

**"We must confront the privileged elites who have destroyed a large part of the world" Hugo Chavez**

# Australia-Venezuela Solidarity Network

November 2011

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## Venezuela: Leader on UN human development goals

In 2000, the Venezuelan government embraced the United Nations Millennium Development Goals (MDG) to achieve a better standard of living for the entire population.

Venezuela's remarkably rapid achievement of most of the MDGs compared to every other country in the world is a result of the Hugo Chavez government's implementation of economic and social policies based on the principles of 21st century socialism, which give priority to social investment for collective welfare and development.

Since the election of Chavez in 1998, social investment in Venezuela has grown from 8.4% of GDP to 18.8% of GDP in 2008. In contrast, social spending in all the advanced capitalist countries has declined in real terms.

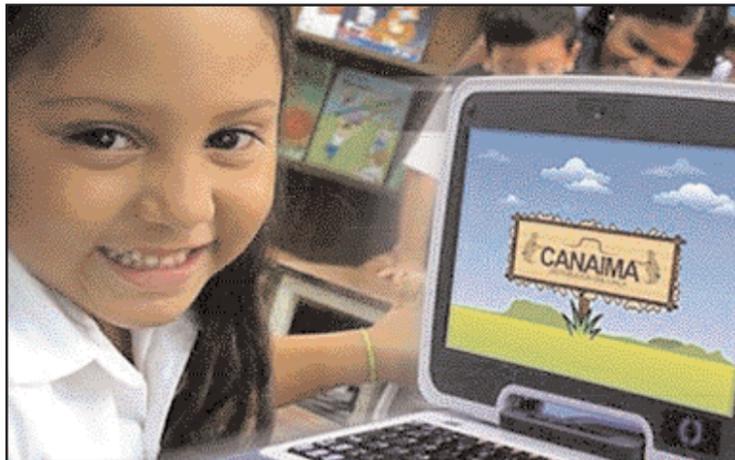
Below is a list of some of Venezuela's achievements in meeting the MDGs, compiled by the *Venezuelan embassy in Australia*.

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*Goal 1: Halve, between 1990 and 2015, the proportion of people whose income is less than \$1 a day. Halve, between 1990 and 2015, the proportion of people who suffer from hunger.*

Achievements:

- The share of people living in extreme poverty was drastically reduced from 29.8% in 2003 to 6.8% in 2011, while the overall poverty index fell from 49% in 1998 to 24.2% by the end of 2009.
- Through the Mercial network, 6048 new facilities serving nutritionally balanced food to the most needy were established in 2008. Nationally, the government-subsidised Mercial network now includes 16,529 food distribution centres, which benefit more than half the population, who buy their food at lower cost.
- Between 1998 and 2010, Venezuela's food production increased by 44%, the result of new policies that have progressively



Primary school student with her free Classmate laptop

eliminated large estates and recovered more than 3 million hectares of land suitable for agriculture; recognised the importance of food security and sovereignty; granted supplies to small farmers to cultivate the land; and financed and provided technical training to food producers.

*Goal 2: Ensure that by 2015 children everywhere, boys and girls alike, will be able to complete a full course of primary schooling.*

Achievements:

- Between 1991 and 2009, enrolment in primary education rose to 92.33%.
- There has been a significant growth in overall participation in the education system, from a 31.25% increase between 1990 and 1998, to a 47.56% increase between 1999 and 2006.
- In 2005, UNESCO declared Venezuela free of illiteracy, and recently put it among the top five countries in terms of access to university education.

*Goal 3: Eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education, preferably by 2005, and at all levels of education by no later than 2015.*

Achievements:

- The school participation ratio of girls to boys is very low, reflecting no gender discrimination in access

to education.

- In university education, women's participation increased by 1.46% in 2009 and there are now more women enrolled in university than men.

*Goal 4: Reduce by two-thirds, between 1990 and 2015, the under-five mortality rate.*

Achievements:

- The infant mortality rate of 19 per 1000 live births in 1999 has been significantly reduced, to 13.7 per 1000 live births in 2007.
- Through the work of Mision Barrio Adentro, Venezuela is on track to reduce that rate to 8.6 per 1000 live births by 2015.

