



Afro Latina Women Speak Up

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Latin America has long been thought of in terms of its Spanish and indigenous roots, which ignores a significant African heritage. The 150 million African descendants in Latin America and the Caribbean make up a third of the region's population but comprise more than half of its poor. For many, the cycle of poverty has been complicated by isolation, marginalization and discrimination. Officially, the contributions of Latin Americans of African descent have been denied and their appalling conditions have been ignored.

As an organized movement, the struggle for black civil rights and for a more equitable share in economic development is a comparatively recent phenomenon in Latin America. Afro Latina women have been present in that struggle. While progress is slow and racially- and gender-based discrimination are still the reality, these committed women work tirelessly for social and economic justice. The panel *Afro Latina Women Speak up—a Discussion on Gender, Ethnicity and Community*, organized by the Inter-American Foundation (IAF) for the 2006 National Council of La Raza Conference, shares the experiences of four black women leaders and their message of inclusion:

Daise Rosas da Natividade teaches in Rio de Janeiro and also provides organizational training and support to small-business owners at the Afro-Brazilian Incubator. She has a B.A. in psychology, an M.Ed. and an M.B.A.

Dayana Gisell Martínez Burke represents Francisco Morazán in Honduras' Chamber of Deputies. Blinded at 15 due to medical malpractice, she founded the Federación Nacional de Organismos de Personas con Discapacidad, where she currently serves as president, and she coordinates the Committee of Inclusion for Mexico, Canada and Central America. She has a B.A. in foreign languages and speaks six fluently.



Sean Sprague

Designer Josina Maria da Cunha, in the headdress, is expanding her small business through Instituto Palmares de Direitos Humanos (IPDH's) entrepreneurship training program. With Sondra Soares, IPDH office coordinator, Josina produces clothes that reflect Brazil's African heritage.

Dorotea Wilson is a Nicaraguan activist who advocates for the rights of women and ethnic minorities. She has served as mayor of Puerto Cabezas and in the Nicaraguan congress where she sponsored legislation providing autonomy to the Atlantic regions. She is a founder of the Foro de Mujeres de Nicaragua, a member of the Red de Mujeres Contra la Violencia de Nicaragua and the coordinator of Voce Caribeñas, a Caribbean women's movement.

Dr. Marta Moreno Vega is the current director of Hunter College's Global Initiative of Afro Latin and Caribbean Organizations (GALCI). Organizations she founded include the Caribbean Cultural Center African Diaspora Institute, Amigos del Museo del Barrio, the Association of Hispanic Arts and the Network of Centers of Color. Among the works she has published on the African diaspora are *The Altar of My Soul: The Living Traditions of Santeria* and *When the Spirits Dance Mambo* which she also produced and directed as a documentary film. Her Ph.D. is from Temple University.

Tina Balin-Brooks, panel moderator, is the Inter-American Foundation's representative for the Caribbean region. Before coming to the IAF, she worked with the U.S. Office of Refugee Resettlement, the U.S. Department of Justice's Criminal Investigative Training Assistance Program in Haiti and at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, during the Haitian boat people crisis of 1994-1995. Mrs. Balin-Brooks has a B.A. in psychology and French literature and is currently working toward an M.A. in world politics. She is a native speaker of French and Haitian Creole.

The IAF, a U.S. government foreign assistance agency created in 1969, furthers self-help development in Latin America and the Caribbean. The IAF responds directly to grassroots groups and to the organizations that support them by funding the proposals they submit. Given the IAF's mission to improve living conditions for the poor in this hemisphere, African descendants are well represented in its portfolio of grants for grassroots development.

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