



Embassy of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela to the UK and Ireland

Fact Sheet:

ALBA: Bolivarian Alliance for the People of our America

Background

In Spanish, the word alba means “dawn.” It is also the name of a bold plan for Latin American integration proposed by Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez in 2001, as an alternative to the U.S.-backed Free Trade Agreement of the Americas (FTAA).

ALBA, the Bolivarian Alliance for the People of our America, is a regional organisation formally launched in 2004 and made up of eight countries in Latin America and the Caribbean – Venezuela, Cuba, Bolivia, Nicaragua, Dominica, Ecuador, Antigua & Barbuda, and Saint Vincent & the Grenadines. Honduras was a member until the coup in 2009.

Purpose of ALBA

ALBA serves as a platform for regional integration and cooperation with particular emphasis on solidarity, complementarity, justice, and cooperation as a means to transform the societies of Latin America and the Caribbean and foster equality and social justice.

Key principles of ALBA:

- Commerce and investment should not merely be ends in themselves, but rather means to reach equitable and sustainable development.
- Economic cooperation and complementarity within member countries, not only competition.
- Cooperation and solidarity should serve as the foundation for special plans for the region’s least developed countries.
- Energy integration within the region to ensure energy security for all countries.
- Regional capital for investment, instead of a reliance on investors from beyond Latin America and the Caribbean.
- Protection of the environment, as well as local cultures and identities.

ALBA is ‘...a geopolitical, regional, platform of economic power ... embracing eighty million people, with an annual product of six hundred million dollars and reserves of gas, petroleum, water and fertile land...’

President Hugo Chavez, 2009



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How is ALBA organised?

At the top of the ALBA organisational structure is the Council of Presidents. Below this is the Council of Ministers which is divided into three areas: Political Council, Council for Social Programmes, and Council for Economic Coordination. There is also a Council of Women and a Council of Social Movements, which attempts to incorporate 'social movements' representing traditionally marginalised and politically radical sectors of society: trade unions, indigenous populations, peasants, and women's groups.

ALBA initiatives

ALBA has launched or supported a number of initiatives to further its purpose and principles:

Finance

Launched at the 2008 ALBA summit in Caracas, the Bank of ALBA aims to promote projects of economic integration and infrastructural development, as well as progress in social, educational, cultural and health in member states.¹

It also aims to eliminate the economic weaknesses of these countries and eradicate economic asymmetries as a result of the process of financial globalisation. It received an initial \$1 billion in financing.

At a 2009 summit, ALBA member states agreed to create a regional currency, the

¹ Bank of ALBA:
http://www.minci.gob.ve/a_r_r/28/173970/banco_del_alba.html

SUCRE (Unified System of Reciprocal Compensation Payments). The aim of the project is to provide an alternative to the U.S. dollar to be used in commercial exchanges and ensure monetary sovereignty for member countries of the alliance.

The adoption of local currency payment systems in international trade is undermining the leverage of the US dollar. The accounting unit introduced to reduce the transaction costs of trade and save hard currency, obstruct the circulation of the US dollar in the region and reduce vulnerability to externally imposed economic blockades.²

Economy

Initiatives discussed at the ALBA summit in 2007 included a plan for the creation of 12 public grand-national companies that would be co-managed by ALBA member states and whose activities would be focused around strengthening key sectors of national economies.

Grand-national companies are multilateral joint ventures of state entities offering an alternative to the transnational corporations of the developed world. This is slated to help reduce the asymmetries that exist within this group of countries in industries including agriculture, infrastructure, telecommunications, industrial supplies, and cement production. A grandnational energy company will encompass activities linked to the production, refining, storage, transportation and distribution of oil and gas,

² Dr Helen Yaffe:
www.londonmet.ac.uk/fms/MRSite/Research/clarc/Helen%20Yaffe.ppt



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as well as the development of alternative energies throughout the region.

Energy

PetroCaribe is an agreement signed in June 2005 to help increase and democratise access to energy for countries in the region. Specifically, PetroCaribe seeks to ease the energy burden on the Caribbean by providing countries with direct access to oil at preferential financing rates, with the savings directed towards important social development projects.³

Health and education

Venezuela and Cuba are working together to provide literacy and healthcare programs to other countries in the region. For example, Mission Robinson is a literacy program that has taught millions of Venezuelans to read and write and was extended to Bolivia in 2006. Barrio Adentro provides free basic medical care, while Mission Miracle has provided free care to individuals with eye-related illnesses from over a dozen countries – including the U.S. A Latin American School of Medicine founded in Venezuela in April 2007 has thus far trained 2,000 doctors to provide basic health services to patients in poor communities in the region.

