

HEMISPHERE HIGHLIGHTS

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PAST EVENTS

- “Outlook on Venezuela’s Foreign Policy,” October 1
- “Brazil’s Election and Beyond: Outlook for the New Administration,” September 30.

Headlines

Canadian prime minister vetoes proposal to extend the detention period for asylum seekers in **Canada**. **Haiti** prepares to elect a new president and legislators in November. Mexican president announces a plan to protect journalists in **Mexico** from drug violence. States across **Mexico** suffer the effects of severe thunderstorms and flooding in September. A law legalizing same-sex marriage in **Argentina** begins to have economic and social effects. Legislative elections in **Venezuela** result in gains for the political opposition and constitute a setback to the government of President Hugo Chávez. Rural violence continues in **Colombia**, despite the death of an influential leader of the FARC guerrilla group. Juan Manuel Santos begins his presidency in **Colombia** with a softer agenda than his predecessor. **Brazil’s** Petrobras raised some \$70 billion through a massive public offering of its stock, resulting in an increase in the Brazilian government’s share of the state oil company.

CANADA

**Prime Minister Stephen Harper of Canada has vetoed a proposal that would have created a separate classification for asylum seekers arriving in mass numbers.** The legislation, proposed soon after a cargo ship carrying 492 Tamils arrived on the coast of British Columbia in August, would have extended the initial detention period of “mass arrival” refugees from 48 hours to 14 days. The rule was intended to provide authorities with more time to screen refugee claimants for involvement in criminal or terrorist activities before their first hearing with the Immigration and Refugee Board. While the federal government has pledged to crack down on human smuggling, Harper criticized the proposal, saying efforts should be focused on the ringleaders of the business not those who fall victim to it. As the government struggles to develop an appropriate response to the arrival of the Tamil refugees, the second group to reach Canadian waters this year, debates continue over whether those who reach Canada without following an accepted immigration process should be allowed entry.

Human rights activists worry that sensationalized media reports and government speculation about terrorist involvement and trafficking

create a climate of fear and distrust that violates Canadian values of compassion toward those seeking protection. Canada is one of the largest recipients of refugees in the world, with nearly 35,000 claims made in 2009. Yet, some fear that inefficiencies in the Canadian system leave it susceptible to abuse. In a speech earlier this year, Immigration Minister Jason Kenney cited worries that Canada's "generosity is too often abused" and noted that many false asylum seekers have been, "misusing the asylum system to jump the immigration queue rather than waiting their turn like everyone else." The Conservative government has responded by introducing legislation to limit refugee inflows. In 2009, an annual report stated plans to cut refugee and family class immigrant targets for 2010, a move Liberal opposition leaders have denounced as part of a trend by the Conservative government to favor immigrants that can afford to enter the country over those seeking family reunification or protection. The report says Canada expects to accept 9,000 to 12,000 asylum claims in 2010, a number that is less than half the amount targeted for acceptance in 2006 under the former Liberal government. The suspected involvement of human traffickers in Canada's refugee problem further complicates the issue, moving it beyond purely a matter of immigration to one of crime.

*As debates over the appropriate response to refugees and human smuggling continue to rage, Canada's image as a haven for asylum seekers is facing heat. While some worry that the country's refugee system is being abused and that lenient measures and inefficient operations could allow potential terrorists or criminals into the country, others argue that measures introduced by the federal government are short-term fixes that do not address deep-seated problems in the country's refugee system. Furthermore, they assert that Canada should remain a country of open arms that permits all asylum seekers an equal chance of acceptance. Tara Brian*

## MEXICO

**With hurricane season in full swing, states across Mexico suffered the effects of severe thunderstorms and flooding in September, with more than 30**

