



# **BOLIVIA** **INFORMATION** **FORUM**

## **Bolivia Information Forum Bulletin** **No. 21, December 2011**

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# Cochabamba strategy meeting seeks new agenda

**A meeting of social movements and other representative organisations debated new policy orientations for the next phase of the MAS government. It also sought to increase the sense of public participation in policy-making.**

When Evo Morales was voted in as president in 2005, his mandate was set by the so-called 'October Agenda'. This constituted the set of demands laid down by social movements in October 2003, when El Alto and much of the country came to a halt for ten days during the 'gas war' that resulted in the ousting of Gonzalo Sánchez de Lozada as president. There were two main demands: the recuperation of natural resources, particularly oil and gas, and the calling of a constituent assembly to revise the constitution.

During his first period of government (2006-2010) Morales 'nationalised' the oil and gas industry, re-establishing the primacy of the state and gaining greater income from production. This provided a basis for the government's social policies and increased the revenues available for local and departmental government and the university system. Shortly after becoming president, Morales called for elections to the Constituent Assembly which met during 2006-2008. After no little opposition to the text of the new constitution, this was approved by referendum in January 2009.

**After the TIPNIS march arrived in La Paz in October 2011, Evo announced that he would be calling for a national debate to discuss the way forward in December 2011.**

By Morales' second period (2010-2014), an important part of the October Agenda had thus been achieved. Since 2010, the government has put the emphasis on 'industrialisation' or processing of raw materials (oil and gas, minerals) in the country rather than exporting them untreated. This adds to their value, with the extra earnings available for redistribution

amongst the population.

At the same time, however, different sectors of the population have been putting forward their demands. These tend to respond to sectoral interests rather than encompass an overall strategic direction. Though the new constitution and the concept of *Vivir Bien* provide points of cohesion and strategic overview, the government's poor handling of two issues (the increase in petrol prices of December 2010 and the TIPNIS conflict) have caused many to feel that the direction of the process of change is no longer clear.

## **Participatory debate**

After the TIPNIS march arrived in La Paz in October 2011, Evo announced that he would be calling for a national debate to discuss the way forward in December 2011.

**The meeting 'to deepen the process of change' was held in Cochabamba from December 12-14. ...Some 650 people, with representatives from 49 social organisations, were present.**

The meeting 'to deepen the process of change' was held in Cochabamba from December 12-14. This is the first part of a three-part process. Social movements and others discussed a wide series of topics: economic development, food sovereignty and land, employment, salaries and job stability, social policies and services, people's security, laws to be sent to parliament, autonomies, communication and cultural revolution, international policy and regional integration, transparency and moves to curb corruption. These issues will now be discussed by different social sectors in each of the nine departments, before a second national meeting is held in early January to reach conclusions.

Some 650 people, with representatives from 49 social organisations, were present. *Campesinos*, *interculturales* (migrant peasants), Bartolinas (peasant women), leaders from the cooperative

miners, oil workers, for example, but also representatives from the highland indigenous CONAMAQ, the urban teachers' union, and the national university body (CEUB). Also present were representatives from business (the CEPB), from mining companies, and from chambers of commerce.

Those absent were mainly from three groups: the leadership of the Central Obrera Boliviana (though many of their member organisations were there), the mineworkers' federation (FSTMB) and the lowland indigenous organisations, under the leadership of the CIDOB. The CIDOB held a parallel gathering in Santa Cruz to express disconformity with government policies.

### Looking forward

At the inauguration of the meeting:

- Roberto Coraite of the *campesino* CSUTCB confederation spoke of the need to develop a new agenda, "let us be the architects of the new plurinational state".
- Daniel Sánchez for the CEPB said that they wanted to draw up a pact between business and indigenous people and *campesinos* to generate wealth, attracting investment from outside the country, and income for the country through taxation. They should be seen as strategic allies in achieving growth, he said.
- José Domingo Vásquez of the oil and gas workers talked with pride of the industrialisation taking place in his sector.

- Albino García for the miners' cooperatives spoke of the need to develop the economy with involvement of the four main economic actors: the state, the private sector, cooperatives and community organizations.

In his speech, Evo Morales spoke of the need to strengthen production, to develop the internal market and relations with the regional market in Latin America, to produce enough food but also to consider exporting it, to raise the added-value of the country's natural resources, which in turn would provide the resources for redistribution amongst the population. He invited people to give their ideas, discuss and deliberate. For Morales, this was "a real assembly of the Bolivian people". He suggested that it might be possible to have a council of people from different walks of life that could meet regularly to provide critical support to the cabinet.

