



## EMBASSY of COLOMBIA

W A S H I N G T O N

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### THE RECENT PROGRESS OF AFRO-COLOMBIANS

A little known fact about Colombia is that it has the 3<sup>rd</sup> largest population of people of Black/African descent in the Western Hemisphere (behind Brazil & the United States). During the 1990's, the government of Colombia took substantial steps to enhance social inclusion of its Afro-descendant population.

Below are some examples of the many ways that President Alvaro Uribe and the Colombian government have shown real commitment to improve the status of Afro-Colombians:

#### **Ethnic Identification through the Census**

In the 2005 Census, Afro-Colombians were encouraged to define themselves as such when filling out the general census questionnaire. As a result of the census, the Government of Colombia identified more than 4 million Afro-Colombians, 10% of the Colombian population. This will be helpful in shaping future public policy that will affect Afro-Colombians.

#### **Increased Property Rights for Afro-Colombians**

Law 70 granted collective title to state-owned lands occupied by Afro Colombians for many years. Under the guidance of the Colombian Institute of Regional/Rural Development or *Instituto Colombiano de Desarrollo Rural* (INCODER) Law 70 was enacted. This measure gave Afro-Colombians the right to collective land rights in traditional coastal communities. Also, Afro-Colombians would be included in environmental impact assessments of development projects on their territories. These measures have been major steps towards cultural self-determination and protection of Afro-Colombians.

The Ministry of Interior and Justice has recently advanced the drafting of a presidential decree concerned the use of land and the protection of natural resources & mining resources. During 2008 the agreed text will be completed and then shared with pertinent Afro-Colombian organizations.

Since 2002, INCODER has issued 68 collective property deeds and more than 2.8 million acres of land in the Pacific coast has been returned to Afro-Colombian control. Most recently, 7 new collective titles were granted to several communities located in the municipality of Buenaventura and the Province of Nariño

#### **Enhanced Protection of Afro-Colombian Communities**

In May 2007, the Ministry of Defense issued a Standing Order on the protection of Afro-Colombian, black, and raizal and palenque communities in Colombia. This aggressive step was taken to assure Afro-Colombians that rights will be protected and their safety from illegal armed groups is a priority of our government.



## Special Projects Geared Towards Developing Afro-Colombian Communities.

At the suggestion of the Congressional Black Caucus, the Colombian government has created special projects to improve the living conditions for Afro-Colombians. Below are some of the said projects:

- **Housing in Buenaventura** : The government will develop a housing project in the city of Buenaventura to improve the living conditions of at least 3000 Afro-Colombian families. The Ministry of Environment and Housing, and the Ministry of Treasury have been working extensively to commit future budget allocations. The initiation of the project is planned for 2008
- **Scholarships for Afro-Colombians**: The Government of Colombia, USAID, the Fulbright Commission and Phelps Stokes Fund launched on March 25, 2008 the Scholarship Program for Afro-Colombians. The goal of the project is to preparing future generations of Afro-Colombians for leadership at American universities.

**Development of Afro-Colombian Communities:** The Government of Colombia will create a special commission to study the needs of Afro-Colombian communities throughout the country. The Colombian government will solicit the input of international organizations, foundations, businesspeople, and personalities to offer a fresh perspective on how to solve some of the problems that plague Afro-Colombian communities. The Commission will be launched in May 21, 2008

### Creation of a National Voice for the Afro-Colombians

Several changes have been made to ensure the participation of Afro-Colombians in shaping the future of Colombia since 1993. These changes include:

- **High Level Advisory Commission:** Composed of 27 representatives of Afro-Colombian organizations, 13 appointed representatives of national agencies, and 2 Afro-Colombian members of the House of Representatives, this commission has debated issues of significance to Afro-Colombian communities. Regular topics of discussion for this commission include the Afro-Colombian census, ethnical education policies, and strategic alliances.
- **Consultative Commissions:** This group was created in order to foster the dialogue and the coordination among national and regional institutions. Besides Bogota, 10 Consultative Commissions have been set up in different provinces of Colombia and in addition to a commission created for the Caribbean Coast.
- **Consultations:** Due to government reforms in 1998, Afro-Colombians are consulted in case of any project to be developed in their territories. Example of such projects where the cooperation of Afro-Colombian communities have been key include the dredging of Buenaventura Port, the construction of Animas-Nuquí road, and the construction of a port in Tribugá

### Comprehensive Plan to Improve Conditions for Afro-Colombians on the Pacific Coast

The Pacific coast region, which is where 60% of Afro-Colombians reside, is a point of emphasis for the National Department of Planning in Colombia. Currently underway is a plan to reduce poverty, promote equality, and generate employment for the Pacific region. Sustainable development for the region will create long-term economic security for Afro-Colombians and other who inhabit the region.

The National Development Plan (2007-2010), designed by the National Department of Planning has pledged the following financial commitments to the Pacific region:

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| • Democratic Security with Socially Integrated Assistance | \$900 million (in U.S. dollars) |
| • Poverty reduction                                       | \$1.95 billion                  |
| • Sustainable development                                 | \$1.3 billion                   |
| • Other programs  | \$500 million                   |