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Afro-Latinos in Latin America and Considerations for U.S. Policy

Updated September 29, 2005

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Summary

In recent years, people of African descent in the Spanish- and Portuguese-speaking nations of Latin America — also known as “Afro-Latinos” — have been pushing for increased rights and representation. Afro-Latinos comprise some 150 million of the region’s 540 million total population, and, along with women and indigenous populations, are among the poorest, most marginalized groups in the region. Afro-Latinos have begun forming groups that, with the help of international organizations, are seeking political representation, human rights protection, land rights, and greater social and economic rights and benefits.

Improvement in the status of Afro-Latinos could be difficult and contentious, however, depending on the size and circumstances of the Afro-descendant populations in each country. As treated in this paper, Afro-Latinos are, generally, descendants of the millions of West African slaves brought to the Americas by European traders during the colonial period. Afro-Latinos tend to reside in coastal areas, although in many countries they have migrated to large cities in search of employment. Afro-Latinos comprise a majority of the population in Cuba and the Dominican Republic, while in Brazil, Colombia, Panama, Venezuela, Ecuador, and Nicaragua, they form a significant minority.

Assisting Afro-Latinos has never been a primary U.S. foreign policy objective, although a number of foreign aid programs exist that benefit Afro-Latino populations. Those programs are funded through the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), the Inter-American Foundation (IAF), the Peace Corps, and the National Endowment for Democracy (NED). They include agricultural, micro-credit, health, grassroots organizing, and bilingual education programs.

On July 18, 2005 the House passed H.Con.Res. 175, recognizing the injustices suffered by African descendants of the transatlantic slave trade in all of the Americas and recommending that the United States and the international community work to improve the situation of Afro-descendant communities in Latin America and the Caribbean. On July 20, 2005, a companion resolution was referred to the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations after being received by the House.

Some assert that the United States has an interest in improving the condition of Afro-Latinos in Latin America. Assisting vulnerable peoples fits into larger U.S. policy goals for the region: promoting democracy, encouraging economic growth and poverty reduction, and protecting human rights. Others disagree, however, as to whether U.S. foreign aid should be specifically targeted toward Afro-Latinos (as it has in the case of some indigenous groups), or be distributed broadly through efforts to support marginalized populations. Skeptics question whether increasing assistance to Afro-Latinos is feasible in a time when limited development assistance is being allocated to Latin America. Still others caution that the United States should be careful when intervening in the sensitive racial politics of other countries.

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Afro-Latinos in Latin America and Considerations for U.S. Policy

Introduction

Persons of African descent, commonly referred to as “Afro-Latinos,” along with women and indigenous populations, are among the poorest and most marginalized groups in Latin America. The term “Afro-Latinos,” as used within the international development community and the U.S. government, generally refers to Afro-descendant populations in the Spanish- and Portuguese-speaking nations of Latin America. Following common usage, this paper uses the terms “Afro-descendant,” “Afro-Latino,” “Afro-Latin,” and “black” interchangeably. This paper does not include a discussion of Haiti or English-speaking Caribbean nations that have governments composed largely of Afro-descendants.

Within the past decade, Afro-Latinos have begun to employ different strategies to align national movements with international organizations, including multilateral development banks to which the United States contributes, in order to improve their social status. Some countries — most notably Brazil and Colombia — have enacted legal reforms and government programs to address racial discrimination, land rights, and political and social exclusion. Improvement in the status of Afro-Latinos could be difficult and internally contentious, however, depending on the size and circumstances of the Afro-descendant populations in each country.

On July 18, 2005 the House passed H.Con.Res. 175, recognizing the injustices suffered by African descendants of the transatlantic slave trade in all of the Americas and recommending that the United States and the international community work to improve the situation of Afro-descendant communities in Latin America and the Caribbean. On July 20, 2005, a companion resolution was referred to the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations after being received by the House.

Some U.S. analysts and policymakers argue that the United States has a specific interest in assisting Afro-descendant peoples in Latin America. They assert that assisting vulnerable peoples fits into larger U.S. policy goals for the region: promoting democracy, encouraging economic growth and poverty reduction, and protecting human rights. Those proponents disagree, however, as to whether U.S. foreign aid should be specifically targeted towards Afro-Latinos (as it has been in the case of some indigenous peoples), or whether it should continue to be distributed broadly through programs aimed at helping all marginalized populations.

Other analysts question whether increasing assistance to Afro-Latinos is feasible at a time when limited development assistance is being allocated to Latin America. They point out that the country with the largest Afro-descendant population in the

region, Brazil, is relatively developed and does not receive large amounts of U.S. foreign aid. They question whether funds directed towards Afro-Latinos will have to be taken from programs currently serving other needy groups. Still others caution that because race is a sensitive issue for many countries in Latin America, the United States should be cautious when pursuing policies that affect the issue.

This report reviews and analyzes the situation, concerns, and activities of Afro-descendants in the Spanish- and Portuguese-speaking nations of Latin America. It then discusses current U.S. foreign aid programs, as well as multilateral initiatives, that have directly or indirectly assisted Afro-Latinos. The report concludes with a discussion of potential policy options that have been proposed should the United States elect to provide further support for Afro-Latinos.

Panorama of Afro-Latinos in Latin America

Race and ethnicity are complex issues in Latin America. Most of Latin America's 540 million residents descend from three major racial/ethnic groups: Indian or indigenous peoples, of whom there are some 400 distinct groups; Europeans, largely of Spanish and Portuguese heritage; and Africans, descendants of slaves brought to the region during the colonial era.¹ *Mestizo* generally refers to people of mixed European and indigenous lineage, while *mulatto* refers to people of mixed African and European background. After centuries of racial mixing, there are numerous racial variations in Latin America, and many people of mixed African, European, and indigenous ancestry.

Since the colonial period, racial intermingling, also known as *mestizaje*, has been a source of national pride for many countries in Latin America. Countries with large Afro-descendant populations, especially Brazil, have, until recently, been heavily influenced by the notion of "racial democracy." Racial democracy attributes the different conditions under which blacks and whites or mestizos live to class differences, not racial discrimination. Adherents of this theory, which is also pervasive in Ecuador, Colombia, and Venezuela, argue that being black is a transitory state that can be altered by "whitening" through miscegenation or wealth accumulation.² The racial democracy theory has been challenged by recent data revealing a strong and persistent correlation between race and poverty in Latin America.³ In both Brazil and Colombia, the countries with the largest Afro-Latino populations in South America, Afro-descendants are (and have always been) among the poorest, least educated, lowest paid citizens.

¹ People of European descent will also be referred to as "whites."

² For a discussion of "racial democracy" and the differences between the prevailing conceptions of race in Brazil and the United States, see Sheila Walker, "Africanity vs. Blackness: Race, Class and Culture in Brazil," *NACLA Report on the Americas*, May/June 2002; Robert J. Cottrol, "The Long Lingered Shadow," *Tulane Law Review*, 2001.

