



ALBA: REGIONAL INTEGRATION, COOPERATION & SOLIDARITY

THE DAWN OF A NEW ERA

In Spanish, the word *alba* means “dawn.” It is also the name of a bold plan for Latin American integration proposed by Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez in 2001, as an alternative to the U.S.-backed Free Trade Agreement of the Americas (FTAA).

ALBA, the Bolivarian Alliance for the People of our America, is a regional organization formally launched in 2004 and made up of eight countries in Latin America and the Caribbean – Venezuela, Cuba, Bolivia, Nicaragua, Dominica, Ecuador, Antigua & Barbuda, and Saint Vincent & the Grenadines. Honduras was a member until the coup government of Roberto Micheletti quit the organization in December 2009.

PURPOSE AND PRINCIPLES

ALBA serves as a platform for regional integration and cooperation with particular emphasis on solidarity, complementarity, 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 of themselves, but rather means to reach equitable and sustainable development.
- Economic cooperation and complementarity within member countries, not only competition.
- Cooperation and solidarity should serve as the foundation for special plans for the region’s least developed countries.
- 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 infrastructural 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 aim of the project is to provide an alternative to the U.S. dollar to be used in commercial exchanges and ensure monetary sovereignty for member countries of the alliance.

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. 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.

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: Venezuela and Cuba are working together to provide literacy and healthcare programs to other countries in the region. For example, *Mission Robinson* is a literacy program that has taught



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millions of Venezuelans to read and write and was extended to Bolivia in 2006. *Barrio Adentro* provides free basic medical care, while *Mission Miracle* has provided free care to 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.

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 challenge broadcasters such as CNN, Univision, and the BBC, and serve to promote Latin American news, culture and identity.

ALBA AND SOCIAL MOVEMENTS

During the Fifth ALBA 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 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 educative 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 a second summit between social movements and the leaders of ALBA countries is set to take place in Ecuador in the coming months.

Serving as evidence of the links between ALBA and social movements in Latin American and the Caribbean,

leaders of ALBA countries including President Chavez 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.

The link between ALBA and social movements will continue to expand, including attempts to create bridges between social movements in the U.S. and those in the rest of the hemisphere.

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