

OAS LAUNCHES COURSE TO STRENGTHEN ENVIRONMENTAL ASPECTS OF TRADE AGREEMENTS IN CENTRAL AMERICAN NATIONS
October 16, 2007

The Organization of American States (OAS) opened an intensive course on trade and environment geared towards governmental officials from Central American nations, with a ceremony last night in Montelimar, Nicaragua. The course, which will be held in that city the entire week, brings together more than 30 high-level government officials from Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, Panama and the Dominican Republic. "It is very important for Central America to prepare itself and work in competitiveness so that the environment does not become an obstacle in trade," said the Nicaraguan Vice Minister of Public Works, Industry and Commerce.

In her opening remarks, the Nicaraguan Minister of Environment and Natural Resources, Juana Argueñal, highlighted Nicaragua's satisfaction in hosting this initiative and participating in the OAS' effort to strengthen Central American institutions as well as its civil servants for the protection of the environment and free trade.

The main objective of the course, sponsored by the Canadian International Agency for Development (CIDA), is to strengthen the region's capacity building on environmental issues and implementation of international trade agreements. The region is in the initial stage of implementing agreements with the United States and it recently began negotiations with the European Union. "The countries of the region face multiple challenges, including environmental, in the current free trade processes.

The principal contribution of this course is that it will facilitate the participating officials with the practical tools and necessary know-how for decision making geared towards sustainable development within the framework of trade agreements," said Claudia de Windt, of the OAS Department of Sustainable Development (DSD) during the event. For his part, Mark Strasser, Trade Advisor of Canada for Costa Rica, Nicaragua, and Honduras, who represented Canadian authorities during the event, noted that "the trade agreements contribute to a greater prosperity, and when they are complemented by other policies and measures, create opportunities to address social and environmental objectives. Canada is committed to work to ensure that the economic benefits of free trade are focused so that they promote sustainable development, which is why we support the work of the OAS in the strengthening of capacity building of the countries of the region in this area."

The course is part of an OAS trade and environment initiative in the Americas, carried out by the Department of Sustainable Development. This initiative, through activities such as the course began in Nicaragua, will address from different approaches the needs of the countries in aspects of trade and environment, both in the multilateral agenda of the World Trade Organization (WTO) as well as in the regional agenda of the Regional Trade Agreements. The six-module course will be taught by renowned experts from several countries of the region, as well as by experts from the United Nations and the OAS. The OAS has created a website (<http://www.oas.org/dsd/Tool-kit/defaultSPA.htm>) with the course's content.

The course will be taught to Andean, Guyanese and Surinamese officials in Lima, Peru, during the week of November 26, 2007.

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