³ Haider Rivzi, "Development: Globalization Driving Inequality — UN Warns," *Inter Press Service*, August 26, 2005; Hoffman, Kelly and Miguel A. Centeno, "The Lopsided Continent: Inequality in Latin America," *Annual Review of Sociology*, 2003.

Despite the complexities surrounding racial identity in Latin America, and the limited data available on this topic, this section outlines the characteristics, history, and current status of Afro-descendant people in Latin America.

Identity, Definition, and Geographic Distribution

Afro-descendants in Latin America have not been historically identified, as they have in the United States, as any individual with traceable African ancestry. People in Latin America have several different ways of classifying themselves. Lighter skinned mulattoes may identify themselves as white, while some blacks may identify themselves as mulattoes or mestizos. These classifications are influenced by a number of factors: class position, geographic location, societal associations of blackness, the existence (or lack) of collective identities among people of color, and state policies.

There is a range of state policies towards race in Latin America, from tacitly condoning racism against minority groups to promoting diversity. The Dominican Republic provides a striking example of how racial identity has been formed by official notions of national identity. The Dominican government mobilized a nationalist movement against an external threat (the mostly black republic of Haiti). Although some 84% of the population has African ancestry, Dominicans, in order to distinguish themselves from their poorer Haitian neighbors, tend to define themselves as mestizos descended from Indians and Europeans, and not as Afro-Dominicans.⁴ A 2005 study on racial attitudes in the Dominican Republic finds that 83% of Dominicans believe their society is racist against blacks.⁵

For the purposes of this report, blacks and mulattoes are grouped together to yield the estimated number of Afro-descendants in Latin America.⁶ Of the 540 million people living in Latin America, an estimated 150 million are of African descent.⁷ **Figure 1** (at the end of this report) depicts Afro-descendants as a percentage of total population for the Spanish- and Portuguese-speaking countries in Latin America. Afro-Latinos tend to reside in coastal areas, although in many countries they have migrated to large cities in search of employment. Afro-Latinos constitute a majority of the population in Cuba and the Dominican Republic. In Brazil, Colombia, Panama, Venezuela, Ecuador, and Nicaragua, they form a

⁴ “‘Illegal People’: Haitians and Dominico-Haitians in the Dominican Republic,” *Human Rights Watch*, April 2002, Vol. 14, No. 1.

⁵ “Racism Rampant in the Dominican Republic, Study Finds,” *EFE News Service*, May 3, 2005.

⁶ Estimates vary as to the actual number of Afro-descendants in each of the countries in question. For example, the CIA World Fact Book estimates that while 38% of Brazil’s population is “mixed white and black,” only 6% is black. Some argue that racial discrimination and social exclusion affect blacks in Brazil far more than they affect the country’s larger mulatto population.

⁷ The World Bank and the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) continue to use this figure, calculated in a study by Cowater International Inc. in 1996. See “The Region: Race: Latin America’s Invisible Challenge,” *IDB*, January 1997.

significant minority. In terms of absolute numbers, Brazil has the largest Afro-descendant population outside of Africa. In 2000, 45% of Brazilians identified themselves as black or mulatto, as compared to 13% of U.S. citizens who identified themselves as African-American.⁸

History. The vast majority of Afro-Latinos descend from the millions of slaves brought by European traders from the West African coast who survived the Middle Passage to the Americas. Some historians have stated that the first slaves in the hemisphere arrived in Virginia in 1619, and that the majority of African slaves ended up in the southern United States. However, it appears that the first slaves arrived in Hispaniola, an island now divided between Haiti and the Dominican Republic, in the early 16th century. Some 12 million or so Africans arrived in the Americas over the 400-year history of the slave trade.⁹ Some scholars estimate that more than 50% of those African slaves ended up in Brazil, while only 5% went to the United States.¹⁰ Although many Africans perished due to harsh working conditions and disease, new slaves from West Africa continued to replace them until abolition occurred. Slavery was abolished in most Latin American countries at or soon after their independence from Spain in the 1820s, but continued in Brazil until 1888.

As slavery and lingering racism have left an indelible mark on Afro-Latinos, so too has the long but little-known legacy of black rebellion and self-liberation (marronage). The first slave rebellions occurred in Puerto Rico (1514) and Hispaniola (1522). By the 17th century, maroons (escaped slaves) in Latin America have been estimated to have numbered between 11,000 and 30,000.¹¹ Maroons formed communities with sovereign territoriality in remote terrains with low population densities that now constitute the prominent Afro-Latino areas of eastern and northern South America, Central America, and the Caribbean.¹² According to the Brazilian Ministry of Culture, there are at least 1,098 *quilombola* (escaped slaves) communities in Brazil.

Current Status. Many Afro-Latinos lack access to some of the tools that the World Bank has identified as crucial to overcoming poverty — education, stable

⁸ For Brazilian census figures, see Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística, Censo Demográfico — 2000, at [<http://www.ibge.gov.br>]. For U.S. census figures by race, see [<http://www.census.gov>].

⁹ Johannes Postma, *The Atlantic Slave Trade*. (London: Greenwood Press, 2003).

¹⁰ Howard Dodson, “The Transatlantic Slave Trade and the Making of the Modern World,” in *African Roots/African Cultures: Africa in the Creation of the Americas*, Sheila Walker, ed. (Maryland: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2001); Hillary Mayell, “Re-Examining U.S. Slaves’ Role in Their Emancipation,” *National Geographic News*, December 6, 2002.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, Mayell.

¹² For a comprehensive history of the African diaspora in the Americas, see Norman E. Whitten and Arlene Torres, eds., *Blackness in Latin America and the Caribbean* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1998). For a more recent history of Afro-Latinos, see: George Reid Andrews, *Afro-Latin America, 1800-2000* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004).

employment, and land titles. In some countries, such as Colombia, Afro-descendants lack access to justice and governmental protection from armed conflict.¹³

Anecdotal information from across the region points to a correlation between African descent and political, economic, and social marginalization. Since most countries in Latin America do not disaggregate socioeconomic data by race, it is difficult to find good quantitative data to establish a correlation between race and poverty in Latin America. In 1997, the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) found that although Afro-Latinos constitute less than a third of Latin America's total population, they account for 40% of the poor. Statistics from Brazil and Colombia support that finding. A 1999 household survey in Brazil found that:

- blacks represent 45% of the population, but constitute 64% of the poor and 69% of the extremely poor;
- 52% of blacks live in houses without adequate sanitation, versus 28% of whites;
- the average 25-year old black Brazilian has only 6.1 years of schooling, versus 8.4 years for whites; and
- illiteracy among blacks over 15 years of age is 20%; for whites it is only 8%.¹⁴

These statistics reveal a living situation for Afro-Brazilians that is not dissimilar to that of Afro-Colombians. Colombia has the second largest Afro-descendant population in Latin America. The following are some select demographics for Afro-Colombians and their communities:

- blacks compose about 25% of the Colombian population, and 80% of them live in conditions of extreme poverty;¹⁵
- 74% of Afro-Colombians earn less than the minimum wage;
- Chocó, the department with the highest percentage of Afro-Colombians, has the lowest per-capita level of government investment in health, education, and infrastructure;¹⁶
- illiteracy in black communities is 45%, versus 14% for white communities; and
- the Colombian healthcare system covers only 10% of black communities, versus 40% of white communities.¹⁷

¹³ U.S. Department of State, *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices 2004: Colombia*, February, 2005.

