

Inter-American Dialogue

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Featured Q&A With Our Board of Advisors

Q Amnesty International said in a report last week that the government of Colombian President Alvaro Uribe is encouraging attacks against human rights workers by questioning their legitimacy and by failing to bring to justice those who attack them. Do you think the Uribe government is not doing enough to safeguard human rights? Will human rights become a problem for Uribe in terms of international support for his government?

A Guest Comment: Carlos Franco: "The Colombian government does not sponsor nor does it encourage attacks against human rights defenders. On the contrary, it has different protection programs for them that have been emphasized by the Office of Human Rights in Colombia and by the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights. The government does not question the legitimacy of the [human rights] defenders, but their objectivity and their slanted opinions on occasion. The responsibility for bringing to justice those who attack them belongs to the judiciary, which in Colombia—like in every democratic country—is independent from the government. The government provides and will provide all help to the judiciary for this task. In terms of international support, what is relevant are the government's actions, its results, and its efforts; the NGOs are permanently invited to a purposeful, good faith dialogue. If they persist

in their attitude of not recognizing any progress and of slanted evaluations, they will become isolated within and outside of the country."

A Guest Comment: Santiago Canton & Victor Abramovich: "Since 1997, successive administrations have made an effort to fund and administer a special protection program for human rights defenders, trade union and social leaders, and journalists and witnesses in human rights cases who are at risk due to the armed conflict in Colombia, at the request of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR). However, on several occasions

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PHOTO OF THE DAY



Ecuadorean Presidential candidate Rafael Correa told investors in New York Tuesday that, if elected, he might seek to renegotiate the country's debt. See story on page 2.

File photo from candidate's Web site.

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NEWS BRIEFS

Moody's to Review Uruguay Ratings for Possible Upgrade

Uruguay's foreign and local currency bond ratings are being reviewed for a possible upgrade, **Moody's Investors Service** announced Tuesday. Moody's said it will look at how "improved growth prospects, a robust export performance, and a strengthened fiscal position will support a continued reduction in government and external debt indicators." Moody's Vice President Mauro Leos said in a statement that "to date, Uruguay's fiscal picture incorporates declining government deficits and increasing primary surpluses."

Minister: Cuba Will Stick with Communism

Cuba will not change its Communist economic policy when the country's leadership eventually changes, Economy Minister Jose Luis Rodriguez said Tuesday, according to Reuters. "In the hypothetical case that [President Fidel Castro] remains ill, would there be a change in Cuban policy toward a market opening? I can categorically say that is not foreseen, the Cuban people do not want that," Rodriguez said.

South Korea's Posco to Build \$250 Million Steel Plant in Mexico

Posco, South Korea's biggest steel-maker, said Tuesday it will invest \$250 million in Mexico to build a plant to supply automakers with 400,000 tons per year of galvanized steel. The plant, to be built in the industrial port city of Altamira in the northeastern Tamaulipas state, should be completed by September 2009, the Associated Press reported. Posco said the Mexican government has agreed to provide tax benefits and subsidies for employee training costs, according to the AP.

Economic News**Correa Says if Elected He May Seek to Renegotiate Ecuador's Debt**

Ecuadorean presidential candidate Rafael Correa told investors in New York on Tuesday that, if elected, he might seek to renegotiate the country's debt, Bloomberg News reported. "Foreign debt should serve the country's development, and our development shouldn't be to serve foreign



Correa

Photo: candidate's Web site.

debt," Correa, who is running under the banner of the center-left Alliance Country (AP) party and briefly held the post of finance minister last year, was quoted as saying. Correa believes the 7 percent of GDP the country currently spends servicing foreign debt is too high, Bloomberg News reported. Debt service should account for no higher than 3 to 3.5 percent of GDP, Correa told a group convened by the

the polls," HSBC said. Correa also told investors in New York on Tuesday that, if elected, he would abandon free trade talks with the United States, which were suspended by the US earlier this year after Ecuador seized an oil field operated by US-based **Occidental Petroleum Corp.**, according to Bloomberg News.

Business Leader: Calderon Must Ensure Rule of Law in Mexico

Incoming Mexican President Felipe Calderon must guarantee the rule of law and not repeat the errors of the outgoing administration of President Vicente Fox in responding to protests and civil disturbances, a business leader said Tuesday, according to local daily *El Universal*. Leon Halkin, president of the Confederation of Industrial Chambers, said that the Fox government had revealed itself to be politically incapable of responding to crises, such as protests in 2002 that thwarted plans to construct a new international airport outside of Mexico City, and current violence in Oaxaca between supporters

“Foreign debt should serve the country's development, and our development shouldn't be to serve foreign debt.”