The meeting was timely and important: it not only brought together people from the social movements, but also others who do not normally attend such meetings like representatives from private business and the universities. It not only provided a forum for participation in plotting a common roadmap, but also served to help those taking part to gain knowledge and a sense of empowerment. The real challenge will come in January, when the many proposals will be brought together in a common strategic agenda.

# Judicial elections

**Elections to senior levels of the judiciary are a step towards a more thorough overhaul of the judicial system to improve access to justice. Those who received most votes did so because of their indigenous identity. A substantial number of women were voted in for the first time. The elections should increase the legitimacy of the judiciary, long a haven for political influence and corruption. But this is but the tip of the iceberg in democratising the justice system.**

When Bolivians voted for Evo Morales and the MAS in 2005, they were expressing distrust in the established political system, but also in the system of justice. This was notorious in its bias towards those who could pay; people from indigenous background and the poor could expect to wait years before their cases came to trial. Not only was the system tardy, but also corrupt. Part of the problem lay with the practice of judges being appointed to senior posts by parliament, making them dependent on the political will of those in power; the judiciary was far from being an independent body of the state. Also, because of the rapid turnover in government, judges tended not to last long in post. The practice of divvying up senior posts amongst the parties in office and their allies was known as *cuoteo*.

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Among the reforms introduced under the 2009 constitution was one to elect senior judges by universal suffrage. This took place in elections on October 16, on the basis of slates previously nominated by the Plurinational Legislative Assembly.

From some 520 people who put their names forward, a total of 116 candidates were preselected. Of these, seven men and women were elected to the Agro-environmental Tribunal,

five to the Council of Magistrates, seven to the Plurinational Constitutional Tribunal, and nine (one per department) to the Plurinational Supreme Tribunal. Together with their substitutes/stand-ins, this totalled 56 elected judges.

The ballot sheet was four columns wide, containing photos of all candidates (in the case of the Plurinational Supreme Tribunal only those in their department). It was nearly a metre long. Candidates were legally prevented from campaigning on their own behalf, and had equal coverage in the different media (newspapers, TV and radio).

**More women/more ponchos, less suits and ties**

In the Agro-environmental Tribunal, in his full garb as a highland indigenous authority, Bernardo Huarachi Tola won 292,740 votes (16.6% of valid votes), followed by Deysi Villagómez Velasco, with 9.1% of the vote and Gabriela Cintia Arniño Paz with 7%, both young women. Only two of the new judges pictured on the ballot sheet wore ties. Four men were elected, three women.

**The three candidates who overall attracted the most votes were Cristina Mamani, Bernardo Huarachi, and Gualberto Cusi – all with a clear indigenous identity.**

In the Council of Magistrates, which is responsible for judicial budgets, discipline and appointments, Cristina Mamani, a woman judge wearing traditional bowler hat won 461,415 votes (26.3% of total valid votes); Wilma Mamani, a young woman, won 8.7% of the votes, and Roger Gonzalo Triveño (suited) won 8%. Of the five elected, one was an indigenous woman, one a man of indigenous background, one a young woman and only two in suits.

In the Plurinational Constitutional Tribunal, Gualberto Cusi Mamani, whose photo shows him as an authority in traditional dress won with

276,037 votes (or 15.7% of valid votes); Efen Choque also in traditional dress came second with 10.6%; Ligia Mónica Velásquez, a young woman, came third, with 7.3%. Of the seven elected, two wore ponchos, one a suit, and four were women.

Finally, in the elections for the Supreme Plurinational Tribunal or supreme court, votes were cast for men and separately for women at the departmental level: of those who achieved most votes, three were women and six men. Of the six, there were four in suits, one in traditional dress and one other. The men were generally much older.

Identity and inclusion thus emerged as key factors. The three candidates who overall attracted the most votes were Cristina Mamani (over 461,000 votes), Bernardo Huarachi (over 292,000), and Gualberto Cusi (over 276,000) – all with a clear indigenous identity.

### **High participation, much null voting**

Around 80% of the population registered on the biometric electoral roll turned out to cast their vote, a surprisingly high turnout given the complicated nature of the election and low levels of candidate recognition. Null voting, however, was high, at around 40%. There were two main reasons for this. There were evident difficulties for voters in choosing who to vote for. But, more important, the opposition to the MAS had called for the nullifying of the ballot sheet. Null votes were on a par with valid votes, with others still leaving their ballot sheets blank. The majority of votes were null in the departments of Chuquisaca, Santa Cruz, Tarija, Beni and Pando; valid votes were in a majority in La Paz, Cochabamba, Oruro and Potosí.