¹⁴ Ricard Henriques, "Desigualdade racial no Brasil," Brasília: Instituto de Pesquisa Econômica Aplicada (IPEA), 2001; Mala Htun, "From 'Racial Democracy' to Affirmative Action: Changing State Policy on Race in Brazil," *Latin American Research Review*, Vol. 39, No.1, February 2004.

¹⁵ United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (UNHCR), "Report on the Human Rights Situation in Colombia," February 28, 2002.

¹⁶ U.S. Department of State, "Colombia: Country Report on Human Rights Practices, 2004," February 2005.

¹⁷ Milam Fitts, "The Mundo Afro Project," Inter-American Foundation, September 2001.

It is worth noting that Brazil and Colombia, two countries with some socioeconomic data broken out into racial categories, have recently developed the most extensive anti-discrimination legislation geared toward Afro-descendants in Latin America. This legislation developed gradually, some assert, as policymakers sought to rectify the political, economic, and social exclusion of Afro-descendants. Some analysts, including officials from both the IDB and the World Bank, have therefore pointed to the importance of gathering better official information on the status of Afro-descendants throughout the region.¹⁸

Issues Affecting Afro-Latino Populations

This section provides a brief overview of some of the major issues affecting Afro-descendant communities in Latin America. These issues include legal protection, political representation, land rights, human rights, and access to quality healthcare. When applicable, the section compares and contrasts the situation of Afro-descendants to that of indigenous peoples. Indigenous peoples are, generally, descendants of the Amerindian ethnic groups that lived in the hemisphere prior to the European conquest who retain distinct communal, cultural, linguistic, or geographic identification with that heritage.

Indigenous peoples have, perhaps as a result of their distinct heritage and shared history, generally exhibited a stronger sense of group identity and a higher level of political mobilization than Afro-descendants. For example, while the First Inter-American Indian Congress was held in Mexico in 1940, the first large-scale hemispheric meeting of Afro-descendant leaders was held in 1977, and the first meeting of Afro-Latino legislators was held in Brazil in 2003. Some have argued that Afro-descendant communities that have been able to prove their “indigenous-like” status have achieved more rights and recognition from their governments than other blacks in the region.¹⁹ Others assert that it has been easier for the indigenous to achieve collective rights than Afro-descendants as political elites in Latin America have tended to award those rights on the basis “of a perceived possession of a distinct cultural group identity, not a history of political exclusion or racial discrimination.”²⁰

Political and Legal Issues

National Census. A government may define race and delimit a country’s concept of “otherness” by the categories it chooses to include in its national census. In a 1991 census, Brazilians used 100 different words to define their racial

¹⁸ Josefina Stubbs, “Afro-Descendants in the Americas: Issues, Achievements, and Challenges,” World Bank, Presentation at the Congressional Black Caucus Legislative Forum, September 9, 2004.

¹⁹ Eva T. Thorne, *NACLA Report on the Americas*, New York: September/October 2004, Vol. 35, Issue 2.

²⁰ Juliet Hooker, “Indigenous Inclusion/Black Exclusion: Race, Ethnicity, and Multicultural Citizenship in Latin America,” *Journal of Latin American Studies*, May 1, 2005.

categories.²¹ In the early 1990s, some analysts criticized the Brazilian government's historic tendency not to encourage citizens to define their racial identity in strict categories. They argued that ambiguous census categories inhibited the formation of advocacy groups and political movements to improve the status of Afro-Brazilians.²² In 1995, Fernando Henrique Cardoso assumed the presidency in Brazil and, under his leadership, the Brazilian government began to use fewer racial categories in the country's national census. The government sought to collect official statistics on Afro-Brazilians in order to assess whether specific public policies were needed to improve their socioeconomic status. Some observers have attributed Brazil's subsequent adoption of some affirmative action policies as a positive byproduct of this census reform.

In 2000, encouraged by the Brazilian example, the World Bank sponsored the first of two conferences on census reform for officials from national statistics bureaus across the region. As a result of these conferences, and ongoing census reform, most countries in Latin America have moved to include racial indicators in their national censuses.

Anti-discrimination Legislation. No Latin American country has ever enacted the type of strict racially based discriminatory laws that were once common in the United States. A paradoxical result of that distinction is that the law has, thus far, proved to be a more successful tool for dismantling racism in the United States than it has in Latin America.²³

According to the Inter-American Dialogue, a great deal of variation exists among Latin American countries with respect to anti-discrimination legislation targeted at Afro-descendants.²⁴ As of August 2004, only Brazil, Colombia, and Ecuador had constitutional bans on racial discrimination that are specific to Afro-descendants. In several other countries — Nicaragua, Honduras, and Peru — Afro-descendants, though not specifically identified by a constitutional provision, have been given the same sort of legal protection and collective rights as indigenous peoples.²⁵ The Dominican Republic stands out as the only country in Latin America with a large Afro-Latino population that has neither constitutional provisions nor major laws to prevent racial discrimination.

Political Representation. Afro-Latinos are under-represented politically in many Latin American nations. In 2004, Brazil, a country with 45% of its population claiming some African ancestry, 27 congressmen of a total of 594 self-identified as

²¹ R. Reichmann, *Race in Contemporary Brazil: from Indifference to Inequality* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1999).

²² Htun, 2004.

²³ Cottrol, 2001.

²⁴ For a detailed discussion on constitutional provisions and legal actions related to Afro-Latinos, see Inter-American Dialogue, "Race Report," August 2004.

²⁵ Juliet Hooker and Edmund T. Gordon, "The Status of Black Land Rights in Central America," paper presented at the 2004 Latin American Studies Association (LASA) Conference, October 2004.

Afro-Brazilian.²⁶ In Nicaragua, the population is 9% Afro-Latino and 5% indigenous. While two members of the National Assembly claim indigenous heritage, none claim to be Afro-descendant. Nicaragua has a measure in place to ensure that political party tickets include a certain percentage of candidates from indigenous backgrounds, but no such provision to encourage Afro-descendant representation.

Colombia assigns seats in its House of Representatives to persons of African descent. In 2004, Colombia had two Afro-Colombian senator and three Afro-Colombian members of its House of Representatives. There were no Afro-Colombian cabinet ministers or judges on the country's high courts.