**deaths and at least 1 million citizens affected by rains, heavy winds, and mudslides.** The Gulf and southeastern states were hit hard by Hurricane Karl and Tropical Storm Matthew, while Tropical Storm Georgette battered the Pacific Coast. The states of Veracruz, Tabasco, and Oaxaca were particularly affected. On September 17, Karl made its way across the Yucatán peninsula after coming ashore just north of the port of Veracruz. Low-lying areas were evacuated, and several thousand residents were rendered homeless in the face of continuing rains. A plane carrying President Felipe Calderón, who was heading to Veracruz to visit the affected areas, was forced to turn around and return to Mexico City because of persistent electrical storms. In Tabasco, which in 2007 saw heavy flooding cover 70 percent of the state's surface with water, rains of up to 150 millimeters per hour were reported, and four major rivers overflowed their banks. A little more than a week later, rainfall from Tropical Storm Matthew caused mudslides in the town of Santa María Tlahuiltontepec in Oaxaca, killing at least four and leaving another dozen people missing. Mexico's Department of Defense (SEDENA) reported that 150 troops had been deployed to the most affected region, which is largely inhabited by members of the indigenous Mixe community and has witnessed considerable conflict in recent years. Because the mudslides covered all roads leading to the village, rescue brigades composed of health workers, army units, and police had to walk to the site, delaying relief efforts and complicating the delivery of emergency services.

*Mexico, like other countries in Latin America and the Caribbean, has been working to strengthen the disaster response capacities of its military and civilian agencies responsible for carrying out emergency relief. In March 2009, Mexico hosted a regional consultation on natural disaster risk management, involving UNESCO and the World Conservation Union (IUCN). International organizations have devoted significant attention to disaster preparedness in Mexico and Central America since Hurricane Mitch devastated the region in 1998. With the United Nations reporting in 2007 that 10 of the 14 emergency response missions it had carried out had been in the Mesoamerican area, the focus has been on assisting countries in establishing special funds for*

*emergency relief and professionalizing emergency rescue teams. The American Regional Group of the International Search and Rescue Advisory Group (INSARAG), with support from the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), is working to build the capacity of urban search and rescue groups in the region. The Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) has also been working to support countries' efforts to improve disaster risk assessment and management. At the World Water Week meetings in Stockholm in early September, the IDB, in conjunction with governmental, international, and nongovernmental partners, issued a draft on challenges and opportunities in adapting to climate change in the water sector, stressing the importance of updating hydro-climatological information systems and urging water resource managers to develop long-range plans for addressing the challenges of extreme weather events in the region. Katherine E. Bliss*

**President Felipe Calderón announced a plan on September 22 to protect journalists in Mexico from drug gangs that have targeted journalists since the government launched a crackdown on drug traffickers nearly four years ago.** Calderón's plan came in response to a September 19 editorial published in *El Diario*, Ciudad Juárez's local newspaper, claiming that journalists can no longer safely do their jobs without the tacit approval of the drug cartels for their articles.

*El Diario's* plea to the drug cartels indicates the gravity of the drug violence and the dangers that journalists face in Mexico. Since 2000, at least 62 journalists have been killed, including 1 American, and 11 have been declared missing since 2003. Mexico is now reportedly the deadliest country in the world for news people. Overall violence has risen dramatically since the government's crackdown began in 2006 with over 28,000 deaths. *El Diario* has lost two staff members in the last two years, most recently, a 21-year-old photographer who was shot and killed in September.

In response to the growing pressures to protect the media, President Calderón has met with the Committee to Protect Journalists and the Inter-American Press Association to work on a plan to protect news workers. The plan will include an early

warning system to give reporters immediate access to authorities when threatened, a council to identify the causes behind attacks on reporters, and legal reforms. Calderón's approach mirrors a successful plan in Colombia, implemented amid violence related to drug trafficking, that moves threatened journalists out of high-risk areas and removes bylines to stories related to the drug cartels.

*Calderón's plan, which should start in October, is an important step in protecting the press and reversing the pressures of the drug cartels on the media. If the plan is as successful as its Colombian counterpart, it could point the way to other similar initiatives to protect against gang violence. Heather Hutchison*

## HAITI

**With less than two months to go before the 28 November elections, Haitians are again being put to the test of finding a president and electing new legislators to help them move beyond the turmoil of the past.** Whether this election will be different, demonstrating a new commitment to develop a viable and sustainable state is still uncertain. Seizing the opportunity to hold elections will certainly mark a positive step in the nation's commitment to build back better after disaster struck last January when a massive earthquake destroyed Port-au-Prince, Haiti's capital. A successful electoral process will also signal to the international donor community that in spite of the weak state, Haitians are capable of moving forward.

