

# OAS

by Gina Ochoa



## Peruvian Cuisine: Cultural Heritage of the Americas

IN A CEREMONY to mark the official beginning of the Inter-American Year of Culture, the OAS declared Peruvian cuisine to be part of the “Cultural Patrimony of the Americas.” The award was presented by OAS Secretary General José Miguel Insulza to the Peruvian Minister of

Commerce and Tourism, Eduardo Ferreyros.

This recognition seeks to “highlight the cultural expressions that best represent the patrimony of the countries in the hemisphere,” said Secretary General Insulza, who also expressed his satisfaction at being able to honor Peruvian gastronomy since “it has become a great ambassador

and attraction for this beautiful country and continues to be a living representation of its cultural treasures.”

“Cuisine,” Insulza said, “is not just the sum of flavors and products; it is the reflection of the relationship that is born between human beings and their environment; between a person and his land, his history, his geography, his people; it is a reflection of the ties that individuals create with the fruits, colors, and customs of their land.”

As he received the award, Minister Ferreyros recalled that Peru’s cuisine has been “enriched throughout history with the culinary traditions of many colonial settlers, such as the Italian and the French, leading to new recipes that express the great creativity of Peruvians through their food. We are very honored to have a place in the cultural history of the Americas,” he continued, “and that our cuisine is recognized as our regional contribution to the world.”

The awards ceremony was held at the OAS headquarters in Washington DC with the participation of high officials and representatives of the Organization’s member

countries. Well-known Peruvian chefs served samples of the country’s traditional foods.

Peru is the first country of the region to receive this award created by the OAS in order to publicize the cultural contributions of the hemisphere and to reaffirm the dynamic, living, and constantly evolving presence of the Americas on the international scene. In the coming year, other aspects of the region’s cultural heritage will also be recognized with this award.

## Elections in Haiti

ON MARCH 20, the OAS-CARICOM Joint Election Observation Mission (JEOM) was present once again for the second round of presidential and legislative elections in Haiti. The Mission had a presence in all eleven electoral departments and stayed in the country until the final results were announced.

The 201 election observers deployed throughout Haiti were able to witness some improvements as compared with the first round of elections. These included: the political climate on election day which was calmer and more relaxed; better



From left to right: OAS Secretary General José Miguel Insulza, Kamlá Persad-Bissessar, Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago, and CIM President Rocío García Gaytán

## Women in Leadership for a Democratic Society

IN EARLY APRIL, the Inter-American Commission of Women (CIM), with the support of the UN Women and of the Ibero-American General Secretariat, organized the First Hemispheric Forum on “Women’s Leadership for a Citizens’ Democracy.” The Forum sought to improve understanding about the challenges the democratic system is currently facing in its efforts to guarantee women the ability to exercise substantive political citizenship.

In the opening session of the Forum, OAS Secretary General José Miguel Insulza highlighted the progress that has been made towards equal rights for women in the region and the fact that “all of the Constitutions of the countries in the region establish equal rights for women and men.” In spite of this, however, he noted that “significant challenges” remain, such as “prejudices and stereotypes” in the political environment.

“Prejudices and resistance to the equality of women in political institutions and the state present serious obstacles for the construction of a citizens’ democracy that works proactively to make citizenship substantive and diverse both ethnically and culturally,” said Insulza who also advocated for increasing the political representation of women in the various branches of government.



Left: On March 20, 2011, Haitian citizens voted in presidential and legislative elections



OAS Assistant Secretary General Albert R. Ramdin, left, in a meeting with Tillman Thomas, Prime Minister of Grenada and Chair of CARICOM

performance on the part of election officials; an active role of the national security forces in contributing to the efficacy and order of the day; rigorous verification of election documents; and, in general, better efforts to ensure the transparency and integrity of the results.

On this occasion, the JEOM sought to verify whether the recommendations it had made after the first round had been taken into account and implemented. It hoped to observe better organization of the voting and a greater sense of legitimacy for the authorities elected. JEOM recommendations after the first round included matters related to the voter lists, the information campaign about where to vote; awareness raising and information about the process in general; the training and conduct of election officials; and the

functioning of the Vote Tabulation Center.

As elections drew to a close, the JEOM Chief of Mission Colin Granderson emphasized the excellent civic participation of the Haitian people, which “made it possible to hold the second round of elections in a peaceful fashion, thus contributing to democratic practices in the country as well as the credibility and legitimacy of the electoral process.”

According to Ambassador Granderson’s reports, the improvements and the success of the second round were clouded by logistical problems that delayed the opening of voting tables in several polling places in the capital. The Mission also observed a lack of electoral materials in 69 polling places and some disturbances and acts of violence in the weeks

before election day that were quickly dispersed thanks to the actions of the National Police and MINUSTAH.

On the day that the preliminary election results from the second round were published, OAS Secretary General José Miguel Insulza emphasized the patience with which Haitians had waited for the vote recount and congratulated authorities for ensuring that the process would be carried out according to the Electoral Law and the Constitution of the country.

OAS Assistant Secretary General Albert R. Ramdin, who traveled to Haiti for the run-off elections, stated that he hopes these elections will mark “the beginning of stability, recovery, and reconstruction for the benefit of the Haitian people.”

Preliminary results indicate that candidate Michel

Martelly has won the presidential elections with 67.57 percent of the votes, a number that will be confirmed after the dispute and challenge phase of the elections. ❀

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The Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago, Kamla Persad-Bissessar, gave a keynote address in which she praised the creation of the Inter-American Democratic Charter as an instrument that promotes and contributes to gender equality and to the participation of women in decision making. She offered an analysis of the achievements and political participation of women in the last few decades, and she presented a number of recommendations for advancing towards the future. “Today’s women in politics are more self-confident, more ambitious, more competitive, and are motivated not only by an interest in promoting women’s issues and concerns, but also by the socio-economic well-being of society, more broadly,” she said.

Former President of Chile and current Executive Director of UN Women, Michelle Bachelet, was also present at the forum. Bachelet called for accelerating processes of change towards the full and effective recognition of the political rights of women, “taking advantage of the current moment in which the continent is experiencing democracy.” She argued that affirmative action mechanisms such as quota systems must not only be developed but also effectively implemented.

Bachelet said that the region is at “a key moment” for increasing the participation of women in political life. “If affirmative action measures are taken in the next electoral contests, and electoral justice mechanisms are implemented to guarantee their enforcement, we will advance more quickly,” she stated.

The CIM hemispheric forum was able to stimulate debate around issues related to the political rights of women, effective citizenship, the strengthening of democratic governance, and human rights. Analysts, political leaders, opinion leaders, representatives of non-governmental organizations, and specialists from various institutions that work on the issue of gender equality attended the event. Panelists included CIM President Rocío García Gaytán; the former Deputy Prime Minister of Barbados, Mia A. Mottley; the mayor of Lima, Susana Villaran; the Assistant Executive Secretary of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, Elizabeth Abi-Mershed; and an Expert from the Committee for the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) Silvia Pimentel.