— Rafael Correa

Ecuadorean American Association, according to Dow Jones. In 1999, Ecuador defaulted on \$6.5 billion of debt; today, the country has about \$11 billion in dollar-denominated debt, according to Bloomberg News. Polls show Correa in third place with 12 percent of intended votes ahead of the October 15 election, gaining on leftist Leon Roldos, who polled at 24 percent support, and conservative Cynthia Viteri, with 17 percent, according to a **Cedatos/Gallup** poll released September 5. In a research noted published this morning, **HSBC** said the charismatic Correa has a chance to make it to a second-round run-off. "At the very least, the appeal of his radical ideas, we believe, is likely to influence the tone of the campaign as more moderate candidates see the need to shift their speech and proposals further left to counter his rise in

and opponents of state Governor Ulises Ruiz. Such social disturbances have created a lack of legal security needed for investments to take place, Halkin said. "President Fox lost the initial political capacity," he was quoted as saying. "Felipe ought not to lose it and should guarantee the application of the rule of law and a legal-judicial framework ... Calderon should not show that incapacity." On October 4, industrial business leaders will give Calderon a proposal for industrial policy that emphasizes legal certainty and the rule of law, and which they believe should be incorporated into the Calderon government's economic policy, Halkin said. Calderon, who takes office on December 1 after narrowly defeating leftist Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador in the hotly disputed July 2 presidential election, is seen as pro-business, but has said he will

make social policy a priority of his administration in an effort to appease Lopez Obrador supporters, who insist their candidate was denied victory due to fraud and other irregularities. Lopez Obrador, who has camped out with thousands of his supporters in Mexico City's main square, has vowed to continue a "civic resistance" movement and possibly create a parallel government.

Panama, Costa Rica, and El Salvador to Launch Centralized Exchange

Panama, Costa Rica and El Salvador plan to launch a centralized electronic stock exchange within a year in a bid to boost liquidity in Central American markets, officials said Tuesday, according to Reuters. "We have signed an agreement with the stock exchanges of Costa Rica and El Salvador to launch or develop a common electronic market for the sale of shares and corporate debts of the countries of the region," Dulcidio de la Guardia, president of Panama's stock market, was quoted as saying. "The idea is to bring together the region's principal issuers of shares and debt so we can offer our investors a more liquid market with a greater variety of issuers." If the venture is successful, other countries in the region could join the new system, which would operate with one standardized set of rules, according to Reuters. The combined value of stock traded in Panama, Costa Rica, and El Salvador in 2005 was \$677 million, while total bond trading value amounted to nearly \$43 billion, Reuters reported.

Minister: Private Oil Firms to Keep Control of Heavy Oil Refining

Venezuelan Energy and Mines Minister Rafael Ramirez said Tuesday that state-owned oil company PDVSA would not take majority control away from foreign companies in projects refining heavy crude from the country's Orinoco Belt, although he reiterated that the government would control upstream work, Reuters reported. "In concrete terms, this migration will entail PDVSA assuming a majority shareholding in the primary exploration and production activities, but not on the downstream side of the busi-

Featured Q&A

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during the last three years the IACHR has expressed to the government of Colombia its concern regarding the effect of statements issued by high-ranking public officials questioning the legitimacy of human rights defenders and organizations, and indicating plans to investigate their background and activities. In this regard, the IACHR has consistently said that the state's punitive power and legal system should not be manipulated to harass those who are engaged in legitimate activities. Yet the Commission has received information and continues to collect evidence concerning repeated instances in which there has been recourse to the so-called *montajes judiciales* (arbitrary judicial proceedings) in an attempt to hinder or silence human rights defenders who are working to document the human rights situation, conduct the legal defense of accused per-

ness," Ramirez was quoted as saying in a speech. PDVSA is increasing its stakes in the four heavy oil projects from about 40 percent to 51 percent. Six companies—the US' **Exxon Mobil**, **Chevron**, and **ConocoPhillips**; and **BP**, France's **Total**, and **Statoil** of Norway—participate in the four projects, which produce about 620,000 barrels per day of heavy oil that has to be upgraded to synthetic crude. The government of Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez has been reasserting greater control over the country's oil wealth. At the start of this year, the government required oil companies to convert operating contracts into joint ventures in which PDVSA has a controlling stake. Also, last month, the National Assembly approved an increase in income tax on the four projects from 34 percent to 50 percent.

