



ALBA: REGIONAL INTEGRATION, COOPERATION & SOLIDARITY

THE DAWN OF A NEW ERA

In Spanish, the word *alba* means “dawn.” It is also the name of the Bolivarian Alliance for the People of our America (ALBA), a **regional organization formally launched in 2004 and currently made up of eight countries in Latin America** and the Caribbean representing over 70 million people – Antigua & Barbuda, Bolivia, Cuba, Dominica, Ecuador, Nicaragua, Saint Vincent & the Grenadines and Venezuela. Honduras was a member until the coup government of Roberto Micheletti quit the organization in December 2009. ALBA was born as a bold plan for Latin American integration proposed by Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez in 2001, based on the principles of solidarity and complementarity between the countries of the Global South. In 2009, the member-states agreed to include “People’s Trade Agreement (TCP)” in the name of the organization (currently the name formally reads ALBA-TCP) to emphasize the importance of developing trade under the principles of solidarity and cooperation to benefit directly the people.

PURPOSE AND PRINCIPLES

ALBA serves as a platform for regional integration and cooperation with particular emphasis on solidarity, justice, and cooperation as a means to transform the societies of Latin America and the Caribbean and foster equality and social justice.

Amongst the organization’s principles are the following:

- Commerce and investment should not merely be ends in and of themselves, but rather a means to reach equitable and sustainable development.
- Economic cooperation should be fostered within member countries, not only competition.
- Cooperation and solidarity should serve as the foundation for special plans for the region’s least developed countries.

ALBA Snapshot

- Eight countries
- 70 million people
- In last five years, 11 million people in ALBA countries have escaped poverty
- More than 3.5 million have become literate, pushing rate above 96%.

- Energy integration within the region to ensure energy security for all countries.
- Regional capital for investment, instead of a reliance on investors from beyond Latin America and the Caribbean.

- Protection of the environment, as well as local cultures and identities.

ALBA INITIATIVES

ALBA has launched or supported a number of initiatives to further its purpose and principles.

Finance: Launched at the 2008 ALBA summit in Caracas, the Bank of ALBA aims to promote projects of economic integration and infrastructure development, as well as progress in social, educational, cultural and health in member states. It also aims to eliminate the economic weaknesses of these countries and eradicate economic asymmetries as a result of the process of financial globalization. It received an initial \$1 billion in financing. At a 2009 summit, ALBA member states agreed to create a regional currency, the SUCRE (Unified System of Reciprocal Compensation Payments). **The first transactions using the SUCRE took place in 2010.**

Economy: Initiatives discussed at the ALBA summit in 2007 included a plan for the creation of 12 public grand-national companies that would be co-managed by ALBA member states and whose activities would be focused around strengthening key sectors of national economies. This is slated to help diminish the asymmetries that exist within this group of countries in industries including agriculture, infrastructure, telecommunications, industrial supplies, and cement production. **One of these companies is ALBATEL, which in January 2011 successfully initiated a fiber optic interconnection between Venezuela, Cuba and other Caribbean islands.** Furthermore, a grand-national energy company will encompass activities linked to the production, refining, storage, transportation and distribution of oil and gas, as well as the development of alternative energies throughout the region.



Embassy of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela to the United States

Energy: PetroCaribe is an agreement signed in June 2005 to help increase and democratize access to energy for countries in the region. Specifically, PetroCaribe seeks to ease the energy burden on the Caribbean by providing countries with direct access to oil at preferential financing rates, with the savings directed towards important social development projects.

Health and Education: Five of the eight ALBA countries have eradicated illiteracy. **Bolivia, Cuba, Venezuela, and Nicaragua have been recognized as territories free of illiteracy by the United Nations (UN)** and have incorporated 1,579,840 additional people to the educational system. Programs like *Barrio Adentro* provide free basic medical care, while *Mission Miracle* has provided free care to **almost 2 million individuals with eye-related illnesses from over a dozen countries** – including the U.S. A Latin American School of Medicine founded in Venezuela in April 2007 has thus far trained 2,000 doctors to provide basic health services to patients in poor communities in the region. Additionally, several programs have been created to address the needs of individuals with disabilities in ALBA countries. Currently, 900,000 disable people are being attended through these programs.

Media and Culture: In 2005, **TeleSUR** was launched as a regional television network with a focus on Latin America and the Caribbean – from a Latin American and Caribbean perspective. It seeks to promote Latin American news, culture and identity. The ALBA Cultural initiative was also launched, which includes **ALBA TV** and the Casas del ALBA.

ALBA AND SOCIAL MOVEMENTS

During the Fifth ALBA Summit in 2007, a group of representatives of some of the hemisphere's most important social movements met to develop a common position on ALBA and present it to the member states.

Leaders of major peasant organizations, indigenous and Afro-descendant movements, social justice organizations, women's organizations, labor

ALBA in Haiti

After the devastating earthquake in Haiti, ALBA established five camps that provide 117,112 Haitians with shelter, food, health, education, recreation, and electricity.

organizations, youth movements, and anti-free trade groups formulated an additional set of principles that they called on ALBA governments to defend. These included: the fight against social exclusion; the defense of social, economic, cultural and labor rights; the defense of food sovereignty; women's rights; and recognition of the plurality of cultures that exist among Latin American and Caribbean peoples. The leaders agreed to share their knowledge of ALBA principles with others in their movements, and to organize educational meetings and seminars at the national level in their respective countries.

Since then, ALBA has deepened its links to social movements throughout the region. **In October 2009, the First Summit of ALBA Social Movements took place in Bolivia**, and on June 25, 2010 the Tenth Summit of ALBA and Afro-Descendent and Indigenous Groups took place in Otavalo, Ecuador.

Serving as evidence of the links between ALBA and social movements in Latin American and the Caribbean, leaders of ALBA countries including President Chávez and Bolivian President Evo Morales traveled to Denmark in December 2009 for the Copenhagen Climate Conference, where they met with leaders of social groups locked out of the discussions and brought their proposals into meetings with other world leaders. Additionally, **in April 20 Bolivia hosted the World People's Summit on Climate Change and Rights of Mother Earth**, at which tens of thousands of activists around the world gathered to discuss how best to fight climate change.

In June 2010, members of ALBA's Secretariat traveled to Detroit, Michigan for the U.S. Social Forum, where they spoke about the alliance, linked up with U.S.-based social movements and received a declaration of support during the forum's final plenary.

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