Media and culture

In 2005, TeleSUR was launched as a regional television network with a focus on Latin America and the Caribbean – from a Latin American and Caribbean perspective.

³ PetroCaribe: <http://www.petrocaribe.org/>

It seeks to challenge broadcasters such as CNN, Univision, and the BBC, and serve to promote Latin American news, culture and identity.⁴

The ALBA Cultural Fund, launched in 2006, has implemented over 50 projects in areas such as film, music, dance, and literature with the aim of fostering greater integration.⁵

The 4th ALBA Games will be hosted by Venezuela in April 2011 in which ALBA member states compete in a variety of different sports. The last ALBA games took place in Cuba in 2009 and athletes from over 26 nations competed.⁶

Environment

ALBA countries are increasingly working together as a bloc in matters concerning the environment.

In December 2009 at the United Nations Climate Change Conference in Copenhagen, ALBA protested against the US-Obama administration operating behind closed doors to impose a non-legally binding treaty with ineffective targets for reducing omissions.

ALBA made the following joint declaration: ‘The global economic crisis, climate change, the food crisis and the energy crisis are the result of the decay of capitalism, which threatens to end life and the planet. To avert

⁴ <http://www.telesurtv.net/>

⁵ http://www.fondoculturaldelalba.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=46&Itemid=1&lang=en

⁶ ALBA Games: <http://www.alba-tcp.org/contenido/venezuela-acoger%C3%A1-en-abril-iv-juegos-deportivos-del-alba-11-de-febrero-de-2011>



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this outcome, it is necessary to develop and model an alternative to the capitalist system. A system based on solidarity not competition; a system in harmony with Mother Earth and not plundering of human resources' (ALBA).⁷

Social Movements

There has been a growing sense of activism, over the past decade, a strengthening social movements and indigenous communities who are often most negatively affected by capitalist exploitation of natural resources.

At the 2007 ALBA Summit in Presidents and delegations met with various leaders of social movements from Honduras, Peru, El Salvador, Chile, Cuba, and other countries, where they agreed on the formation of an ALBA Council of Social Movements as a fundamental body in the organisational structure of ALBA.

The Council of Social Movements will make up the new organisational structure of ALBA along with a Council of ALBA Ministers and a Council of ALBA Presidents. The purpose is to give the ALBA model a structural organisation with the inclusion of the social movements to allow for grassroots participation in decision-making.⁸

International solidarity and cooperation

International solidarity is one of the most important aspects of ALBA. ALBA countries have pledged \$2.42 billion in reconstruction aid to earthquake-torn Haiti over the next five years

⁷www.londonmet.ac.uk/fms/MRSite/Research/clarc/Helen%20Yaffe.ppt

⁸Social movements:
<http://venezuelanalysis.com/news/2362>

Capital will be made available for Haiti to invest in rice production and to finance a Cuban-style literacy campaign.

Cuba was the first country to send hundreds of doctors to Haiti in the immediate aftermath of the earthquake; however this was ignored in the mainstream media.

ALBA agreements have even bypassed hostile or disinterested governments by setting up cooperation treaties with local authorities or community groups such as PetroBronx, the US-based Citizen's Energy Corporation based in the Bronx where 50% of the city's 500,000 population live in poverty.⁹

The issue of solidarity also distinguishes ALBA from previous regional trade blocs. Ecuadorian President, Rafael Correa said: 'it is integration based on fraternal solidarity, not between competitors, which has been the great mistake in the past. The integration that we have sought [in previous decades] has been orientated towards trade, to having larger markets and competing between us. In ALBA we don't talk about competition, we speak of coordination in energy, finances and even in defence, but coordination, not competition' (Correa, 2009).¹⁰

Venezuelan Embassy in the UK 15th of March, 2011

For further information on Venezuela, please see the Embassy website:

<http://www.embavenez-uk.org/index.asp>

⁹PetroBronx: http://venezuelanalysis.com/analysis/5277?page=11&quicktabs_2=3

¹⁰Correa interview: <http://links.org.au/node/1460>