Haitians must now turn to the act of choosing a leader who will take them from recovery to reconstruction. This is no easy task, given the large numbers of Haitians still living in tent cities in the capital. Estimates suggest that more than 1.5 million people are still homeless. The logistical challenges for Haiti are enormous; in addition, the political maneuvering that continues to permit the exclusion of potential rivals to President René Préval is problematic. Allegations that the national electoral commission acceded to the wishes of Préval in selecting the slate of candidates has plagued the presidential race from the outset. In addition, setting up polling stations in Port-au-Prince

will require ways to overcome the 700 million cubic feet of rubble still lining the capital's streets.

With 19 candidates running for the presidency it will be difficult for citizens to distinguish among the contenders. A presidential debate held in mid-September had only 4 of the 19 candidates present. The four were Gérard Blot (Plateforme 16 décembre), Jean Chavannes Jeune (Alliance chrétienne citoyenne pour la reconstruction d'Haïtian), Jean Hector Anacacis (Mouvement pour le développement de la jeunesse Haïtienne), and Wilson Jeudy (Force 2010). Notably absent were Jude Célestin (Inite), Préval's choice and former director general of the state construction company, and former prime minister Jacques-Edouard Alexis (Mobilisation pour le progrès d'Haïti).

Yet the elections will go on, according to the UN Mission in Haiti and the Organization of American States, both of which are charged with helping the government of Haiti ensure that voting will take place. With election costs running at \$28.9 million—paid for by funds raised through the international donor community and the government of Haiti—the investment is significant.

The head of the UN Mission to Haiti, Ambassador Edmond Mulet, has assured the international community that credible elections can be held in Haiti. He underscored this point when he noted that “without elections, what are the options? The vacuum, the instability, the breaking down of all the structures here... We have to work with the government, the Haitian institutions, if we want to build those capacities.” **Johanna Mendelson Forman**

## VENEZUELA

**Venezuela's legislative elections held October 26 resulted in gains for that country's political opposition and constituted a setback for the government of President Hugo Chávez.** While Chávez's United Socialist Party of Venezuela (PSUV) won a clear majority of the 165 seats at stake in the National Assembly (several seats are reserved for indigenous representation and chosen separately),

the government faction failed to obtain a two-thirds “super-majority” that would allow it to pass any type of legislation, including “organic” laws of particular importance. Chávez had signaled the two-thirds margin as a key goal, and preventing it was seen as the opposition's bottom line. In the end, the PSUV won 98 seats; the opposition, for the first time united in a coalition called the Mesa de Unión Democrática (MUD), took 65; and a PSUV splinter group now in opposition to Chávez, the Fatherland for All (PPT) party, won 2 seats. The size of the PSUV's share, however, constituted an overrepresentation of its vote nationwide. An electoral law passed by the Assembly earlier in the year changed the system to allow for substantial overrepresentation of rural areas where the PSUV is especially strong. This, coupled with the gerrymandering of a number of districts in urban areas of particular opposition strength, skewed the result in favor of the government. For example, the rural state of Cojedes, with a population of around 320,000, elected four members of the Assembly; the state of Sucre, with a population of 960,000, elected six. A major achievement of the opposition was to outvote the PSUV nationwide by a margin of 5.7 million votes to 5.4 million, according to figures reported in international media.