**The number of doctors in Venezuela has increased from 1628 in 1998 to more than 19,500 in 2009.**

*Goal 5: Reduce by three-quarters, between 1990 and 2015, the maternal mortality ratio.*

Achievements:

- The maternal mortality rate decreased to 56.8 per 100,000 live children in 2007. As this is still too high, comprehensive care for pregnant women has been made a prior-

ity by the government, which is implementing the following programs: Proyecto Madre (Mother Project); improvement of the country's health care network (Barrio Adentro I, II and III); Mision Nino Jesus; and the National Sexual and Reproductive Health Program.

*Goal 6: Have halted by 2015 and begun to reverse the spread of HIV/AIDS. Have halted by 2015 and begun to reverse the incidence of malaria and other major diseases.*

Achievements:

- In 2003, the Bolivarian government launched the HIV/AIDS National Strategic Plan (Penvih).
- The number of people receiving free antiretroviral therapy increased from 1059 in 1999 to 25,657 in 2008.
- Since 2000, seven new vaccines have been incorporated into the national strategy for disease prevention. In 2008 alone, more than 32 million doses were administered and, through Mision Barrio Adentro, 8,656,988 doses have been produced, more than ever before in Venezuela's history.
- Between 2005 and 2009 there was a reduction in malaria cases.
- Between 2007 and 2010, the number of dengue cases reduced by 18%.
- Through the establishment of Barrio Adentro in 2003 to provide free health care to the population, the number of doctors has increased dramatically, from 1628 in 1998 to more than 19,500 in 2009.

*Goal 7: Integrate the principles of sustainable development into country policies and programs, and reverse the loss of environmental resources. Halve by 2015 the proportion of people without sustainable access to safe drinking water.*

Achievements:

- Under Mision Arbol, established in 2006, more than 2000 conservation committees involving more than 50,000 members have planted 22,000 acres of trees in Venezuela.

• Herbicide and pesticide use has progressively reduced in recent years.

• The Ministry of People's Power for the Environment will receive \$675 million from the 2012 national budget to develop policies, strategies, plans and actions aimed at boosting environmental conservation and education. Current projects include a national plan to apply the Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants, and extending environmental education and community participation in environmental preservation.

• Between 1990 and 2007 there was an increase from 68% to 92% in the proportion of people with sustainable access to safe drinking water, which has benefited more than 24 million people throughout Venezuela.

*Goal 8: Make available the benefits of new technologies, especially information and communications.*

Achievements:

- Venezuela's National Technological Literacy Plan provides training to regular and specialised users in information and communication technologies. By late 2009, 620,574 people had been trained in the use of computers and related tools around the country, and more than 1 million Venezuelans had become technologically literate.
- A new network of 782 Infocentros (Infocentres) make information and communication technologies available to the general population at little or no cost.
- In 2009, the Canaima Project: Educational Use of ICTs was launched to provide every primary school student with a free Linux-based Classmate laptop and involve families, schools and communities in the learning process.
- In 2011, Venezuela opened the second Infocenter for the visually impaired. Twenty-two states in Venezuela now have the equipment to enable visually impaired people to access technological literacy. ■

## Chavez applauds Occupy Wall St protesters

**Owen Richards**

Venezuela's socialist president Hugo Chavez has likened the Occupy Wall Street movement in the United States to Venezuela's February 1989 Caracazo riots against neoliberal policies, widely seen as the start of Venezuela's revolutionary process.

Chavez made the comments by phone on the television program *Dando y Dando* on October 5.

Chavez also expressed solidarity with the protesters and condemned police repression of peaceful protest. "This movement of popular

outrage is expanding ... and the repression is horrible, I don't know how many are in prison now," he said.

Discussing the roots of the popular explosion, he said: "Poverty's growing. The misery is getting worse."

The Caracazo broke out across Venezuela after a "shock package" of neoliberal reforms was introduced by then-president Carlos Andres Perez involving drastic price hikes in fuel and transport costs.

It was a popular explosion of anger by Venezuela's working peo-

ple and destitute masses. It marked the beginning of the end of the rule of Venezuela's capitalist oligarchy.

