sur del país (Sur de Meta, Guaviare, Caquetá, Putumayo y Vaupés), que estaban controladas por las guerrillas (Fuerzas Armadas Re-

volucionarias de Colombia, FARC y Ejército de Liberación Nacional, ELN); es decir, se ha enfocado en lo rural.

No obstante, los sectores urbanos no se han intervenido de igual manera que lo rural, pues las operaciones militares de seguridad democrática se centraron en recuperar los territorios alejados de las ciudades, que eran fortín de las guerrillas. Por ende, las BACRIM han hecho de las zonas urbanas sus nuevos escenarios. Las urbes se han convertido en espacios de enfrentamientos entre estas bandas, milicias urbanas de las guerrillas y pandillas.

Las BACRIM han sido divididas en seis grupos por el gobierno: Los Rastrojos, Ejército Revolucionario Popular Anticomunista de Colombia (ERPAC), Los Machos, Los Paisas, Renacer y Banda Criminal de Urabá (Los Urabeños).

Cada una de estas bandas tiene presencia en una determinada región del país. Por ejemplo, Los Rastrojos son los herederos de la estructura de Don Berna, comandante de las AUC que ejercían presencia en Antioquia y Córdoba. Hoy, esta estructura se enfrenta a Los Paisas en el Departamento de Córdoba y por sectores de Medellín.


Instituciones como la Fundación Nuevo Arco Iris, han expuesto la idea de que la política gubernamental de seguridad democrática ha alcanzado su pico. En consecuencia, esta medida ha alcanzado su máximo rendimiento en cuanto a la reducción de homicidios e indicadores de violencia, y ha comenzado a descender en sus logros.

De acuerdo con la Fundación Nuevo Arco Iris: “El balance de acciones y presencia de grupos ilegales en el territorio nacional en 2009

registra un panorama distinto. Una nueva generación de paramilitares —llamados “Bandas Criminales” por el Gobierno— se está extendiendo por todo el país y ha alcanzado un número de acciones que excede la suma de incidentes hechos por las FARC y el ELN”.

En el lado estatal esta tesis no es aceptada, puesto que se han hecho importantes capturas de cabecillas (Don Mario o Riñón) y se incrementan los detenidos y judicializados relacionados con estos grupos, además de las múltiples operaciones que se hacen día a día por parte de las Fuerzas Militares y la Policía Nacional en los sitios críticos.

En conclusión, la política de seguridad democrática ha traído mejoras en seguridad nunca antes vistas en el país. Sin embargo, es necesario que la política de seguridad democrática trascienda lo rural, cubriendo los sectores urbanos, pero manteniendo las fuertes acciones en la zona sur del país. Llegó la hora de llevar esta política a un segundo nivel que intervenga de manera más directa a las ciudades.

La actualidad del conflicto en Colombia debe conservar el rumbo que se impuso en 2002. Si esto no se hace, existe el riesgo de perder todo el terreno ganado y volver a la situación de los años 90, cuando los grupos armados tenían el control de distintas zonas del país y la población no podía circular libremente por el territorio nacional. 

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The next level in the Colombian conflict

Juan Camilo Clavijo Martín

Criminal bands are behind increasing violence in cities.

The conflict in Colombia is now presenting itself in a new form, one that has not been seen before. War has reached the cities, setting the stage for a reformulation of Colombia's policy of democratic security.

The period between 2003 and 2005 saw the creation of new paramilitary groups identified by the Colombian government as ‘criminal bands’ (BACRIM in its Spanish acronym). These bands have inherited the structure of the old United Self-Defence Forces of Colombia (Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia, AUC), as well as its drug and arms trafficking businesses. The open conflict among the newly formed groups is currently increasing the level of violence in Colombia.

The criminal bands were created when former AUC commanders were demobilized and extradited to the United States. The AUC's intermediate officers, knowing that they no longer had any superiors, decided to take over their structures. This was done at the cost of warfare and has taken the Colombian conflict to the next level.

These bands have strengthened their presence in cities. The best example is Medellín, where crime rates have increased to significantly high levels: small-time drug trafficking, homicides and “score-settling” have become everyday occurrences in the city.

According to the Human Rights Report prepared by Medellín's ombudsman's office (Personería), in 2009 the number of homicides in several of the city's neighbourhoods had increased compared to 2008. The report, which uses data from official sources and from organizations that are part of the Municipal Human Rights Committee, emphasized the alarming number of homicides that took place during this period. Between January and October 2009, there were 1,717 homicides reported in the city, compared to 830 in the same months of 2008; this is an increase of 106.9 per cent.