*The outcome of this election is relevant in several ways. It changes the character of the National Assembly from a body entirely controlled by the government—due to the opposition's boycott of the 2005 legislative elections—to one in which there will be debate and discussion on issues, ideally with the potential for promoting dialogue between the two sides. The election was touted by both sides as a plebiscite on Chávez and therefore had real relevance in terms of the national vote. The result frames the 2012 presidential election as a real challenge for Chávez. Certainly, Venezuela's economic downturn, high inflation, food shortages, and skyrocketing crime rates all influenced the vote on September 26. For its part, the opposition can clearly see the advantages of a united front. But achieving that goal in 2012—selecting a single candidate and producing a coherent platform that appeals to independent voters beyond mere opposition to Chávez (the famous “ni-ni” bloc)—is a challenge has been elusive.* **Jakub Liskowiak and Peter DeShazo**

## COLOMBIA

**The death of Mono Jojoy on September 20 signals the beginning of the end of FARC but not the end of rural violence in Colombia.** Mono Jojoy, also known as José Briceño, was usually listed as number two among the collective leadership of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) and considered to be its most important military commander. He personally directed the group's "Eastern Bloc," which makes up half of FARC's total armed force. Following the death of the guerrilla organization's historic leaders over the last decade, he became the most prominent proponent of FARC's increasingly ruthless style of violence. While the death of this FARC leader is important in the long term, more significant is the way the attack against his camp illustrated the Colombian military's enhanced capabilities. It was a joint operation involving all three branches of the armed forces and the national police, supported without a hitch by dozens of aircraft and special operation teams deployed from several widely separated bases. Just days before the military launched the attack, it was conducting another large operation hundreds of miles further south against another large FARC unit in Putumayo. Perhaps most important was the quality of intelligence available to the military high command and how well they used it to develop their operational planning. For at least 18 months the Colombian military had known that Mono Jojoy suffered from diabetes—so much so that he often had to be carried, seated in a kitchen chair, from place to place by his subordinates. Soon after his death, local media alleged that his exact location was known because his special boots, purchased in Bogota and designed to help ease pain, had electronic monitors inserted in the heels by intelligence operatives. Other reports said rather it was simply a matter of having a turncoat enter the inner circle of the camp and confirm the leader's presence. The surviving FARC leadership must be shaken by either possibility, as each suggests the deteriorating loyalty of their followers, and by knowledge that the computers picked up in Mono Jojoy's camp will now give the government more threads to further unravel the guerrilla's remaining strength. *Recent official figures estimated that FARC still had 6,000 armed combatants, a third of what it had*

*a decade ago. The assault on Mono Jojoy's headquarters should encourage further desertions. Some 1,300 have gone through a formal demobilization process over the last seven years, providing much of the intelligence needed for recent government successes. For the last six months, the military has been chasing FARC's top political leader Alfonso Cano, a former college professor known more as an ideologue than combatant commander, around the guerrilla's historic base across the mountains from where Mono Jojoy was found. But even if he is captured or surrenders, it is unlikely that FARC will lay down its arms as a group. Colombia's long guerrilla war was initially fueled by disputes over land tenure and ideology and later sustained by the lucrative drug trade. The ideology is much weakened, but many of the underlying causes of conflict remain.* **Phillip McLean**

**Juan Manuel Santos has begun his presidency with an agenda "softer" than his predecessor ended with.** In his campaign and his inaugural address, he promised to continue Alvaro Uribe's emphasis on "democratic security" (defined as giving every citizen the right to personal security). But to distinguish his administration from the immediate past, Santos patched up relations with Venezuelan president Hugo Chavez and laid out an agenda of reforms that Uribe's critics in Colombia and abroad have long demanded. These include constitutional amendments to make the judiciary more efficient and credible to the public by eliminating the overlapping jurisdictions among the high courts, better training and support for judges, prosecutors and investigating magistrates, and restructuring the civilian intelligence agency and establishing a military justice system to end human rights abuses. To curb a major source of government corruption, he wants further changes in the way local and central authorities share earnings from natural resource exploitation (especially oil and coal). Perhaps his most ambitious goal is compensation for victims of the violence that was the nation's scourge for two decades. Part of that project will be the return of vast areas of the country grabbed by rural magnates during the heyday of the narcotics trade. For the first time since the 1970s, officials are talking about something akin to "agrarian reform." FARC apparently thought these presidential postulates suggested weakness