### **Opposition questioning**

The opposition questioning of the election of judges went back to when the new constitution was being written. When the date for the election was announced, opposition figures urged their supporters not to stand as candidates. That they heeded this is clearly reflected in the results from the lowland departments, where opposition parties have more influence but where few put forward their preferred candidates. Finally, opposition groups questioned the way in which the pre-selection of eligible candidates was carried out by the Plurinational Assembly (where the ruling MAS has a majority in both houses). It may be the case that some other way will need to be found to pre-select suitable candidates.

The judicial elections coincided with the TIPNIS march (see BIF Bulletin No 20 and the October Special Bulletin on the issue). This arrived in La Paz two days after the vote, and was very much the central issue of the day, eclipsing the elections in news coverage. Even on the massive march in favour of the 'process of change' on October 12, there were no banners calling attention to the elections. The opposition was able to rally the feelings around the TIPNIS march, seeking to turn the elections into a plebiscite against the government.

# US and Bolivia sign 'framework' deal

**On November 7, the US Under-secretary for Global Affairs, Maria Otero, and Bolivia's deputy foreign minister Juan Carlos Alurralde signed a 'framework agreement' to guide bilateral relations between the two countries on the basis of "shared responsibility and mutual respect". The announcement represents a significant uptick in the two countries' frayed relations, though it is by no means clear when it will lead to the restoration of full ambassadorial relations, severed in October 2008.**

Negotiations over a framework agreement have been conducted over the last two years, but progress was necessarily slow. It is the first time that the US has agreed to such an arrangement, intended to provide guarantees of mutual respect for each country's sovereignty. While perhaps no big deal for Washington, this was an important concession for Bolivia, since the asymmetries in power between the two countries have led to repeated accusations of US meddling in Bolivia's domestic affairs.

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## **Fraught relations**

Relations between the two countries have long been fraught. In the 1950s, the US used constant diplomatic and economic pressure to bring Bolivia 'into line' following the nationalist 1952 revolution. By the 1980s, the main concern in Washington ceased to be 'communist contagion' in Bolivia, and turned to the problem of drugs. Probably the most harmonious period of US-Bolivian relations was in the late 1990s when the government of General Hugo Banzer pursued its 'zero coca' policy against the coca farmers of the Chapare.

The election of Evo Morales as president in 2005

brought new concerns. Not only was Morales the leader of the Chapare *cocaleros*, but he aligned himself closely with President Hugo Chávez in Venezuela. The publication of US diplomatic traffic by Wikileaks attests to deep suspicions among US diplomats in La Paz about Morales and the MAS. For his part, Morales repeatedly accused Washington of trying to subvert his government.

Bolivia's expulsion of US Ambassador Philip Goldberg in 2008 brought matters to a head. Goldberg was accused by Bolivia of being in cahoots with elite groups in Santa Cruz in preparing for a coup. This was in the context of extreme domestic tensions between the government in La Paz and would-be secessionists in the eastern lowland departments. The expulsion of the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) followed soon after, along with several US diplomats.

**The new framework agreement, while helpful to the normalisation of relations, is unlikely to lead to the swift return of the DEA to Bolivia.**

Since then, Washington has continually berated the Morales administration for its supposed failure to act to control coca cultivation and drug manufacturing/trafficking. Every March, Bolivia has been singled out for its failure to collaborate with the War on Drugs. However data produced annually by the UN Office on Drugs and Crime show that the increase in coca cultivation has increased only very modestly, much slower than in neighbouring Peru. Bolivia for its part has continued to accuse Washington of intervening in its domestic affairs, most recently over the TIPNIS dispute.

## **Aid, drug control and trade access**

The new framework agreement, while helpful to the normalisation of relations, is unlikely to lead to

the swift return of the DEA to Bolivia. Nor is it likely to lead to Bolivia regaining its trade preferences in the US market, removed with the suspension of the Andean Trade Preferences and Drug Eradication Act (ATPDEA). Although Bolivia continues to cooperate with the US embassy's Narcotics Affairs Section, it remains highly sensitive to any hint of US involvement in suppressing drugs in Bolivia.

ATPDEA, as the name indicates, offers trade benefits but only in return for 'good behaviour' in the drugs field. Its suspension has made it difficult for exporters of manufactured goods (mainly located in El Alto) to access the US market, forcing the Bolivian government to provide them with subsidies to compensate them for the higher US tariffs payable. Foreign Minister David Choquehuanca has played down the possibility of any free trade deal with the United States.