Political News

Chavez Says US May Have Been Involved in 9-11 Attacks

Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez said

sons, represent victims in court, and assist at-risk communities. Respect for human rights and good faith and openness in governmental dealings with the organizations of civil society devoted to the promotion and protection of human rights are relevant concerns in international relations. Countries aspiring to become a part of the law-abiding community of nations must respect human rights."

A Guest Comment: Adam Isacson: "The number of Colombian human rights defenders murdered each year declined during Alvaro Uribe's first term, largely due to the paramilitaries' declared—and partially observed—cease-fire while negotiating with the government. This progress, however, was not cemented in place by sound government policies. For instance, killers of human rights defenders continue to enjoy the

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Tuesday that the US may have been involved in the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks in order to justify the later invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan. "The theory that is gaining force is that the US empire planned and conducted this terrible act against its own people to justify its aggression [in Iraq and Afghanistan]," Chavez, a frequent critic of the US, said during a televised ceremony, according to Bloomberg News. The Venezuelan leader said a theory that the World Trade Center towers could have been rigged with dynamite to make them collapse after they were struck by hijacked airplanes was plausible. "A building never collapses like that, unless it's with an implosion," Chavez said, according to the Associated Press. Engineers have said that the towers collapsed after steel supports weakened under intense heat caused by burning jet fuel from the crashed airplanes. Chavez also questioned whether an airplane was crashed into the Pentagon. "A plane supposedly crashed into the Pentagon, but no one ever found a single remnant of that plane," he said, according to the AP. He called on US authorities to investigate.

Featured Q&A*Continued from page 3*

same near-total impunity as before, since Colombia's judiciary has been unable to make progress toward investigating and prosecuting attacks. Meanwhile, President Uribe and others in his government have periodically made public statements alleging links between human rights workers and guerrillas, tarring the entire community with the same brush. This—along with occasional catch-and-release arrests of activists on sedition charges—has contributed to the hostile climate toward human rights defenders that is a main theme in Amnesty's report. In the past few months, we have seen a notable increase in threats against human rights defenders, including some break-ins at activists' homes and offices. There is good reason to fear that the minor progress of Uribe's first term may prove to be ephemeral."

A **Guest Comment: Rafael Nieto:** "What can be stated is that the situation of human rights and international humanitarian law in any conflict is always very difficult. And so, to the extent the conflict continues in Colombia, the human rights situation will continue being a very difficult situation. However, what is also true is that there has been an effort, not just in the Uribe administration but also since the Samper administration, to improve the situation. For example, around 1994, 57 percent of complaints about violations of rights and freedoms were attributable to members of the armed forces and police. In 2003, only 1 percent of the complaints were attributable to the public security forces. These are figures from the national attorney general's office, an independent body that does not depend on the government. Nevertheless, serious cases related to human rights and international humanitarian law continue to appear—none of which are attributable to members of the public security forces—showing that much work still needs to be done. In particular, I believe it possible to strengthen, on the one hand, training programs on human rights and international humanitarian law for soldiers and

police. On the other hand, reforming and strengthening the system of administration of justice and, in particular, the judiciary, to make the fight against impunity more effective is needed. With the passage of time, the international community has better understood the conflict in Colombia and also the situation of human rights and international humanitarian law, and has recognized that the bulk of responsibility for human rights violations falls on the head of illegal armed groups—the rebels and the self-defense forces. There is also a certain international pressure with respect to the state's management of this issue, pressure which will increase in the event Democrats gain control of the US Senate and Congress. In this case, it is possible that the Uribe administration will face bigger problems on this issue. The Amnesty International statement is not only unjust but false, not only because there is no proof showing that the Uribe government persecutes defenders of human rights, but also because there is proof that this government has done more than any other to protect human rights defenders: they have been given armored vehicles, bodyguard services, and thousands of dollars have been spent protecting the headquarters of the non-governmental organizations in which they work."

Carlos Franco is Director of the *Colombian Government's Presidential Program on Human Rights*.

Santiago Canton is Executive Secretary and **Victor Abramovich** is the *Rapporteur for Colombia at the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights*.

Adam Isacson is Director of Programs at the *Center for International Policy*.

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