Three years later, Chavez led a failed military rebellion aimed at toppling the Andres Perez regime and establishing a popular revolutionary government. The attempt failed, but it earned Chavez and his military comrades immense respect among Venezuela's poor majority.

On the back of this mass support, Chavez was elected president in December 1998.

In his comments, Chavez characterized the Caracazo as "a forerun-

ner to what we are seeing in Europe, and in North America, huge protests" against neoliberalism. In the Caracazo, "the Venezuelan people struck out against neoliberalism, against the Washington consensus, and here a revolution broke out".

Venezuela has provided an example of an alternative approach to neoliberalism. The Chavez government has continued to nationalise more and more of Venezuela's productive forces, starting with the biggest monopoly corporations in areas such as steel, electricity and telecommunications, to benefit

Venezuela as a whole, not just the rich.

Venezuelanalysis.com said on October 11 that Chavez announced that houses built illegally on the Los Roques islands would be nationalised and turned into holiday resorts for workers and the poor. Until now, the archipelago has been frequented by Venezuela's rich and international tourists.

Commenting on the nationalisation, Chavez said: "The upper class bourgeoisie privatised all of that, and that's what we are going to appropriate." ■

# Presidential elections in 2012: Chavez versus Obama

## James Petras

Two incumbent presidents are running for re-election in 2012, Hugo Chavez in Venezuela and Barack Obama in the United States. What makes these two electoral contests significant is that they represent contrasting responses to the global economic crises.

Chavez, following his democratic socialist program, pursues policies promoting large-scale, long-term public investment and spending directed at employment, social welfare and economic growth.

Obama, guided by his ideological commitment to corporate financial capitalism, pours billions into bailing out Wall Street speculators, focuses on reducing the public deficit, slashes taxes and offers government subsidies to business in the hope that the banks will lend and that the private sector will invest. Obama hopes the corporate sector will start to hire the unemployed.

Chavez's economic strategy is directed toward raising popular demand by increasing the social wage. Obama's strategy is directed toward enriching the elite, hoping for a "trickle down" effect.

Chavez's economic recovery program is based on the public sector, the state, taking the lead in light of the capitalist market-induced crises and the failure of the private sector to invest.

Obama's economic recovery and employment program depends wholly on the private sector, utilising tax handouts to stimulate domestic investments which generate employment.

According to the experts and politicians, the socio-economic performance of each president will be decisive in determining whether either president will be re-elected.

## Competing responses to the economic crisis

Over the past three years, both presidents faced a deep socio-economic crisis resulting in rising unemployment, economic recession and popular demands for political leadership in formulating an economic recovery program.

Chavez responded with a large-scale program in public spending on social programs. Billions were allocated in a massive housing program



Chavez (left) and Obama

designed to create 1 million homes over the next several years. Chavez lessened military tensions and reduced frontier conflicts by negotiating a political agreement with the right-wing Santos regime in Colombia.

Chavez increased the minimum wage, social security and pension payments which increased consumption among low-income groups, stimulated demand and increased revenues for small and medium-size businesses. The state embarked on large scale infrastructure projects, especially highways and transport, creating jobs in labor-intensive activities.

The Chavez government sustained living standards by instituting price controls on food and other essentials, which sustained popular demand at the expense of profiteering by the owners of supermarkets.

The Chavez government nationalised lucrative goldmines and repatriated overseas reserves in the course of financing its demand-driven economic recovery program, eschewing tax concessions to the rich and bailouts of bankrupt banks and private businesses.

Obama rejected any large-scale, long-term public investments to create jobs: his "Jobs for America" proposal will, at best, temporarily reduce unemployment by less than half of 1%.

In pursuit of policies benefitting Wall Street bondholders, Obama became deeply involved in deficit reduction, meaning large-scale cuts

in public spending, especially in social expenditures. Obama, in agreement with the extreme right wing, agreed to regressive proposals to reduce tax payments for popular Medicare, Medicaid and Social Security programs.

His proposals to fund "Jobs for America" depend on cuts in the social security tax, which ensures a reduction in payments and a deficit, or worse, which would facilitate privatisation — handing social security to Wall Street, a trillion-dollar plum.

