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**REORGANIZATION OF THE WORLD ECONOMY:  
CENTRAL AMERICAN AND UNITED STATES PERSPECTIVES  
(LEGISLATURES AND UNIVERSITIES)**

**San José, Costa Rica  
November 11-14, 1991**

**Center for Legislative Development  
State University of New York  
University at Albany  
Albany, New York 12222**

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On November 11-14, 1991, the Consortium for Legislative Development, through the Center for Legislative Development (CLD), University at Albany, State University of New York (UA/SUNY), organized a regional conference in cooperation with the University of Costa Rica. The Conference had a dual purpose: First, to begin establishing linkages between national universities and national legislatures in Central America; second, to do so within the context of a current public policy issue of interest to the region.

The rationale for such a conference, as outlined in the CLD strategy for legislative institution-building, is that legislatures need to establish appropriate linkages with their environments to acquire needed information and intelligence. Universities and research institutions, usually, are centers of information relevant to legislatures. The relationship between legislatures and universities, however, are often strained and misperceived. Bringing the two communities together within the context of a salient public policy issue was considered to be of mutual advantage to both communities.

Another important feature of the conference is that it was organized cooperatively by CLD and the Department of Latin American and Caribbean Studies (LACS) at UA/SUNY and the University of Costa Rica. As such it was intended to set a pattern and explore the possible dimensions and limitations of university-to-university cooperation within the context of the regional efforts at legislative institution building in Central America.

Since this activity was the first of its kind, it was decided to proceed carefully and only on a limited scale. The goal was to bring together a specific group of scholars and legislators for two to three days of intensive interaction within the context of a specific topic. The emphasis was on the scholarly/university community, to show that the goals of the university (teaching, research, and public service) could be better achieved through such interaction. For this purpose, outstanding scholars from Central American universities and UA/SUNY, and--in view of the topic of the conference--chairpersons of budget and finance committees or their representatives, of six national legislatures were invited to participate. The role of the scholars was to present research papers on selected topics, while the role of the legislators was to act as discussants.

Scholars from UA/SUNY, Costa Rica, Guatemala, and Honduras presented papers at the University of Costa Rica in San José on issues pertinent to the challenges that Central American countries are now confronting in the changing global economy. CLD invited chairpersons of the budget committees of the Central American countries, including Panama, to critique each paper in a panel format. CLD had anticipated attendance at the conference to be between 20 to 30 participants in each session including the paper presenters and the discussants.

The theme of this special conference originated from an ongoing relationship between scholars from the University of Costa Rica and faculty of LACS and the Graduate School of Public Affairs at UA/SUNY. Professors Robert Carmack, Jolyne Sanjak and Alvin Magid in consultation with their colleagues at the University of Costa Rica originally proposed organizing a conference concerning issues that Central America is facing in the reorganization of the global economy. Thus the conference theme was proposed and was accepted by the academic community and enjoyed its support. CLD proposed the addition of participants from Central American legislatures as discussants to make the discussion more focussed in realistic public policy alternatives and options, and at the same time to create a positive relationship between the university communities and the legislative institutions in the area.

### **CONFERENCE PLANNING**

Invitations to participating legislators were sent by fax prior to the conference. To adhere to protocol, invitations were sent to the chairperson of each budget committee through the President of each National Assembly. Telephone calls were used to follow up on those invitations. Each USAID mission in the area was informed of the activity and the individuals being invited. Finally, the invitation authorized each National Assembly President to send additional participants if they chose to do so, provided they cover their transportation and per diem costs. In addition, some USAID missions sponsored participation by staff members and consultants.

LACS/UA/SUNY and the University of Costa Rica, through its legislative liaison, Sergio Reuten, took responsibility for inviting the academic participants and for conceptualizing the topics to be covered. The University of Costa Rica also assumed responsibility for local arrangements for the conference.

The following were invited and confirmed their participation:

- Costa Rica:** Rolando Laclé Castro, President of the Budget Committee  
William Reuben, University of Costa Rica  
Marielos Rojas Víquez, University of Costa Rica  
Alvaro de la Ossa, Facultad Latinoamericana de Ciencias Sociales (FLACSO)  
José Luis Vega Carballo, University of Costa Rica
- El Salvador:** Carmen Elena Calderon de Escalon, President of the Budget Committee  
Gabriel Siri, Professor, CEPAL, Mexico City  
Dr. Alan Austin, representing USAID
- Guatemala:** Carlos Alarcon Monsanto, President of the Budget Committee  
Jorge Gonzalez del Valle, National Bank of Guatemala  
Diane Tsitsos, representing USAID
- Honduras:** Teofilio Martel Cruz, President of the Budget Committee  
Dante Ramirez, University of Honduras
- Nicaragua:** Humberto Guzman, President of the Budget Committee  
Dr. Farid Ayales, representing USAID
- Panamá:** Milton Henriquez, President of the Budget Committee
- U. S.:** Carlos Astiz, LACS  
**(UA/SUNY)** Abdo Baaklini, Public Administration; CLD Director  
Waiter Goldstein, Political Science  
Alvin Magid, LACS and Political Science  
Jolyne Sanjak, LACS and Economics  
Carlos Santiago, LACS chair  
James Wessman, LACS  
Elizabeth Campisi, CLD administrative coordinator