This state in which the Colombian conflict finds itself is caused by the fighting among different bands for the control of strategic routes in rural areas and in certain sectors of Colombian cities. Armed actors in Colombia have evolved in a fashion that parallels the military strategy of the Colombian police and armed forces.

During the Álvaro Uribe administrations, the policy of democratic security first implemented in 2002 has had an impact that is acknowledged by the Colombian people. This policy led to the demobilization of the AUC and the recovery of rural areas South of the country (Sur de Meta, Guaviare, Caquetá, Putumayo and Vaupés), which used to be under the control of the guerrillas (Colombian Revolutionary Armed Forces, FARC; National Liberation Army, ELN). In recent years, the policy has therefore focused upon rural areas.

Contrastingly, less attention has been paid to urban sectors, since military operations for democratic

security concentrated on recovering territories far from cities where the guerrillas had established their strongholds. Therefore, the criminal bands made urban areas their prowling ground. Cities have become the backdrop of confrontations among these bands, which are the urban militia of guerrillas and gangs.

The BACRIM has been categorized in six groups by the government: Los Rastrojos (The Dregs), Ejército Revolucionario Popular Anticomunista de Colombia (Colombian Popular Revolutionary Anticommunist Army, or ERPAC), Los Machos, Los Paisas (*paisa* designates an inhabitant of Medellín), Renacer (Rebirth) and Banda Criminal de Urabá (Urabá Criminal Band), also called Los Urabeños.

Each of these bands has a presence in a specific region of the country. For example, Los Rastrojos inherited the structures created by Don Berna, an AUC commander that operated in Antioquia and Córdoba. This structure is now fighting Los Paisas in the department of Córdoba and in some sectors of Medellín.


Some institutions, such as the Nuevo Arco Iris Foundation, are of the opinion that the government's democratic security policy has peaked: it has achieved as much as it can in terms of reducing homicide and violent crime rates and its effectiveness is starting to decline.

According to the Nuevo Arco Iris Foundation, "The balance of the actions and the presence of illegal groups in Colombia in 2009 show a different scenario. A new generation of paramilitaries —called 'criminal bands' by the government— is spreading all

over the country and has achieved a record number of actions that exceeds the total sum of incidents that were carried out by the FARC and the ELN."

These findings are not accepted by the government, which has captured band leaders (Don Mario or Riñón) and increased the number of arrests and trials related to these groups. Further, operations by the armed forces and the national police take place almost daily in critical areas.

Overall, the policy of democratic security has improved safety up to unprecedented levels in Colombia. However, this policy must now transcend rural areas and reach urban sectors, all the while maintaining strong actions in the South of the country. This policy must be taken to the next level to deal more directly with cities.

The current Colombian conflict must stay the course that was designated in 2002. Should this not be the case, all the gains achieved since then may be lost, leading to a return to the situation of the 1990s when armed groups controlled different areas of the country and its citizens could not circulate freely throughout its territory. 

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ANNOUNCEMENTS

New Governance Policy Paper:

Summitry in the Americas: The end of mass multilateralism? by Richard Feinberg

This policy paper explores some of the many lessons learned since the inaugural 1994 Summit of the Americas. Inter-American summitry has served a number of valuable purposes such as adding legitimacy to democratic norms and values, advancing specific initiatives, providing a forum for face-to-face engagement of leaders, compelling executive branch bureaucracies to focus on issues of inter-American interest and, on occasion, addressing crises of the moment. However, it has also suffered from evident shortcomings, the most serious being the following: the wide gap between words and deeds that has generated a summitry credibility gap; the limited engagement of existing multilateral institutions in partnering and helping to finance Summit initiatives; and the ups and downs of civil society inclusion. Based on this critical examination, the author draws lessons for improvements.

Please visit http://focal.ca/pdf/Feinberg_Summitry_in_the_Americas.pdf to access this paper.

New Education Policy Paper:

Indigenous population and differences in access to primary education in Bolivia, by Wilson Jiménez and Miguel Veras

In the last few years, the gap in access to primary education between indigenous and non-indigenous populations has been decreasing in Bolivia. Proof of this is found in primary education enrolment rates for children that have learned to speak in an indigenous language and those that learned to speak in Spanish; the difference between these rates has fallen from six to three percentage points. However, the differences in Grade 8 completion rates between these two groups persist.

Even though enduring access problems are being addressed by existing policies, these appear to be insufficient to deal with the division between urban and rural areas. Policy recommendations are put forward based on this diagnostic. Please visit http://focal.ca/pdf/Jimenez_EN.pdf to access this paper in English and http://focal.ca/pdf/Jimenez_SP.pdf to access it in Spanish.

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