Obama ignores mortgage foreclosures of over 10 million families — increasing homelessness and habitation downgrades, in favor of bailing out banks and home mortgage swindlers.

Obama increased military spending, multiplying overseas combat troops, clandestine terror operations and the domestic spy apparatus, increasing the deficit at the expense of productive investments in education, technology skill upgrades and export promotion.

Unlike Chavez, who makes a point of highlighting positive job and education policies for Afro and Indo-Venezuelans, Obama ignores the 50% unemployed big-city young (18-25 year-old) Afro-Americans and Latinos in favor of serving white Wall Street bankers.

In contrast to Chavez, who pegged pensions and wages to inflation and enforced price controls, Obama froze federal salaries and social security payments, resulting in a 7% decline in real income over the past

three years.

According to the latest US Census Bureau data (September 2011), under Obama over 46.2 million Americans live in poverty, the highest figure ever. Median household income dropped 2.3% between 2009 and 2010. The number of Americans in poverty increased from 13.2% in 2008 to 15.1% in 2010. Nearly one in four children lived in poverty in 2010, as over 2.6 million more US citizens were impoverished in a single year.

In contrast, and in line with Obama's "trickle down" economic policies, the number of wealthy Americans — those earning over \$100,000 — have suffered little or no impact: luxury specialty stores, like Tiffany's, reported a 15% increase in sales.

The lowest 10% of the population suffered the most, a fall in income of 12.1% between 2009 and 2010, while the 10% with the highest income saw a decline of 1.5%. Of the 34 members of the OECD, the US, along with Mexico, Chile and Israel, has the worst social class inequalities.

Obama's top down stimulus policies saved the bankers by sacrificing the working and middle classes.

## 'Top down' versus 'bottom up' economics

The political and economic consequences of Obama's "top down" and Chavez "bottom up" socio-economic policies are striking in every respect.

Venezuela grew 3.6% in the first half of 2011, while the US stagnated at less than 2%. Worse still, during the second half of the year Obama and his advisers expressed fear that the US is heading toward a "double dip" recession, that is, negative growth.

In contrast, the president of Venezuela's Central Bank predicted accelerated growth for 2012.

While US unemployment remains above 9%, and combined with underemployment rose to over 19%, Venezuela's vast public housing and infrastructure investments are generating jobs and lowering the numbers of unemployed and underemployed in the formal and informal labour market.

Obama's pandering to Wall Street bankers and deficit reduction hawks, and his vast increase in spending on overseas wars and the domestic security apparatus, has bankrupted the treasury.

In contrast, Chavez has nationalised lucrative private sector mines, banks and energy enterprises, and decreased military tensions, increasing resources for social programs such as food subsidies.

Obama's deficit reductions have led to massive firings in education and social services. Chavez's social expenditures have augmented the number of public universities, secondary and primary schools, and clinics.

Millions have lost their homes as Obama ignored the forced evictions by the mortgage banks, while Chavez has made a start in solving the housing deficit via the building of one million new homes.

Obama lent at virtually no interest to private banks who fail to lend to productive enterprises to create jobs, preferring speculation in overseas (Brazilian) bonds with higher inter-

est rates. Chavez invested directly in productive, labor-intensive infrastructures programs, agricultural self-sufficiency projects and developing downstream processing plants, refineries and smelters.

As a result of the reactionary top-down economics Obama practices and his overt threats to cut basic social programs like Medicare, Medicaid and Social Security, his popularity has fallen over the past three years from 80% to 40% and is heading lower.

Moreover, his pro-Wall Street fiscal and militarist policies — deepening and extending Bush and Rumsfeld's wars and terror operations — has turned the US political climate further toward the extreme right. Obama appears vulnerable to electoral defeat.

Chavez, riding the wave of economic recovery based on positive programs of social expansion and public investments, has seen his popularity rise from 43% in March 2010 to 59.3% as of September 7, 2011.

The US-backed opposition is fragmented, weak and unable to challenge the overwhelmingly positive popular perceptions of the housing and infrastructure projects benefitting the mass of workers, construction companies and contractors.

Chavez is vulnerable on issues of personal security, administrative corruption and inefficiency. But he is seen to have taken important steps to correct these problem areas.