Some policy-makers in Latin America believe other countries should follow the Colombian example and employ quotas in order to ensure that Afro-descendants (as well as indigenous peoples) are represented on party tickets and in legislative bodies. Quotas, though controversial, have been used across the region to increase female political representation. In 1991, Argentina enacted a law requiring parties to present at least 30% female candidates in their party lists. By 1997, women's representation in the Argentine Congress had risen to 28%, one of the highest rates in the world. Since the Beijing Conference on Women in 1995, at least eight other Latin American countries have passed laws requiring political parties to reserve 20%-40% of candidacies for women.

Another way to address the issue of race and political representation has been the creation of new institutions to promote racial equity and affirmative action. In 2003, Brazil established a Special Secretariat with a ministerial rank to manage Racial Equity Promotion Policies. The mission of the Special Secretariat is to develop initiatives to reduce racial inequalities by developing affirmative action programs, coordinating with other Ministers and government entities, and cooperating with the private sector and international institutions. Other countries in the region that have similar government entities in place include Ecuador, Colombia, and Peru.

Affirmative Action. In 2001, Brazil became the first Latin American country to endorse quotas in order to increase minority representation in government service. Although Brazil's public universities are free, most Afro-Brazilians, the majority of whom attend public high schools, have been unable to pass the admissions test required to attend those universities. In 2000, black students comprised only 2% of Brazil's 3 million college students.²⁷ Since 2002, several state universities throughout Brazil have enacted quotas setting aside 20% of admission slots for black students. The Brazilian Congress is debating whether to enact racial quotas for all public universities, government agencies, and television casting. In 2004, the first university in Latin America established to serve black students opened in São Paulo, Brazil.

²⁶ This information on Afro-Latino representation in Brazil, Nicaragua, and Colombia was gathered from the U.S. Department of State's Country Reports on Human Rights covering 2004.

²⁷ Marion Lloyd, "In Brazil, a Different Approach to Affirmative Action," *Chronicle of Higher Education*, October 29, 2004.

The use of quotas in university admissions and government hiring programs has opened up a vigorous debate on affirmative action in Brazil that may spread to other countries in Latin America. While most Brazilians favor government programs to combat social exclusion and inequality, they disagree as to whether the beneficiaries of those programs should be selected on the basis of race or income.²⁸ Several court cases in Brazil have challenged the fairness of using racial quotas for university admissions. Some observers have stated that state governments throughout Brazil have not budgeted the funds necessary to provide financial assistance and supplementary services for minority students admitted under the quota program.²⁹

Human Rights

For the past several years, both USAID and the multilateral development banks have shared the goal of increasing human rights protection and access to the justice system for minority groups in Latin America, but progress has been slow in both these areas. The State Department Human Rights Report for Brazil covering 2004 finds that “darker-skinned citizens, particularly Afro-Brazilians, frequently encountered discrimination,” and that “people of color were five times more likely to be shot or killed in the course of a law enforcement action than were persons perceived to be white.” Afro-Ecuadorians reportedly face both official discrimination and negative stereotyping and are stopped by police for document checks more frequently than other citizens.³⁰ A 2004 report on people of African descent and the judicial systems of Brazil, Colombia, Peru, and the Dominican Republic finds weak enforcement of laws against racism, and limited access to justice for blacks in these countries.³¹ Though data on Latin American prisons is limited, the survey also found blacks to make up large percentages of prison populations living in conditions that were often overcrowded, violent, and unhygienic.

In Colombia, the regions on the Pacific Coast where Afro-Colombians reside, such as the Chocó, are among the poorest, most isolated regions of the country. The absence of an effective state presence in these communities has created a vacuum into which the country’s 40-year conflict between paramilitaries and guerrilla forces has spread. In May 2002, a battle between these forces resulted in the bombing death of 119 Afro-Colombian civilians who had sought refuge in a town church. In 2003, UNHCR noted a “marked worsening” of conflict in Afro-Colombian communities.³² According to the Colombian Consultation for Human Rights and Displacement (CODHES), the displacement rate of these communities is 20% higher than the

²⁸ Livio Sansone, “Anti-Racism in Brazil,” *NACLA Report on the Americas*, September 1, 2004.

²⁹ Jonas Zoninsein, “Affirmative Action and Development in Brazil,” paper presented at the 2004 Latin American Studies Association (LASA) Conference, October 2004.

³⁰ U.S. Department of State, *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices 2004: Ecuador*, February, 2005.

³¹ Justice Studies Center of the Americas, “The Judicial System and Racism Against People of African Descent,” March 2004.

³² United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (UNHCR), “Report on the Human Rights Situation in Colombia,” February 2003.

national rate.³³ Nationally, Afro-Colombians compose roughly 33% of the total displaced population, which is now between 2 and 3 million. As of May 2005, UN officials reported that more than 2,000 Colombians had fled their homes along the Bojayá River due to the conflict.³⁴ Afro-Colombian leaders have expressed concern that the Colombian government, though making an effort to protect some endangered Afro-Colombian leaders, has not responded to black communities' demands for better government services and increased protection. They would also like to be consulted on issues such as aerial fumigation, the proposed Andean Free Trade Agreement, and the reintegration of former paramilitaries into their communities.³⁵

Land Titles

Giving poor families access to land titles has been identified as an important poverty-fighting measure.³⁶ Land titles can enable families to obtain mortgages to finance home improvements, to start small businesses, or to pay for their children's education. Increasing legal land ownership enables governments to collect more property taxes to pay for schools, hospitals, and infrastructure projects. The World Bank has helped finance land-titling programs in Peru, Bolivia, El Salvador, and Guatemala.

In the 1980s, a number of Latin American countries began to recognize the importance of land reform. One type of land reform that has benefitted indigenous and some Afro-descendant groups has been ethnic-specific. Starting with Brazil in 1988, and Colombia in 1991, Latin American governments began to recognize the historically derived land rights of some black communities, notably maroon communities of escaped slaves' descendants.³⁷

Afro-descendant groups have, in general, been much less successful than indigenous groups in gaining collective land rights. In Central America, only Afro-Latinos in Honduras and Nicaragua have gained the same collective land rights as indigenous communities. For example, the Garifuna community, descendants of escaped slaves from St. Vincent that inhabit the Caribbean coast of Central America, won communal land rights in Honduras and Nicaragua by proving that their language, religious beliefs, and traditional agriculture techniques are inextricably linked to their notion of land and territory.³⁸ In contrast, Afro-Latinos whose ancestors were brought as slaves have been integrated into the mestizo culture of Central America and do not therefore possess the racial/cultural group identity or

³³ Jeffrey, Neil and Tara Carr, "The Impact of the War on Afro-Colombians," U.S. Office on Colombia, July 2004.

³⁴ "More Than 2,000 Afro-Colombians Displaced by Violence," *Agence France Presse*, May 8, 2005.

³⁵ Email from Luis Murillo, Lutheran World Relief, September 19, 2005.

³⁶ Tyler Bridges, "Land Titles Give Poor a Chance to Advance," *Miami Herald*, April 4, 2004.

³⁷ Thorne, 2004; Hooker and Gordon, 2004.