Probably the most significant aspect of the framework agreement is that it reduced the scope for US funding of organisations in Bolivia which do not have government approval. Choquehuanca says it will jointly define the jurisdictions and agencies through which US aid money can be filtered. In the past USAID has refused to accept government control over how it spends its money.

US aid to Bolivia has shrunk notably since 2007, when it totalled US\$122 million. Next year, it is budgeted at about a quarter of that, most of it going into anti-narcotics programmes.

Shortly after the signing of the 'framework agreement', a tripartite policy was announced involving US, Brazilian and Bolivian collaboration in the area of drugs control. So far nothing has materialised from this, perhaps reflecting Bolivian suspicions that the Brazilian authorities only became involved at the instigation of Washington.

# CELAC: a more autonomous sort of regionalism?

**The creation of the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC) at a summit of heads of state from the region in Caracas in November reflects the growing sense of regional autonomy and self-confidence in Latin America and the Caribbean.**

The CELAC was ratified by 33 countries in the region. Unlike the Organization of American States (OAS), it does not include the United States and Canada. Also, unlike the OAS, it does include Cuba. Cuba's membership of the OAS was suspended over 50 years ago because of US pressures at the time of the Cuban Revolution. And unlike the Iberoamerican summits, CELAC does not include Spain or Portugal.

## Range of positions

The 33 countries involved include a wide range of ideological positions. Whereas on the one hand it includes the leftward-leaning members of ALBA (Venezuela, Cuba, Bolivia, Ecuador and Nicaragua amongst others), CELAC was also ratified by the region's more conservative governments, like those of Chile, Mexico and Colombia. While some governments – including key ALBA members – see in CELAC the basis for replacing the OAS as the main regional organisation – the final text of the CELAC communiqué avoided giving this impression.

CELAC is an outgrowth of the Rio Group which represented many Latin American countries. It encapsulates a number of sub-regional integration pacts, such as Mercosur, the Andean Community, the Central American Common Market and the Caribbean Community (CARICOM). As well as ALBA countries, it also includes the members of UNASUR, the union of South American states.

Although the ALBA countries (particularly Venezuela) made much of the running in stimulating the creation of CELAC, Brazil had a strong influence over its formation. Brazil in recent years has sought to curb Venezuela's influence in regional affairs. The fact that Mexico chose to join CELAC is also significant since it reaffirms the country's 'Latin American' identity at a time when Mexico has veered ever-closer to the United States in its political and economic linkages. Given their size and economic weight, both countries will have a powerful influence over how CELAC develops.

Though presidents of different political

persuasions were positive and enthusiastic about the initiative, the Caracas summit left many issues about CELAC – its organisational structure and its decision-making procedures – unclear. Several countries recoiled from overtly describing it as an alternative to the OAS and the various hemispheric organisations which come under its aegis. However, it is no secret that the OAS – long questioned for its pro-US leanings – is suffering a major questioning as to its role. This is even the case in the United States itself (which is the main source of OAS budgets) where prominent Republicans in the Senate have recently sought to axe funding to the organisation.

## Reduced US dependence

Behind the formation of CELAC, there is no hiding the fact that Latin America is far less dependent economically than it used to be. According to ECLAC, in 2000, the United States bought 60% of Latin America's exports, whereas in 2010 that figure was under 40%. In 2000, Latin America bought 50% of its imports from the US, whereas that figure was 29% in 2010. 17% of Latin America's exports were destined for Asian markets in 2010, up from 5% in 2000, and the proportion of imports rose from 10% to 27%. The difference will only get wider over the next few years. The pattern of investments in Latin America has also become far more diversified in recent years.

Parallel to this has been Washington's lack of interest – some would say benign disinterest – in Latin America and its problems in recent times, with both the Bush and Obama administrations far more concerned with foreign policy priorities elsewhere. Old perennial issues have predominated: drugs, migration and attempts to secure markets through free trade deals. Even on the drugs issue, there are clear signs among Latin American countries (including Mexico and Colombia) that the old policies pursued by Washington are inoperative and need to be rethought.

For countries like Bolivia, the creation of the CELAC provides the opportunity to further reduce dependence on Washington and its hemispheric institutions. It makes it easier to establish regional solutions to regional problems, including the drug issue (where Bolivia is seeking to work more closely with Brazil rather than take instructions from the north). The CELAC has a long way to go before it becomes the regional institution, but important progress is being made.