Graduates of a new police academy provide honest, efficient, community linked policing, which, in pilot projects, have reduced violent crime by 60%. Efforts to end bureaucratic corruption and inefficiency are still pending.

## Conclusion

Comparing Chavez and Obama's presidencies presents a sharp contrast between a successful bottom up socialist-informed economic recovery program and a failed top-down capitalist stimulus program.

While the American public expresses its hostility to private bank's pillage of the treasury, government threats to the last remnants of the social safety net and Obama's failure to lower persistently high levels of unemployment and underemployment, Chavez's popularity rises along with the positive "good feeling" among three-fifths of the electorate to his presidency.

If the Chavez government continues and deepens his bottom up economic stimulus program and the economy continues to expand, and he recovers from cancer, he will in all likelihood be re-elected by a landslide in 2012.

In contrast, if Obama continues to yield to the corporate and financial elite, and slash and burn social programs, he will continue his downward slide into well-deserved defeat and oblivion.

Venezuela's economic recovery through advanced social programs is a powerful message to the American people: there is an alternative to regressive top down economic policies: it's called democratic socialism. Its advocate is Chavez, who talks to and works for the people, as opposed to the con-man Obama, who talks to the people and works for the rich. ■

Get involved in the  
Australia-Venezuela  
Solidarity Network

Support Venezuela's  
Bolivarian Revolution!



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Post to AVSN, PO Box 12427, A'Beckett St, Melbourne, Victoria 8006. Ph (03) 9639 8622  
Email <network@venezuelasolidarity.org>. Visit [www.venezuelasolidarity.org](http://www.venezuelasolidarity.org)

# Join the 2012 presidential election brigade to Venezuela!

## Jim McIlroy

There is not much that the world's corporate chiefs and warmongers would like better than for President Hugo Chavez to lose the presidential election to be held in Venezuela on October 7 next year.

Chavez, and the Bolivarian revolution he leads, have been a deep and painful thorn in the side of the capitalist rulers since he was first elected in 1998 on the back of popular resistance to the brutality of neoliberalism and foreign intervention in Venezuela.

Over the last decade, Venezuela's Bolivarian revolution has confronted many challenges, undergone many changes and achieved remarkable things for the poor majority in that country.

Throughout that time, the US-backed right-wing opposition has tried to sabotage, stall and end this revolution that is not only putting control of Venezuela's politics, economy and society back into the hands of the people, but is also challenging the greed, exploitation and destructiveness of global capitalism by showing that a better world is possible.

In the last presidential election, in December 2006, President Chávez was re-elected with 7.4 million votes (63%), the largest vote for a



Participants in the May 2010 solidarity brigade (left) and a pro-Chavez march in Caracas



candidate in Venezuela's history. Now, the anti-revolution opposition in Venezuela and their powerful imperialist backers are working overtime to defeat Chavez in the next election.

That poll will be a critical point in the ongoing struggle between the people — and their right to peace, democracy, social justice and sovereignty — and the tiny, capitalist elite, who desperately want to return Venezuela — and the rest of Latin America — to the exploitation and suffering that Chavez's "socialism of the 21st century" aims to eradicate.

The importance of this contest is why the Australia-Venezuela Solidarity Network (AVSN) has decided to organise a solidarity brigade to Venezuela to witness the election.

The 12-day brigade will run from September 27 to October 8. As well as observing the last week of the election campaign, and polling day itself, brigade participants will visit social missions, communal councils, cooperatives, public health and education services, sustainable development projects, community

controlled media stations, and women's and indigenous organisations.

During the 12-day tour, brigadistas will speak to a wide range of grassroots organisations, community activists, trade unions and government representatives about the radical changes being implemented by Venezuelan people power.

The 2012 brigade is the 13th tour to Venezuela organised by the AVSN.

The deadline for registering for the presidential election brigade is May 31, 2012. The registration fee

is \$500 for waged workers or \$350 for full-time students/unemployed/pensioners.

Participants will need to book their own international airfares (please do not book without contacting the AVSN to confirm the brigade dates). Accommodation, transport and English-Spanish translation within Venezuela will be organised for all brigade participants by the AVSN.

