



Toward a Common Agenda for the Andean Countries and the United States

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



A report from the Andean-U.S. Dialogue Forum

AN opening product of the Andean-U.S. Dialogue Forum, this report is intended to spur conversations on more effective cooperation by identifying convergences and divergences in priorities among the countries and the citizens of Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, and Venezuela, and the United States. It seeks to open the door to a better understanding of the internal dynamics in each country and to reduce stereotypes that impede cooperation to resolve mutual challenges. This report highlights the transnational issues of energy, climate change, trade, and illegal drugs, recognizing that beneficial progress will demand a collective response from all.

Why a Focus on Andean-U.S. Relations?

A dynamic subregion of 127 million people with a wealth of natural resources, the Andean countries have demonstrated impressive development progress. Boasting a gross national product (GDP) of \$1 trillion and \$100 billion in imports, the subregion has substantially matured over the past decade. The Andes weathered the

financial crisis well, and poverty has been substantially reduced since the mid-1990s. The Andes' role as a major source of energy and as one of the principal origins of illegal drugs cannot be ignored, especially in light of continued high demand. The region is home to the United States' closest allies in South America—Colombia and Peru—and to some of the countries with whom the United States often experiences the tensest relations, including Venezuela and Bolivia. All Andean countries are proposing new bases for their relations with the United States, rooted in mutual respect and recognition of the interests of each country.

Common Ground for Cooperation

The report reveals that the top priority for a common agenda is the hope for greater respect and mutual understanding among countries. The report identifies the urgent need to “de-militarize” and “de-narcotize” relations. Through elite surveys and public opinion polls in all six countries, the Dialogue Forum shares the following findings:

Strong agreement exists on promoting a social agenda.

Policies to promote social equality (fighting poverty and inequality) generate strong agreement in all countries. These are problems shared across all countries—including the United States. The Dialogue Forum recommends the following:

- Broaden the development agenda beyond traditional issues of trade and investment.

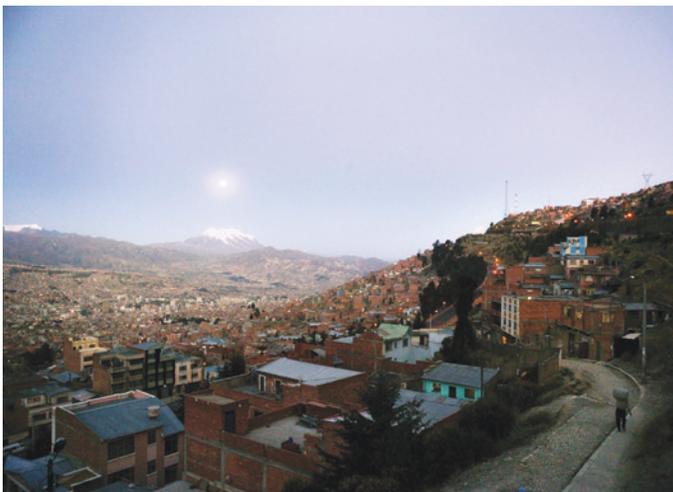
- Promote inclusive trade and investment to include vulnerable and marginalized populations and to comply with environmental and intercultural standards.
- Advance comprehensive immigration reform as a policy priority to mitigate the problems derived from illegal immigration.

General agreement exists on clean energy and environmental protection. This suggests that policies of this nature could be feasible and fruitful and should be pursued more fully. The Dialogue Forum recommends the following:

- Approach the climate-change debate as an opportunity to diversify agendas.
- Promote environmental protection (e.g., shared forests and glaciers are a rich area for cooperation to reduce degradation and to improve food security).

Ambivalence and divergence prevail on issues pertaining to citizen security. While public opinion prioritizes citizen security, elite opinion is ambivalent about the issue. Therefore, the Dialogue Forum recommends the following:

- Policy makers should attend to the high demand for citizen security, but broaden the cooperation agenda beyond drugs to transnational organized crime, including trafficking of arms, people, and contraband, and laundering of money.
- Foster a debate about the exhaustion of existing counternarcotics policies and work through multilateral forums for a comprehensive review and consideration of alternatives, while taking into account the specificity of each country and its social, economic, and security environment.
- Take advantage of the current opportunity in the Andean subregion and the United States to evaluate and advance new approaches and alternative policies in this area.



View of La Paz, Bolivia, one of the five Andean countries discussed in a report about the issues unique to the region and the United States.

Ambivalence exists on the promotion of democracy. The traditional approach of the United States of promoting democracy was met with ambivalence by respondents, potentially reflecting strong political connotations of perceived intrusion into national affairs by the United States. Therefore, the Dialogue Forum recommends the following:

- Promote the protection of human rights in its broader sense to include social, economic, and cultural rights in addition to political and civil rights. This could provide more common ground than the traditional democracy promotion approach.
- Seek international cooperation mechanisms to better protect journalists, with a particular focus on those who work in environments influenced by organized crime.
- Analyze the growing concentration of ownership in the media sector, the political role of the media, and the consequences this has for pluralism in the media.

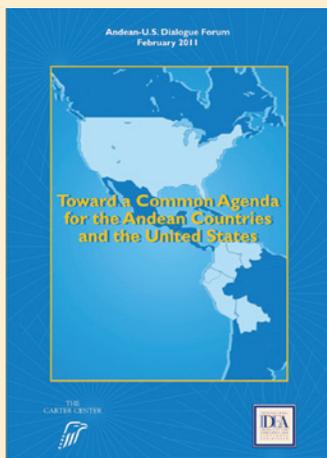
Stereotypes Impeding Understanding

The report presents some of the stereotypes that key stakeholders from the six countries would like to change, including:

- **The United States'** complex policy process is misunderstood in the Andes. Contradictory policies are interpreted as

conspiracies, when in reality they are a result of compromises or lack of coordination among agencies. U.S. policy today is unfairly stigmatized for its past historical interventionism.

- **Bolivia's** process of change, with unprecedented improvements in terms of social inclusion, national self-affirmation, constitutional reform, and intercultural democracy, is not understood or appreciated.
- **Peru's** position in favor of consultation and coordination with the United States is misinterpreted by some Andean countries as economic and political subordination.
- **Ecuador** is likened all too easily to the Chávez regime, which disregards the important differences between both political projects. Ecuador's efforts to intercept and control drug trafficking are not sufficiently acknowledged.
- **Venezuela's** political, economic, and cultural changes have in general been stigmatized and demonized, resulting in simplistic characterizations that veil the real challenges. Less polarization could enable a relationship with others based on reality instead of stereotypes.
- **Colombia's** progress in combating drug trafficking and guerrilla insurgency is not well understood by external actors who fail to appreciate the evolution of this complex issue.



This executive summary is an excerpt from the report "Toward a Common Agenda for the Andean Countries and the United States," which has been developed by The Carter Center and the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (International IDEA) as part of the Andean-U.S. Dialogue Forum. It is intended to promote more effective cooperation by identifying convergences and divergences in priorities among the countries and the peoples of Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, and Venezuela, and the United States. The full report is available on the Carter Center website: www.cartercenter.org.



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