## CONFERENCE IMPLEMENTATION

Participants began arriving on Monday, November 11, since the inauguration activity was supposed to take place the following day. On Tuesday, Professor Baaklini, Director of CLD, accompanied by Professor Carlos Astiz, visited the National Assembly of Costa Rica and met with Diputada Nury Vargas, Vice President of the Assembly and featured speaker in the opening session, to brief her on the program. The same day, Professor Baaklini, Professor Astiz and Ms. Campisi visited USAID/Costa Rica to meet with Mr. Henry Reynolds, Director of the Office of Multisectoral Development, to bring him up to date on the conference. During the conference on Wednesday and Thursday, several were held between Professor Baaklini and Don Olmedo Castro Rojas, Secretary General of the Costa Rican National Assembly and Executive Director of the Asociación de Técnicos Legislativos Centroamericanos (ATELCA) to discuss the conference and other legislative development activities of the Consortium.

### *Opening session*

The opening session of the conference was held at the auditorium of the Hotel Europa where the participants were housed. The Vice President of the Costa Rican National Assembly, Diputada Nury Vargas, opened the session, welcoming the participants and emphasizing the importance of the theme of the conference and the importance of constructive relationship between legislatures and universities, citing her experience as a former university professor. Professor Baaklini presented the theme of the conference, and discussed the turbulent relationship between the university and the legislature and the need for a constructive relationship. The rector of the University of Costa Rica, Dr. Luis Garita Bonilla, then welcomed the participants and outlined the actual relationship between the University of Costa Rica and the National Assembly and the importance the leadership of the university attaches to this relationship.

This session was attended by over 40 participants including representatives from USAID missions in El Salvador, Guatemala, and Nicaragua and leading members of the university in addition to the participants. A reception and dinner followed the opening ceremonies. The opening session and all the proceedings of the conference were accompanied by simultaneous translation, English/Spanish and Spanish/English, and were recorded.

*Other sessions*

The remaining sessions of the conference were held at the auditorium of the School of Pharmacy of the University of Costa Rica. Six panels were presented over a period of two days: Two each morning from 9:00 a.m. until 1:00 p.m., and one in the afternoon from 3:00 p.m. until 6:00 p.m. Between 30 and 40 participants attended each panel. Informal discussions among the participants were held in the evening at the lobby of the hotel. The sessions were:

*November 11, 9:00 a.m.*

The State and the Economic System

Presenters: José Luis Vega Carballo, University of Costa Rica; "Costa Rica en los Años 80: Un Balance de su Desarrollo Social"

James Wessman, UA/SUNY, LACS; "Reflections on Contemporary State Formation in Latin America and the United States"

*November 11, 11:00 a.m.*

The Political Economy and its Effects on the Agricultural Sector

Presenters: William Reuben Soto, University of Costa Rica; "Efectos de las Políticas de Ajuste Sobre la Economía Campesina en Centroamérica"

Jolyne Sanjak, UA/SUNY, LACS; "The Dynamics of Agrarian Policy and Political Economy in United States History: Contemporary Policy Implications"

*November 11, 3:00 p.m.*

Cooperatives and other Forms of Social Property in the Context of the Globalization of the World Economy

Presenters: Alvin Magid, UA/SUNY, LACS; "Worker Participation, Worker Control, and Industrial Democracy: Comparative Perspectives Based on the United States and Europe"

Marielos Rojas Víquez, University of Costa Rica; "Perspectivas de Cooperativismo en Centroamerica: Algunos Elementos para la Discusion"

*November 12, 9:00 a.m.*

External Debt in the Context of Restructuring of the World Economy

Presenters: Jorge González del Valle, National Bank of Guatemala; "La Deuda Externa Centroamericana en el Contexto de la Globalizacion Economica"

Carlos Santiago, UA/SUNY, LACS: "External Debt, Structural Adjustment, and the Labor Market"

*November 12, 11:00 a.m.*

Multinational Corporations

resenters: Walter Goldstein, UA/SUNY Political Science; "The Future of Multi-national Enterprise and Foreign Direct Investment"

Alvaro de la Ossa, FLACSO; "La Globalizacion: Esfera Superior del Capitalismo"

*November 12, 3:00 p.m.*

Regional Integration and the Globalization of the World Economy

Presenters: Carlos Astiz, UA/SUNY LACS; "Political Integration: A Central American Option"

Dante Ramirez, Honduras; "Perspectiva Economica y Politica de la Regionalizacion y Globalizacion"

Professor Baaklini concluded the conference on the evening of Thursday, November 14, by thanking the participants and the organizers of the conference from the University of Costa Rica and UA/SUNY and the Costa Rican National Assembly.