To register or find out more, please email [brigades@venezuelasolidarity.org](mailto:brigades@venezuelasolidarity.org), or fill out the form below. ■

## Venezuela Presidential elections solidarity brigade Sep 27 to Oct 8, 2012 (inclusive)

Bookings close May 31, 2012

The Australia-Venezuela Solidarity Network's brigades to Venezuela are a once-in-a-lifetime experience - the opportunity to see first-hand an unfolding revolution that is not only radically transforming the lives of Venezuelans, but challenging the greed, exploitation and destructiveness of global capitalism by showing that a better world is possible.

A special feature of the 2012 solidarity brigade to Venezuela will be the opportunity to participate in the last 2 weeks of the Presidential election campaign. The election campaign is a mass popular expression of the true democracy that exists in Venezuela.

As well as observing the elections and the large mobilisations in the lead-up to polling day, brigade participants will experience Venezuela's participatory democracy at work, with visits to communal councils and communes. They will also visit free, high-quality public health and education services; indigenous communities and women's organisations; community controlled media stations; factories and workplaces under workers' control and numerous other social projects.

**We must confront a privileged elite who have  
destroyed a large part of the world.**  
Venezuelan President - Hugo Chavez Frias

for more information visit [www.venezuelasolidarity.org](http://www.venezuelasolidarity.org)  
Jim 0423 741 734, Roberto 0425 182 994, Lisa 0413 031 108  
or email [brigades@venezuelasolidarity.org](mailto:brigades@venezuelasolidarity.org)



## To register for the 2012 solidarity brigade to Venezuela, please complete and mail this form

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Phone \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

Email \_\_\_\_\_

Union/organisation (if any) \_\_\_\_\_

Please contact me to confirm my registration for the brigade

I want to join the Australia-Venezuela Solidarity Network. Please find enclosed my \$ \_\_\_\_\_ membership fee (\$20 waged/\$10 unwaged).

I want to get involved in AVSN activities in my area. Please put me in touch with the local AVSN committee.

Mail to: AVSN, PO Box 5421CC, Melbourne 3001.

### For more information:

Email: [brigades@venezuelasolidarity.org](mailto:brigades@venezuelasolidarity.org)

Phone: Jim 0423 741 734, Roberto 0425 182 994 or Lisa 0413 031 108

Web: [www.venezuelasolidarity.org](http://www.venezuelasolidarity.org)

# Venezuela, revolution & food sovereignty

**Lisa Macdonald**

If current trends continue, global food crises will become more frequent and more severe. Today's food systems already leave hundreds of millions of people in hunger and are rapidly depleting the soil fertility on which long-term food sovereignty depends. Add to this mix the convergence of climate change and peak oil, it's clear we need major changes to the way food is produced and distributed.

The Venezuelan people are in the midst of an exciting experiment to create a socially just and sustainable food system. From fishing villages to cacao plantations to urban gardens, this growing social movement is showing what's possible when people, not corporations, take control of food.

Since the discovery of oil in Venezuela in the 20th century, corporations' single-minded exploitation of this "black gold" turned the country into a single-industry economy. Food production and feeding the population was neglected in favour of the huge profits to be made from oil exports, with Venezuela having to import more than 80% of its food by the 1990s.

With the election in 1998 of President Hugo Chavez and the development of the Bolivarian revolution, this began to change. In the last decade, a large number of initiatives have been taken to promote Venezuela's rural development and guarantee food sovereignty.

Among these are:

- Food sovereignty is now guaranteed in the constitution: "Food sovereignty is the inalienable right of a nation to define and develop priorities and foods appropriate to its specific conditions, in local and national production, conserving agricultural and cultural diversity and self-sufficiency and guaranteeing food supply to all the population".
- The new Law of the Land and Agrarian Development, Law of Food Sovereignty and Security, and Law of Integrated Agricultural Health are based on the principles that farmers should control their land and product, the country should produce its own food, and toxic agricultural chemicals should be phased out.



- The nationalisation of large private landholdings, many of which had laid idle for decades, and the redistribution of that land to local communities for agricultural development is one of the most important achievements.