³⁸ Hooker and Gordon, 2004.

specific relationship to the land that the Garifuna possess. The same can be said of Afro-Colombians residing in Colombia's major cities as compared to those on the Pacific Coast.

Even Afro-descendant groups that have communal titles, such as the Garifuna, are facing increasing challenges to their land titles, especially in coastal areas, as real estate developers seek to capitalize on the recent boom in tourism development. Some Garifuna have also expressed concerns that a 2004 Honduran law granting land titles for individual and private capital development, may threaten their communal land rights.³⁹

Health

Although extensive regional data are not yet available, existing studies from selected countries indicate a persistent gap between health indicators for Afro-descendants and for the general population in Latin America.⁴⁰ Analysts from the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) assert that these health differentials result, at least in part, from racial discrimination. Discrimination in health can limit ethnic minorities' access to services and reduce the quality of information and services provided to them. Racial discrimination also operates indirectly, according to PAHO, by limiting the types of jobs, living conditions, and educational opportunities available to indigenous groups and Afro-descendants.

Health disparities are evident in some countries by higher rates of infant mortality, homicide, suicide, and HIV/AIDS among Afro-Latinos than other people in Latin America.⁴¹ The infant mortality rate in the Chocó, a region that is 70% Afro-Colombian, is the highest in Colombia, more than three times higher than the rates in Bogotá. Similarly, in Brazil, the infant mortality rate by race of the mother in 1993 was 37 per 1,000 for whites and 62 per 1,000 for blacks. Figures from Ecuador reveal significantly higher homicide and suicide rates in Esmeraldas, a coastal region that is inhabited by Afro-descendants, than the national average. In Honduras, the Garifuna community of Afro-descendants has a much higher HIV/AIDS prevalence rate (an estimated 8%-10%) than the general population (where the rate is less than 2%). In 2002, a household survey in the Dominican Republic found a higher HIV/AIDS rate among Haitians and Dominico-Haitians working in the sugarcane fields (4.9%) than for the general population (1.7%). These figures, though far from exhaustive, illustrate some of the major health challenges facing Afro-descendants in Latin America.

³⁹ "Land Legislation Threatens Garifunas," *Central America Report*, April 1, 2005.

⁴⁰ Cristina Torres Parodi, "Working to Achieve Health Equity with an Ethnic Perspective," Pan American Health Organization (PAHO), October 2004; Cristina Torres Parodi, "Ethnicity and Health: Another Perspective Towards Equity," PAHO, June 2001.

⁴¹ These statistics were drawn from country statistics cited in two sources. See PAHO, "Health in the Americas," 2002, vol 1; PAHO, "Health and Ethnic Groups," Presentation for Latin American Parliament Meeting in Guatemala, 2004.

U.S. Policy Considerations

The United States, some assert, has an interest in improving the condition of Afro-Latinos in Latin America. People of African descent comprise a significant portion of the population in several Latin American countries, and account for nearly 50% of the region's poor. For many Afro-descendants, endemic poverty is reportedly exacerbated by isolation, exclusion, and racial discrimination. The IDB notes that Afro-Latinos are among the most "invisible" of the excluded groups as they are not well-represented among national political, economic, and educational leadership in the region.⁴² They have also been, until recently, absent from many countries' census and socioeconomic data.

Although Afro-descendants have benefitted from general development assistance to the region, they have not, in most cases, received the same degree of attention or amount of targeted funding as indigenous peoples. Afro-descendant communities have suffered human rights abuses, especially in Colombia. They may also be at a high-risk of contracting HIV/AIDS. Some argue that their demands — for political representation, land rights, jobs, access to health and education programs, and human rights protection — intersect with strategic U.S. goals for the region.

This section outlines several U.S. foreign assistance programs that are already targeting Afro-descendant communities in Latin America. It then discusses how multilateral development banks and regional political institutions, such as the Organization of American States (OAS), entities of which the United States is a member and major funding source, are engaging on this issue. The section includes a brief description of previous legislative activity addressing the concerns of Afro-Latinos, as well as legislation being considered during the 109th Congress. It concludes with a brief discussion of other policy approaches that have been proposed should the United States elect to provide further support for Afro-Latinos in Latin America.

U.S. Foreign Assistance and Afro-Latinos

Assisting Afro-Latinos has never been a primary U.S. foreign policy objective. However, a number of economic aid agencies that receive U.S. funding have benefitted Afro-descendants and their communities either directly or indirectly. Two of these agencies — USAID and the Peace Corps — are government agencies. One — the Inter-American Foundation — is an independent agency of the U.S. government. The last organization — the National Endowment for Democracy (NED) — is a private foundation funded by the U.S. government. Since many of the programs serving Afro-Latinos are small and relatively new, few independent

⁴² Social exclusion occurs when certain populations are denied the benefits of social and economic development based on their race, gender, ethnicity, or disabilities. According to the IDB, social exclusion in Latin America affects indigenous peoples, Afro-descendants, women, the disabled, and those living with HIV/AIDS. See [http://www.iadb.org/sds/soc/site_3094_e.htm].

evaluations exist to evaluate their effectiveness. Unless otherwise noted, sources for the program descriptions contained in this section of the report were compiled from documents provided by the agency or entity in question.

U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID). Bilateral economic aid to Latin America is primarily administered by USAID. Under President Bush, U.S. policy towards Latin America is based on three broad objectives — strengthening democracy, encouraging development, and enhancing security. While hemispheric security is addressed by programs funded through counter narcotics and military accounts of the U.S. foreign assistance budget, most development programs aimed at fostering social, political, and economic progress are funded by the Child Survival and Health (CSH), Development Assistance (DA), and Economic Support Funds (ESF) accounts.⁴³

In Latin America, USAID policy is to support efforts to deepen and broaden the participation of all groups, especially those that are poor and marginalized. According to USAID, beneficiaries of its programs in the region include indigenous populations and people of African descent. In some countries these groups have faced legal or official discrimination in employment, access to health and education programs, and property rights. In Colombia, they have suffered from human rights abuses as a result of an ongoing armed conflict. To address these issues, USAID has reached out to indigenous and Afro-Latino populations, both through targeted programs and through broad efforts to support marginalized populations. In FY2004, six USAID bilateral and regional programs worked directly with Afro-Latinos. Many of these programs have continued in FY2005 and are included in the FY2006 budget request. Among USAID's recent programs targeting Afro-Latinos are the following:

Bilingual Education for Afro-Latinos in Nicaragua. In 1999, USAID began funding an education program known as “Base Project II.” One of the components of the program is to increase access to quality education for the multilingual and multiethnic populations living in the Atlantic Coast regions of Nicaragua. The project has created 170 model schools, 28 (16%) of which are located in Afro-descendant communities. Among the 170 model schools, fifth grade completion rates are reportedly 20% higher than in the traditional schools, and parent participation is close to 100%. The total value of the program to date is \$20 million (including \$5 million in recovery funds given after Hurricane Mitch), and it was extended through September 2005.

