

THINKING BRAZIL

UPDATE NO. 15 - MARCH 2005

An Electronic Newsletter of BRAZIL @ THE WILSON CENTER

Regional Integration in the Amazon

Moving Forward with the ACTO

The Amazon is a natural wonder as diverse as it is vast. The largest remaining tropical forest in the world, it covers an area equivalent to half the United States, containing roughly one-third of all plant and animal species and one-fifth of the world's fresh water. While the region clearly is a place of extraordinary opportunity it also holds proportional challenge: how can one promote economic development without driving environmental degradation?

Since signing the Amazon Cooperation Treaty in 1978, the eight Amazon Basin countries (Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, Guyana, Peru, Surinam, and Venezuela) have agreed that common regional problems must be addressed collectively. Nonetheless, they have experienced tremendous difficulties implementing solutions capable of collectively promoting sustainable development in the region.

Rosalía Arteaga, Secretary General of the Amazon Cooperation Treaty Organization (ACTO), discussed challenges to regional integration in the Amazon at a February 1, 2005 session at the Woodrow Wilson Center in Washington, DC. The conference, co-sponsored with the Organization of American States and the Environmental Change and Security Project, brought together individuals from diverse backgrounds to discuss one area of interest: the Amazon.

Arteaga stressed that the Amazon



Rosalía Arteaga

should be a region of concern not only to the Basin countries, but to the entire world. "We are all on the same planet and need to work together," said Arteaga, "events like the recent Tsunami in Asia and the El Niño phenomenon have

shown that our world is intertwined." While the ACTO operates in deference to each member country's sovereignty, Arteaga is confident that the organization can magnify its impact in 2005 and beyond.



Woodrow Wilson
International Center
for Scholars

How?

As Arteaga put it, the Amazon is not only an area that allows life to flourish, but could also prove an ideal habitat for regional integration. She noted the potential for cooperation among Amazon Basin nations as a catalyst for Latin American identity, along the lines of Mercosur and the Andean Community. Dr. Arteaga felt this was a reasonable goal given the higher likelihood of finding common ground on Amazon related issues, than in other integration initiatives.



The ACTO's mission is "...to establish effective processes of regional integration and sustainable development," while increasing the global negotiation capacity of member countries on Amazon related issues. According to Dr. Arteaga, the ACTO aims to "put people first," serving not only to monitor, but also, and perhaps more importantly, to raise issues and make policy recommendations for the protection of the Amazon. Dr. Arteaga outlined the ACTO's comprehensive programs which are designed to address the water;

forest, soils, protected natural areas, biological diversity, biotechnology, biotrade, territory planning, human settlement, indigenous affairs, social infrastructure, health, education, transportation, electric power, and communications.

According to Arteaga, the greatest challenge is not how to proceed with the substantive nature of the ACTO's mission, but instead how to fund these important projects. A major goal of her Washington visit was to further relations with potential partners including the Organization of American States, the Inter-American Development Bank and others. Several projects are on the table, with projected costs ranging from \$4 to \$45 million. The ACTO's efforts in areas such as the utilization of science and technology to promote sustainable development belie a thoughtful and progressive strategy. Targeted at bolstering research networks, and centralizing data (perhaps in an integrated database for the region), this approach will facilitate accurate and effective recommendations and management for the region.

During a question and answer period, several attendees echoed concerns regarding the impact that further infrastructure development might have on the Amazon. In response, Arteaga raised questions that the ACTO often considers: "What is the human cost? What are the benefits on the population?" She believes projects carried out by the ACTO and its partners show quantifiable benefits and are easier to monitor and manage than the alternative, which is the indiscriminate, and in many cases illegal, exploitation of nature. While the ACTO does not have a legal department or jury of its own, Arteaga is confident that the



organization “can have a voice, even if [we] don’t have force.” In the end, participants agreed that initiatives of this nature will only be successful if all players place long term ethics and responsibility above short-term economic gain.

A native of Ecuador, Rosalía Arteaga is a lawyer, journalist, and author of numerous works, including The Trees of Cuenca. In the late 1990’s she served as Ecuador’s Vice-President and briefly as President. After accepting her current post with the ACTO last May, Dr. Arteaga has made it her goal to return the ACTO to relevance.



Thinking Brazil Update is an electronic publication of *Brazil @ the Wilson Center*. This project is founded on the conviction that Brazil and the U.S.-Brazilian relationship deserve to receive better attention in Washington. Brazil’s population, size, and economy, as well as its unique position as a regional leader and global player fully justify this interest. In response, and in keeping with the Center’s mission to bridge scholarly research and public action, *Brazil @ the Wilson Center* sponsors activities designed to create a “presence” for Brazil in Washington that captures the attention of the policymaking community. *Brazil @ the Wilson Center* is grateful for the support of ADM, and The GE Foundation.

For more information please refer to www.wilson-center.org/brazil or contact Alex Parlini at parlini-aj@wwic.si.edu



GE Foundation