Victorian farmer Alan Broughton, who participated in a food sovereignty tour to Venezuela in July 2010, wrote in a September 4, 2010 *Green Left Weekly* article: "Control over production is in the hands of the farmer cooperatives on the newly distributed lands.

"Assistance is provided by the government for cooperative management and to establish processing plants so the farmers are no longer victim to the powers of the processors and distributors to set prices... The communities that have gained control of the land have different methods of land ownership and organisation.

"Some communities chose to own individual plots and work together for machinery and knowledge sharing and marketing. Others form cooperatives to hold title of the land in common and work the land together. Other land remains as state farms with day to day decision making determined by the farm workers."

- Rural producers are today supported by the Agricultural Bank of Venezuela (BAV). They receive agricultural funding at low interest rates and guidance to guarantee the success of their productive projects. BAV's main goal is to dignify the

work of farmers. By 2010, nearly 600,000 small and medium producers had registered in this program.

- In urban areas, "Venezuela is emulating the remarkable achievements of Cuba where more than half of the fruit and vegetable needs of the urban population are produced within the cities", Broughton said.

"As in Cuba, the city food gardens are all organic, providing non-toxic, safe, fresh food to communities. The benefits of urban agriculture are seen as contributing to food security and sovereignty, improving the urban environment, supplementing the income of families, communities and schools, and fostering learning and recreational activities.

"The gardens are set up on unused land, at schools and, using raised beds, on concrete and balconies. Community centres have established these gardens wherever possible."

- One of the most radical government initiatives is its work to eliminate chemical fertilisers and pesticides, which were used in massive quantities in Venezuela in past decades. To help achieve this, agroecology colleges have been set up, with the assistance of advisors from Cuba. Biological control and biofertiliser labs are also being set up across the country to produce beneficial insects and fungi, and soil inoculants.

- Seed banks and seed treatment plants have been established to provide the range of agricultural genetics suited to the various regions. The aim is to completely bypass the inter-

national corporations that supply seeds around the world, and preserve the genetic diversity that has been built up in Venezuela for thousands of years. GM seeds are not allowed.

- The establishment of the Paulo Freire Latin American School of Agroecology to provide free education for future advisors and teachers from around Latin America is important not only for Venezuela but also the whole continent. The aim is to reclaim agriculture from the neoliberal model, especially for indigenous and Afro farmers. The philosophy of the school is social transformation in defence of Mother Earth. Permaculture is integrated into the education process.

During the 12 years of the revolution, the food producing area has increased from 4,049,866 acres in 1998 to 6,014,404 acres today, and agricultural production has increased by 44%. The Venezuelan economy is still dominated by oil exports, but the social investment policies implemented by the government have used the oil wealth to gradually replace food imports with domestic production and Venezuela has now achieved food sovereignty in the production of rice and white corn.

In his 2011 documentary, *Growing Change: A Journey into Venezuela's Food Revolution*, filmmaker and solidarity activist Simon Cunich investigated the 2008 global food crisis and visits Venezuela to speak to farmers, fisherfolk, cacao producers and urban gardeners about the new food system that is being constructed by communities and the revolutionary government.

*Growing Change* is an inspirational story full of lively characters, thought-provoking insights, stunning scenery and ideas to transform the food system. It is a film that everyone interested in a sustainable future should watch, discuss and encourage others to watch. Why not organise a screening in your local community centre, school, university, or at home with your neighbours?

For more information or to get a copy of the film visit: [growingchange.com.au](http://growingchange.com.au). ■

## Venezuela to host Latin American and Caribbean Summit

President Hugo Chavez ratified that 33 Heads of States will be present in the Venezuelan capital, Caracas, on the 2nd and 3rd of December for discussions on the integration of the continent, without the presence of the United States and Canada. The Latin America and Caribbean Summit (CALC) will see the coming into being of the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC).

"We, all by ourselves here in Caracas, discussing the present and the future of this great continent of utopia, the hope of the world; Our America, Bolivarian America, Marti's America, brown-skinned America, indigenous America, mestizo America", he said.

The Venezuelan president expressed satisfaction at the warm reception the call inspired among his counterparts in the region. His statement was made at the Municipal Theatre of Caracas on November 12.