Community-Based HIV/AIDS Prevention in Honduras. USAID / Guatemala's Central American Program (G-CAP) has supported the implementation of a community-based HIV/AIDS prevention model, known as “AIDS Action,” in 15

⁴³ CSH funds focus on combating infectious diseases, such as HIV/AIDS, malaria, and tuberculosis, as well as on promoting child and maternal health, family planning, and overall reproductive health. DA funds aim to achieve measurable improvements in key areas to foster sustainable economic growth: trade and investment, agriculture, education, health and democracy. Through the security-related ESF program, the United States provides economic aid to countries of strategic interest to U.S. foreign policy. For more information on U.S. foreign assistance, see CRS Report RL32487, *U.S. Foreign Assistance to Latin America and the Caribbean*, coordinated by Connie Veillette.

sites in Central America, including two Garifuna communities in the Atlantic Coast of Honduras. As previously mentioned, the Garifuna community of Afro-descendants has a much higher HIV/AIDS prevalence rate (an estimated 8%-10% compared to the general population, where the rate is less than 2%). The project is a relatively low-cost intervention that supports community ownership, responsibility, and action in combating HIV/AIDS on the local level. Between 2001 and 2003, USAID provided \$58,695 to train health facilitators in Tornabé, Honduras. That program has continued with the support of private donors. In Puerto Castilla, USAID has allocated \$23,207 for an AIDS prevention program for school youth that began in April 2003 and will continue through January 2005. To date, there have been no independent evaluations to assess the effectiveness of the “Aids Action” program.

Programs Benefiting Afro-Colombians. USAID/Colombia supports Afro-Colombians and their communities through six programs. Those programs include alternative development, local governance, administration of justice, human rights, peace initiatives, and support for internally displaced persons. USAID’s alternative development programs include an agriculture program that has taught approximately 6,900 Afro-Colombian families (34,000 individuals) viable alternatives to illegal drug production. USAID is also promoting a sustainable forestry project that will benefit an additional 500 Afro-Colombians. According to USAID, its governance programs have trained an estimated 46,000 Afro-Colombians to strengthen citizen participation in local governments. Afro-Colombian leaders have complained, however, that USAID and other development agencies have not always sought Afro-Colombian participation in project formation and implementation. USAID has created “justice houses” in five departments that have provided 30,000 Afro-Colombians access to government services and conciliation services. USAID asserts that its assistance to displaced persons has benefitted over 500,000 Afro-Colombians.

A 2004 GAO report found that U.S. nonmilitary assistance programs to Colombia have begun to produce some positive results.⁴⁴ However, individual projects reach a relatively small number of beneficiaries, confront serious implementation obstacles, and may be difficult to sustain. The report contains only one direct reference to Afro-Colombians in a section on assistance to internally displaced persons (IDPs). It describes a small project outside of Bogotá that has provided health and education services to roughly 480 Afro-Colombian IDPs and their families. The report asserts that internally displaced persons do not generally receive all the assistance they need, and that USAID does not keep track of its beneficiaries to assess whether they have been able to transition back in to society.

Other current USAID projects involving Afro-Latinos include: an artisan enterprise project in Bolivia, a local government program that includes Afro-Ecuadorian communities in Ecuador, a civil society program working to prevent racial conflict in Guyana, and a tourism development program in Panama.

⁴⁴ U.S. General Accounting Office, “U.S. Nonmilitary Assistance to Colombia Is Beginning to Show Intended Results, but Programs are not Readily Sustainable,” GAO-04-746, July 2004.

Afro-Cuban Assistance. In early May 2003, President Bush endorsed the recommendations of the Inter-Agency Commission for Assistance to a Free Cuba and directed that up to \$36 million be made available for democracy-building activities for Cuba. This included \$4 million targeted at programs to develop democracy-building and civil society groups within the Afro-Cuban community.⁴⁵

Inter-American Foundation (IAF). The Inter-American Foundation is a small federal agency that provides approximately 60 new grants each year to non-profit and community-based programs in Latin America and the Caribbean. The grants are awarded to organizations that promote entrepreneurship, self-reliance, and economic progress for the poor. The FY2005 estimated appropriation for the IAF was \$18 million, and the FY2006 request is also about \$18 million.

Since the mid-1990s, the IAF has been working to raise awareness of the issues facing Afro-descendants, a minority group that has long benefitted from its grassroots development programs. The IAF has provided more than 60 grants amounting to almost \$8 million to coastal Garifuna and rural maroon communities whose origins date back to the escaped slaves of the colonial period. The FY2003 grants include \$258,600 over three years to a Brazilian organization that is training Afro-descendant domestic workers to start their own businesses. IAF also provided \$200,750 over two years to develop a regional network of Afro-descendant communities in Brazil, Uruguay, Argentina, and Paraguay. The network will fund projects focused on micro-enterprise development, education, and cultural preservation. Other IAF-funded NGOs working in both rural and urban areas with diverse subsections of the poor in Latin America count African descendants among their primary beneficiaries.

In addition to its grant work, the IAF has represented the U.S. government in a number of regional and international groups and forums in which Afro-descendant issues have been discussed. In 1999, the IAF became a founding member of the Inter-American Dialogue's Inter-Agency Consultation on Race Relations in Latin America (IAC). In 2001, the IAF sponsored the first panel on African descendants held at a Latin American Studies Association (LASA) conference. Finally, the IAF has co-sponsored a number of events on Afro-Latinos and their communities with the National Council of La Raza.⁴⁶

Peace Corps. The Peace Corps sends U.S. volunteers to developing countries to provide technical aid and to promote mutual understanding on a people-to-people

⁴⁵ The State Department reports that Afro-Cubans, though composing a majority of the country's population, are under-represented in leadership positions and are socially marginalized. See U.S. Department of State, *Commission for Assistance to a Free Cuba*, May 6, 2004.

⁴⁶ Founded in 1968, the National Council of La Raza — the largest national constituency-based Hispanic organization — is a private, non-profit, non-partisan advocacy organization dedicated to improving the living situation of Hispanic Americans. Since 2001, NCLR's international efforts have included an initiative to improve the visibility of Afro-Latinos in the United States and abroad. This initiative has resulted in the convocation of a number of roundtable discussions on Afro-Latinos, and, since 2002, a panel on Afro-descendants at La Raza's Annual Conference.

basis. The FY2005 estimated appropriation for the Peace Corps in Latin America was \$45.2 million and the FY2006 request is \$43.1 million. Peace Corps volunteers are currently working in several countries in the region that have significant Afro-Latino populations. Those countries include the Dominican Republic, Honduras, Nicaragua, Panama, and Ecuador. Peace Corps/Dominican Republic says that 70% of its 154 volunteers are working with Afro-descendant populations. Many of the 30 volunteers working on maternal and child health care and HIV/AIDS prevention work in *bateyes* (small communities bordering sugar mills), which are among the poorest areas in the country. The vast majority of the beneficiaries in those communities (90%) are of Haitian/African descent. Peace Corps/Ecuador reports that 10 of its 143 volunteers are working with Afro-Ecuadorians in activities related to life skills development (including self-esteem, leadership, and job skills), income generation activities, and HIV/AIDS prevention and education.