**EVALUATION**

Substantively, the conference was a great success. The papers presented were generally of high quality and provoked heated and serious discussions. While all these discussions were important, especially valuable comments tying the issues to current public policy options and limitations came from Diputada Milton Henriquez from Panama, Professor Rosemarie Karpinski, former president of the National Assembly of Costa Rica, and Dr. Farid Ayales, former Ambassador of Costa Rica to Nicaragua. Throughout the conference there was a conscious attempt by both the academic participants and by those with legislative and other government experience to ground the discussion in public policy alternatives. Scholars from the University at Albany and the University of Costa Rica are now revising their papers to take into consideration those discussions and comments.

*Conference logistics*

The University of Costa Rica deserves a lot of credit for the organization and implementation of this joint conference, in spite of its limited resources and political events just before the convening of the conference (a major budget cut set the university on strike and prompted street demonstrations in San José). Professor Sergio Reuben and the Rector of the University and their

volunteers were able to make the necessary arrangements for the conference: Hotel reservation were made; conference facilities and equipment were secured; special preparation of the School of Pharmacy's auditorium was completed on time, including new painting; programs were printed and sent to the appropriate individuals; publicity was disseminated; transportation between airport, hotel, and conference facility was arranged; sound and recording facilities were located; and refreshments, coffee, and desserts during conference breaks were also provided. All of these activities, services, supplies and equipment were provided to the conference at no cost to the project; they were borne by the University of Costa Rica. Professor Reuben deserves special mention for the many days he spent before and during the conference to see that all of these services and facilities were available and functioning.

From the UA/SUNY side, the efforts of Professor Carmack to coordinate the resources at Albany with those in Costa Rica deserve special mention. In spite of his busy teaching schedule in Costa Rica, he acted as the communication link between Albany and Costa Rica. He worked closely with Professor Reuben to ensure that all the necessary preparations were in place. His colleagues, professors Sanjak and Magid, deserve special appreciation for their work to insure that the academic participants from the UA/SUNY side were prepared and their papers were intellectually coordinated to cover complementary aspects of the conference theme. Their help, both while in Albany and with Professor Astiz while in Costa Rica, to iron out last minute emergencies were especially timely and effective.

In retrospect, the timing of the conference was somehow problematic, especially relative to the goal of fostering legislature-university interaction. The conference took place during the season when most Central American legislatures were in the midst of budget action. In addition:

In Costa Rica, not only was the Assembly discussing the budget, but the chairperson of the budget committee had just been appointed to be minister of presidential affairs, and so was unable to participate despite having earlier confirmed his intention to attend.

Humberto Guzman from Nicaragua was in the midst of a confrontation between FSLN and UNO factions and therefore was unable to leave the country. An expected substitute did not arrive, either.

- \* A legislative crisis in Guatemala prevented the attendance of Carlos Alarcon Monsanto and two separate substitutes.
- \* Carmen Elena Calderon de Escalon, of El Salvador, had a medical emergency that necessitated her admission to the hospital in serious condition, and an alternate could not be arranged for in time.

These and similar last-minute problems limited the participation of invited legislators in the conference. Nonetheless, the papers presented at the conference are being revised by scholars at Albany and in Central America and are being prepared for publication in English and Spanish. The final versions of the papers will be distributed to members of all invited legislatures, thus taking the themes of the conference to those who were unable to participate. In the interim, drafts of papers presented are available through CLD.

## CONCLUSIONS

The goals of the conference were to a large extent met, due to the excellent work of the participants and the support of the local organizers. While it is difficult to predict legislative agendas in the region and political and personal emergencies that occur in the final hours, future activities should be cognizant of those last-minute emergencies.

Organizers of joint activities requiring significant local institutional participation and contribution should also be more cognizant of the limited human and material resources available at those institutions. For example, Central American universities have scarce resources to invest. Their faculty are underpaid and overworked, and administrative and research staff are practically nonexistent. Funds to purchase needed resources for such joint activities are also absent. American organizers in the future should be aware of those limitations and seek to address them by assisting in covering some of the human costs and costs of needed facilities and equipment. The presence of a CLD field representative in the country some time prior to the scheduled event should ease some of these problems.