

XIX FORUM OF MINISTERS OF CULTURE AND OFFICIALS IN CHARGE OF CULTURAL POLICIES IN LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN AND THE FIRST MEETING OF MINISTERS OF CULTURE OF THE COMMUNITY OF LATIN AMERICAN AND CARIBBEAN STATES (CELAC)

Paramaribo, Surinam, March 14th and 15th, 2013

Statement of the ALBA CULTURAL: For the unity of Our America

First of all, I want to express our gratitude and congratulations to the excellent hosts, who have diligently worked to make of this meeting a new success of our fruitful existence as a regional entity. I must also thank the Chairman and Pro Tempore Secretariat for having considered the invitation of the ALBA Cultural to this important Forum, to which I attend for the fourth time, though, this time, we have to add to its high and historical significance, that of being the first appointment of the Ministers of Culture which takes place within the context of the emerging Community of Latin American and Caribbean States.

The priority that, from the ALBA is given to this Forum, is expressed in an eloquent way, if we consider the headquarters of Ecuador and Bolivia from the two last meetings, to which are added, for our satisfaction, the Santa Cruz de la Sierra agreements that granted Venezuela and Cuba the organization of the next two, thus reaffirming our commitment to continue working very close for the sake of its strengthening and subsequent development, as today our region requests and fosters.

Since the very emergence of the ALBA, that December 14th, 2004, when Commander President Hugo Chávez -whom we're paying posthumous tribute in this meeting, as akin to his legacy- signed the founding Declaration with Commander-in-Chief Fidel Castro, Culture was recognized as a priority area of its work, aware of its important role in the complex processes involved in the full emancipation, the sustainable development and the integration of Our America.

In 2007, the highest cultural authorities of several Latin American and Caribbean countries met, who identified common priorities, and expressed their will of working together, for which we already had the help of the ALBA Cultural Fund, by then just founded, and now strengthened. Thus, the Cultural ALBA was created, endorsed by the VI ALBA Summit, held in January, 2008. We are specially committed since the 10th Meeting of the ALBA-TCP Political Council -which took place just two weeks ago- was congratulated for the good implementation of the ALBA-Cultural Project.

From a deeply rooted cultural conception, its programs and actions aim at encouraging answers and solutions to the main challenges our nations face, such as: creation, production, distribution and promotion of cultural goods and services; the legitimacy of our authentic cultural values within the context of a hegemonic globalization; as well as the training of human resources required for the cultural work in our societies.

The four Meetings of the Ministers of Culture of the ALBA nations, the ongoing management of the National Coordinators appointed by them, and the rising economic and commercial activity of the ALBA Cultural Fund, have argued, oriented and evaluated the development of their actions, which projecting, consistent with the cardinal objective of Cultural ALBA, to all Caribbean and Latin American countries interested in participating in them.

To this established synergies along with other integration mechanisms operating in the region, including the Forum that welcomes us today have joined, leading to the cooperation and complementarily in order to promote the optimal use of resources and enhance the impacts of joint actions, whose shared goals have propitiated to act jointly disregarding the identity of each participant, an experience which we're persuaded should go on expanding, diversifying and deepening.

The Cultural ALBA has been linked -and expects to continue this practice- with actions of this Forum: it makes its own the Virtual Museum of Latin America and the Caribbean, which involves today eight nations, and it has 83186 exhibition pieces, being always ready to incorporate new collections of all our nations. It also cosponsored the Itinerant Sample of the Caribbean Cinema and other important initiatives that emerged from it, like the Meeting of Filmmakers from Africa, the Caribbean and its Diasporas. The Portal "Cultures of Our America" (www.albacultural.org), is supported on the Network, is ready to immediately link with the Portal of Culture of Latin America and the Caribbean that the Forum encourages, with the effective collaboration of the ORCALC.

The Editorial Production Plan has responded to important interests, and two issues of the *Arte Sur* magazine, of excellent quality, were launched; nonetheless, the difficulties - in different orders- the region faces as to the international distribution, have not achieved the necessary results.

The Audiovisual Production Plan has implicated production teams from Bolivia, Cuba, Dominica, Ecuador, Nicaragua, Paraguay and Venezuela. The Audiovisual Distribution and Exhibition Network has provided modern equipments to the itinerant cinema of Bolivia, Ecuador, Nicaragua and Venezuela, to which will be added new ones, to favor its arrival and appreciation by new audiences.

The ALBA Narrative Contest, in its four editions, has received over four hundred manuscripts by young writers; the most distinguishing have been novels from Argentina, Colombia, Cuba, Chile, Puerto Rico and Venezuela. Meanwhile, the ongoing ALBA Cinema Award "Our America First Copy", in its five editions, has favored the completion of 16 films, produced in Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Cuba, Ecuador, Guatemala and Uruguay, some of which have been awarded in prestigious international contests. The Discography ALBA Award debuted last year, among which distinguished phonograms from Brazil, Cuba, Ecuador and Mexico participated. The ALBA Award on Art Criticism and Theory acknowledged a long essay that came from Argentina.

The ALBA Scholarships on Cultural Research, in its two editions, have been granted to students of relevant issues of our cultures in Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Cuba, Ecuador, Mexico, Trinidad & Tobago, and Venezuela. Nowadays, we are also building the ALBA Cultural Information System, for which we receive -and appreciate- the support given by those who striving to development of the SIC-SUR, within the MERCOSUR area. We respectfully suggest to the distinguishing authorities met here, to consider the relevance of working in favor of a Cultural Information System of the entire region that takes into account the experiences accumulated and the will that, in this regard, is present in different sub-regional integration mechanisms.

We are moving forward in the Traditional Music Mapping activity of the Latin American and the Caribbean peoples. To create it, we encouraged to convene all the countries, and we expect it will be welcomed as a new action of this instance of regional coordination. The Development Program of the Art Teaching National Systems responded to needs identified by Dominica and St. Vincent and the Grenadines, a country that also won a Scholarship granted by the ALBA Cultural with the prestigious Television and Cinema International School of San Antonio de los Baños. To this Program adds the bibliographic contribution provided to Bolivia, Cuba, Ecuador, Nicaragua and Venezuela for the training of its cultural promoters.

We are particularly pleased to have provided to the region of important Awards, as a recognition for a lifetime work, in the areas of Literature and Arts, whose strength is determined, in first place, by the paradigmatic personalities that -among outstanding figures nominated by a growing diversity of cultural and academic institutions of all our nations- have been selected by the international jury boards created each year for granting the award: Mario Benedetti, Roberto Fernández Retamar, Frei Betto, Luis Britto García, George Lamming and Eduardo Galeano, render account of the highest values of our poetry, fiction and essay; meanwhile, Oscar Niemeyer, Jorge Sanjinés, León Ferrari, Silvio Rodríguez, Santiago García and Alicia Alonso, have made universal architecture, cinema, fine arts, music, performing arts and dance of the Caribbean and Latin America.

To face the big challenges we share in the order of production, distribution, marketing and promotion of cultural goods and services, we make available to all the nations and to this important space of meeting and dialogue, the experience of the ALBA Cultural Fund company, as well as its capacity to take care of interests and projects linked to its objectives, related to the cardinal issues included in the agenda of this Meeting, so that we make possible that our cultures increasingly be protagonists and beneficiaries of a sustainable development.

We hope that these experiences, reflections and suggestions we have shared thanks to your generous attention, contribute to a better knowledge of the task we carry out, and have made clear that the Cultural ALBA's will of moving forward, working together, for the unity of Our America.