and increased attacks around the country. The new president suffered a momentary drop in popularity, but that rebounded with the armed forces' effective response. *It is well to remember that Alvaro Uribe began his term eight years ago, promising economic and social reforms, and indeed he made significant progress reordering government programs. Many believe the country is now ready for a period of strong economic growth. But Uribe soon became known as a "hard-liner" for his focus on security policies—and in the end for his confrontation with his bellicose Venezuelan neighbor. For his part, Santos begins with a more optimistic national picture. Success is not, however, guaranteed. Many of his goals are in effect to change many characteristic Colombian traits responsible for the country's history of troubles.* **Phillip McLean**

## BRAZIL

**Petrobras raised some \$70 billion through a massive public offering of its stock, resulting in an increase in the Brazilian government's share of the state oil company.** Reportedly a record-breaking stock sale, some two-thirds of the Petrobras offering at the end of September was purchased by the Brazilian Development Bank (BNDES), raising the percentage held by BNDES from nearly 40 percent to 49 percent of total shares. The Brazilian government now controls slightly more than 64 percent of voting shares of Petrobras. This stock issue is intended to help fund Petrobras's ambitious plan to develop large oil reserves located some 250 kilometers off Brazil's coast in very deep "pre-salt" formations. The pre-salt deposits, as they increasingly come on line, could make Brazil the world's sixth-largest producer of petroleum. During 2010, Petrobras's stock declined some 20 percent in value, in part due to the BP spill in the Gulf of Mexico, which rattled investor confidence in deep-water drilling. Several delays in the public offering date, as well as uncertainty regarding the regime that will govern the development of the pre-salt also contributed to this decline.

*Last month's stock offering not only underscores the commitment of the Brazilian government to the*

*financing of Petrobras for the development of pre-salt, but it also makes a strong statement regarding the policy of the Lula administration—one that his likely successor Dilma Rousseff will almost certainly continue—to favor an increasingly larger state role in the development of the pre-salt.* **Jakub Liskowiak**

## ARGENTINA

**In July, the Argentine senate approved a law legalizing gay marriage, making Argentina the first country in Latin America to do so.** The bill, addressing marriage, inheritance protection, shared custody responsibilities, coverage of social security, and adoption rights for gay couples, has already begun to influence the Argentine economy, as well as other social movements.

Gay tourism in Argentina has expanded since the law's enactment. In early September 2010, Buenos Aires displayed its first "Pink Point," an information center designed to give gay tourists a comprehensive description of gay hot spots, as well as spots to avoid, throughout the city. Tourism Minister Enrique Meyer claims that interest in terms of tourism "is already rising as this is a country that is more open than others in terms of rights and how it treats its citizens," especially its gay citizens.

Other areas of the economy have also benefitted from the law's enactment. The wedding industry has seen substantial growth. As of September 18, gay leaders estimated that there had already been 140 same-sex weddings nationwide and another 120 were expected by the end of the month. The rise in same-sex weddings has begun to reshape the wedding planning business. Vanesa Marni and Miriam Perez own a business in Argentina called Gay Planners. They have gained momentum from the marriage law. They already anticipate planning for an average of four weddings a month.

In addition to spurring economic changes, the gay marriage law has also stimulated other social movements in Argentina. On September 28, heartened by the passage of the same-sex marriage law, a group of women's organizations filed a writ of habeas corpus at

different courtrooms around the country demanding that the criminalization of abortion be declared unconstitutional.

*Though Argentina is the only country in Latin America to have legalized gay marriage, other countries and cities in the region have taken steps toward this end. Same-sex marriage has been legal in Mexico City since May 2010, and in August 2010, senators in Chile introduced a bill to Congress to legalize same-sex marriage. Additionally, same-sex civil unions are legal in some states of Brazil and Mexico, and substantial rights for gay couples exist in Colombia, Ecuador, and Uruguay. Gay rights advocates throughout the region hope that Argentina's decision will add momentum to nascent efforts in other countries.* **Jessica Carlton**

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