National Endowment for Democracy (NED). The National Endowment for Democracy (NED), funded by Congress since 1983, plans and administers grants to promote pluralism and democratic governance in more than 90 countries around the world. In FY2004, NED provided approximately \$6.6 million in grants to organizations working in Latin America and the Caribbean. NED plans to give \$10.9 million in grants in FY2005. The primary focus of these organizations is to foster participation of citizens in their national political systems.

Until 2005, few NED-funded activities were aimed specifically at Afro-descendant groups. Between FY2002 and FY2004, however, NED provided \$135,920 to the Association of Youth Groups FREEDOM in Colombia. The FY2005 grant for the Association is \$73,570. This association has helped Afro-Colombians in 12 municipalities near Cali, Colombia, to develop budget proposals reflecting their community's needs that were subsequently integrated into municipal and state development plans. In October 2003, project participants ran for office in local elections, and four were elected (one as mayor and three as council members). NED has also supported the League of Displaced Women, a group that, in 2003, provided education and support to over 300 displaced Afro-Colombian and indigenous women in the department of Bolivar. In 2003, the league also formed a committee to denounce human rights abuses, processed 86 petitions for forced displacement, and established five community safe houses for women and children. The FY2003 grant for the league was \$45,000, and the FY2004 grant was \$51,919.

In addition to ongoing support for the Association of Youth Groups Freedom in Colombia, NED's FY2005 approved projects include: \$62,000 for the creation of a journal about the situation of Afro-Cubans, \$89,213 for two grants to strengthen leadership and political participation in Afro-Ecuadorian communities, and \$90,539 for Afro-América XXI, a group based in Colombia, to provide training in effective political participation to Afro-Latino organizations in Honduras, Peru, and Venezuela.

Multilateral Development Banks and Afro-Latinos

In addition to its bilateral aid, the United States is a member and the major funding source of the multilateral development banks that work in Latin America — the World Bank and the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB). The World Bank

and the IDB have both funded a number of projects benefiting Afro-descendants in Latin America.

World Bank. In several countries, the World Bank is supporting efforts to incorporate race/ethnicity variables into national censuses. In June 2004, the World Bank approved a \$34 million loan to support the development of indigenous and Afro-descendant communities in Ecuador. The loan will support social organizations, cultural activities, and educational opportunities for these groups. It will also fund small-scale rural investment and natural resource management projects designed by eligible communities. The Ecuador loan is similar to support for an ongoing community development project, “Our Roots,” that the bank has funded in Honduras since 1997. In 2004, the bank loaned the government of Honduras an additional \$15 million for this project to help 2,000 indigenous and Afro-Honduran communities design community-development plans that will become part of municipal development strategies. In 2005, the World Bank will release reports on the socioeconomic situation of Afro-descendants and indigenous peoples in Colombia, Peru, Ecuador, Honduras, and Argentina.

Inter-American Development Bank. In 1996, the IDB undertook the first comprehensive assessment of the situation of Afro-descendants in Latin America. Since that time, the IDB has focused, perhaps more than any other organization working in the region, on combating poverty and social exclusion in Afro-Latinos communities.⁴⁷ In addition to joining the Inter-Agency Committee on Race Relations in Latin America, the IDB formed a Working Group and a High Level Steering Committee on Social Inclusion in 2000. The IDB’s broad social inclusion program includes indigenous peoples, Afro-descendants, persons with disabilities, poor women, and people with HIV/AIDS. With respect to exclusion based on race and ethnicity, the IDB has pledged to increase capacity-building within the bank and in the region, to support research on this topic, and to expand projects focused on Afro-descendants and indigenous groups.

In February 2003, the IDB launched a Social Inclusion Trust Fund, which is being funded by initial investments by the governments of Norway and Great Britain, to support small-scale initiatives to promote social inclusion. In 2003, the fund financed more than \$1 million in social inclusion projects in Latin America. The funds were allocated in the following way: 33% to Afro-descendant groups, 13% to indigenous peoples, 15% to disability projects, and 39% to cross-cutting projects. In addition to the projects supported by the fund, other IDB loans and technical consultations on behalf of social inclusion totaled approximately \$649.5 million in 2003. In 2004, the IDB published a book on Social Inclusion and Economic Development in Latin America.⁴⁸ Also in 2004, the IDB approved projects aimed at

⁴⁷ Minority Rights Group International, “Afro-descendants, Discrimination and Economic Exclusion in Latin America,” 2003. Minority Rights Group International is a London-based advocacy group that works on behalf of minorities and indigenous peoples worldwide. See [<http://www.minorityrights.org>].

⁴⁸ Mayra Buvinic and Jacqueline Mazza, eds., *Social Inclusion and Economic Development in Latin America* (Washington, DC: Inter-American Development Bank/Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004).

both Afro-Latinos and indigenous communities totaling some \$312 million. These efforts will be complemented by training, travel grants, and best practices rewards provided to nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) throughout the region.

International Organizations, Conferences, and Afro-Latinos

The United Nations (U.N.) Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination entered into force in 1969. The United States, along with all the Spanish- and Portuguese-speaking countries in Latin America, are parties to this convention. As signatories, these countries have agreed to condemn racial discrimination and undertake all appropriate means necessary to eliminate it in all of its forms.

Organization of American States. Hemispheric leaders reiterated a commitment to ending poverty and discrimination at Summit of the Americas meetings held in Santiago (1998), Quebec (2001), and Monterrey (2004). In 2003, Brazil proposed a resolution requesting that the Organization of American States (OAS), a political body of Western Hemisphere countries, draft an Inter-American Convention for the Prevention of Racism and All Forms of Discrimination and Intolerance. Although this resolution has yet to be adopted, it has been considered by the OAS General Assembly. As a followup to this resolution, the OAS commissioned a report by the Justice Studies Center of the Americas, completed in March 2004, on the judicial systems and racism against Afro-descendants in several countries in the region.⁴⁹ Several cases involving Afro-descendants and their communities have been resolved or are pending before the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IAHCR) and the Inter-American Court. In February 2005, the IAHCR created a Special Rapporteur on the Rights of People of African descent and racial discrimination.