[Taken from [celac.mppre.gob.ve](http://celac.mppre.gob.ve).] ■

## What is ALBA-TCP?

The Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America - Peoples' Trade Treaty (ALBA-TCP) is an integration platform for the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean.

It puts emphasis on solidarity, complementarity, justice and cooperation, and has the historical and fundamental purpose of joining the capacities and strengths of the countries comprising it with a view to producing the structural transformations and the relations system necessary to achieve the integral development required for the continuity of our existence as sovereign and just nations.

Additionally, it is a political, economic, and social alliance in defense of the independence, self-determination and the identity of the peoples comprising it.

Integration is an indispensable condition for the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean who aspire to development in the middle of the increasing formation of huge regional blocs that occupy predominant positions in the world economy.

The cardinal principle that governs ALBA is solidarity between the peoples of Latin America and the Caribbean, without selfish nationalism or restrictive national policies that reject the objective of constructing a Big Homeland in Latin America.

ALBA does not harbor commercial criteria or selfish interests related to business profits or national benefit to the detriment of other peoples. It seeks to rely on a broad latinoamericanist vision that recognizes the fact that it is impossible for our countries to develop and be really independent in isolation.

The countries that currently comprise ALBA-TCP are: Venezuela, Cuba, Bolivia, Nicaragua, Commonwealth of Dominica, Antigua and Barbuda, Ecuador, and Saint Vincent and the Grenadines.

[Taken from [alba-tcp.org](http://alba-tcp.org).] ■

## ALBA: Eleven million lifted from poverty

**Tim Anderson**

The Bolivarian Alliance for the Americas (ALBA) agreements, six years on, have delivered some spectacular results. Eleven million people have been lifted out of poverty in Latin America's ALBA countries. This was mainly through social programs in education, nutrition, health, housing and community programs for marginalised groups.

As part of this process, 3.5 million people gained the ability to read and write, and over 900,000 people with disabilities were treated with medication, orthotics and prosthetics, just in 2010.

On top of this, the joint Cuban-Venezuelan "Mision Milagro" (Miracle Mission) in just three years has restored sight to over a million people, in and outside the ALBA countries. The disability project in 2010 rapidly followed the success of

"Mision Milagro". All these programs were free of charge.

Executive Secretary of ALBA, Amenotheop Zambrano, presented a report with these details in February at the UN's Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) in New York.

The ALBA group was created by Venezuela and Cuba in December 2004, as a reaction to the now-dead US proposal for a "Free Trade Area of the Americas" and to subsequent bilateral Free Trade Agreements (FTAs). The ALBA group currently includes 70 million people and eight countries.

The overall literacy rate in the ALBA countries has increased from 84% to 96%, with five of the eight countries in the bloc now recognized by the UN as being free of illiteracy. Public health systems are rapidly expanding in all the ALBA countries, in face of the health privatisation driven by the US-style "free trade"

agreements.

"When we see the social gains made by ALBA countries and at the same time hear testimony ... that the majority of the world's countries won't achieve the Millennium Development Goals, it becomes clear that ALBA is doing what's right - economic policies simply can't substitute for social policies", Zambrano said during a meeting with progressive groups in Washington, DC during his visit to the US.

Zambrano pointed out that ALBA also had also provided more than 1000 medical scholarships, on top of the many thousands of medical places that Cuba provides to developing countries round the world. Venezuela now has a Latin American School of Medicine (ELAM), the "daughter" of Cuba's ELAM.

Mr Zambrano emphasised the importance of ALBA's Social Movements Council and the role

played by social movements, especially indigenous and Afro-Latino groups, in the mechanism of integration. At the next ALBA heads of government summit later this year it is planned to hold a parallel ALBA social movements summit.

In 2009, ALBA's member-states chose to highlight the Bolivian concept of the "People's Trade Agreement" (TCP in Spanish). The ALBA is now formally known as the ALBA-TCP.

Zambrano said: "In this way, we emphasize the importance of a democratising economic movement, one based on the principles of cooperation, complementarity, solidarity, justice, equity, and the strengthened role of the state in the direction taken by economic development. This contrasts with the traditional economic model that promotes the accumulation of capital in few hands." ■