Inter-Agency Consultation on Race in Latin America (IAC). In 2000, the Inter-American Dialogue founded the Inter-Agency Consultation on Race in Latin America (IAC), a consultative group of international development institutions that meets regularly to address issues of race, discrimination, and social exclusion facing Afro-descendants in Latin America. The IAC is comprised of representatives from the British Department for International Development, World Bank, Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), Pan American Health Organization (PAHO), OAS Commission on Human Rights, Inter-American Foundation, and Ford Foundation. Its mission is to encourage the hemisphere's policy-makers, including the U.S. government, as well as the international development agencies, to address issues of race and discrimination when designing and implementing programs. The IAC has, in consultation with academics and Afro-descendant advocacy and research groups in Latin America, sponsored a number of forums and conferences to increase the visibility of Afro-descendants and their communities. It is currently placing

⁴⁹ Justice Studies Center of the Americas, "The Judicial System and Racism Against People of African Descent," Santiago, Chile, March 2004.

emphasis on establishing specific development targets for Afro-descendants in the context of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).⁵⁰

Impact of Durban and Regional Conferences. In 2001, the World Conference Against Racism in Durban, South Africa increased regional interest in the challenges of Afro-Latinos. After a national dialogue on race leading up to its participation in the conference, the Brazilian government reportedly admitted for the first time that racial prejudice and discrimination were serious problems that Brazil had to overcome.⁵¹ In 2003, Brazil hosted the first meeting of Afro-descendant legislators in the Americas. The resulting “Brasilia Declaration” outlined concrete regional and national goals for advancing Afro-Latino concerns, and set forth the framework used to organize a second meeting of Afro-Latino legislators in Bogotá, Colombia, in May 2004. Legislators, including Members of the U.S. Congress, met for a third time in Costa Rica in August 2005. They and other Afro-Latino leaders are preparing to assess progress in advancing Afro-Latinos rights that has been made since the regional meeting to prepare for the Durban conference was held in Santiago in 2000. A “Santiago + 5” meeting is planned for December 2005 in Brazil.

Prior Legislative Activity

Congress has expressed some concern in recent years about the status of Afro-Latinos in Latin America. In the 107th Congress, the House Appropriations Committee report to the FY2003 Foreign Operations Bill (H.R. 5410, H.Rept. 107-663) included a section acknowledging the human rights violations suffered by Afro-Colombians, and urging USAID to increase funding on their behalf.

In the 108th Congress, one bill and two resolutions concerning Afro-Latinos were introduced in the House, but no action was taken on any of these initiatives. In November 2003, Congressman Menendez proposed a bill, H.R. 3447, the Social Investment Fund for the Americas Act of 2003, that would have provided assistance to reduce poverty and increase economic opportunity to the countries of the Western Hemisphere. The Social Investment Fund would seek to combat poverty and the exclusion of marginalized populations by targeting assistance to people of African descent, indigenous groups, women, and people with disabilities. It would have authorized the appropriation of \$250 million to USAID and to the IDB respectively for each of the fiscal years 2005 through 2009.

In February 2004, Congressman Rangel introduced a resolution, H.Con.Res. 47, recommending that the United States and the international community promote research, development programs, and advocacy efforts focused on improving the

⁵⁰ In 2000, hemispheric leaders agreed to support global development objectives known as the United Nations’ Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The United Nations Development Program (UNDP) is tracking regional and country progress towards attaining those goals. See [<http://www.undp.org>].

⁵¹ Some have argued that two byproducts of Brazil’s active participation in the Durban Conference and subsequent regional meetings on Afro-descendants have been its recent adoption of affirmative action programs, and legislation that requires schools to teach Afro-Brazilian history. See Htun, 2004.

situation of Afro-descendant communities in the region. In July 2004, Congressman Meeks submitted another resolution, H.Con.Res. 482, urging the United States government to work with the governments of Latin America, as well as the rest of the international community, to promote the visibility of Afro-descendants and to support efforts to eliminate racial and ethnic discrimination and the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals.

Legislation in the 109th Congress

On July 18, 2005 the House passed H.Con.Res. 175, recognizing the injustices suffered by African descendants of the transatlantic slave trade in all of the Americas and recommending that the United States and the international community work to improve the situation of Afro-descendant communities in Latin America and the Caribbean. On July 20, 2005, a companion resolution was referred to the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations after being received by the House.

Possible Options for Support for Afro-Latinos

In general, U.S. foreign aid has not addressed Afro-Latinos as a unique and specific category of beneficiaries. Afro-Latinos are not treated in the aid program the way “women in development” are — that is, as a group requiring special attention, including the need to enumerate those served in order to demonstrate and encourage progress. They have never been one of the targets designated for special attention by Congress or an Administration. Rather, insofar as Afro-Latinos comprise a large proportion of the poor in Latin America, they are helped by the general assistance programs that serve the poor. Additionally, some U.S. agencies have, to the extent possible, developed small interventions specific to the needs of certain Afro-descendant communities.

Some assert that the United States has an interest in increasing assistance to Afro-Latinos and delineating a clearer policy to address their needs. These analysts argue that Afro-Latinos have a set of problems specific to their situation that economic assistance is not yet adequately addressing. Three examples they point to include the dearth of data on the socioeconomic situation of Afro-descendants, the limited support given to Afro-Latino community organizations, and the precarious nature of the land titles held (and still being sought) by Afro-descendant communities.

Proponents of expanded assistance to Afro-Latinos emphasize the need for the United States to support or encourage Latin American governments’ efforts to collect better data on race/ethnicity and socioeconomic status. These proponents also are likely to support legislative initiatives targeting aid to Afro-Latinos and their communities, especially capacity-building programs for Afro-Latino community organizations. They believe that it is important to encourage USAID and other development institutions to include Afro-Latinos in the process of designing and implementing local programs. Finally, advocates of increased support for Afro-Latinos assert that it is important to sponsor exchanges between Afro-descendant leaders, organizers, and elected officials and interested groups in the United States.

In addition to increasing bilateral aid programs targeting Afro-Latinos, some argue that the United States could take a more active role in multilateral initiatives on behalf of Afro-Latinos. For example, the United States government could contribute (as Norway and Great Britain have) to the IDB's Social Inclusion Fund for the Americas. The U.S. government might also encourage the OAS to create a rapporteur on the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights to handle Afro-descendant issues and to put race on the agenda for the 2005 Summit of the Americas.

Others question whether increasing assistance to Afro-Latinos is feasible at a time when limited development assistance is being allocated to Latin America. They point out that Afro-Latinos are already benefiting from development assistance programs. Targeting further assistance to Afro-Latinos through earmarks or other means might force USAID and other agencies to cut funding for other needy groups. It may also increase the regulatory burden on development agencies by forcing them to gather statistics on a new subgroup that is, for reasons outlined in the section on identity in Latin America, sometimes difficult to delineate. Finally, they argue that mandating the inclusion of Afro-Latinos in Peace Corps, IAF, or Millennium Challenge Account (MCA) portfolios for a country may go against the priorities outlined by the agency or the country in question.

Still others caution that race is a sensitive issue for many countries in Latin America, and that the United States should proceed with caution when approaching this issue. Notions of race and national identity vary widely between the United States and Latin America, and within the countries of the region. Some maintain that it would be inappropriate for the United States to attempt to impose its views and policies with respect to race on other sovereign nations.

Figure 1. Afro-Latinos as a Percentage of Total Country Population



Source: Statistical data provided by Inter-American Dialogue Race Report, January 2003. Map Resources. Adapted by CRS. (K. Yancey 10/18/04).