



**NETRIS external mobility report by Kimberly Mitchell, MA student at IIR/UWI, Trinidad and Tobago**

**NETRIS mobility at the Pro-Tempore Secretariat of UNASUR – Union of South American Nations**  
**June 20<sup>th</sup> – July 19<sup>th</sup> 2011**



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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would firstly like to thank His Excellency President Bharrat Jagdeo of Guyana for issuing an invitation to students of the University of the West Indies to participate in an internship at the Pro-Tempore Secretariat of the UNASUR – Union of South American Nations; based at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Takuba Lodge, Georgetown, Guyana.

I would also like to thank the United Nations University Institute on Comparative Regional Integration Studies – UNU-CRIS and its Network for Regional Integration Studies – NETRIS; and Ms. Maria Cristina Macovei, Project Coordinator NETRIS, for making the internship a possibility by providing funding and air fare to and from Guyana.

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## ABOUT UNASUR

In 2004 South American leaders gathered in Peru to discuss the formation of a South American Community of Nations (CSN). This body was later renamed the Union of South American Nations – UNASUR and was then formally established in 2008 with the signing of the Constitutive Treaty by country representatives from 12 nations; Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Columbia, Ecuador, Guyana, Paraguay, Peru, Suriname, Uruguay, and Venezuela.

The body is modelled after the European Union (EU), moving to have a common currency, parliament and passport. It is based on the values of

*'democracy, freedom, solidarity, human rights, respect for territorial integrity, diversity, non-discrimination, the affirmation of their autonomy, peaceful dispute settlement, and the sovereign equality of states.'* (Cuzo declaration on the South American Community of Nations. Third South American Presidential Summit 2004)

UNASUR aims to eliminate hunger, poverty, improve the quality of life and standard of living of many; ensure access to education and universal literacy, the creation of jobs, access to health, and environmental conservation among others.

UNASUR countries “have immense resources, [...] and huge reserves of gas and oil,” (Egas n.d) large tracts of fertile land, approximately 27% of the world's fresh water (Chapter 11 Brazil and other countries n.d), vast biodiversity, a diverse number of



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energy resources inclusive of alternative energy resources, and an estimated combined GDP of US\$2.3 trillion. (Seabra 2010:2)

UNASUR has several Councils, these are; the South American Council on the World Drug Problem, the South American Council of Planning, Infrastructure and Physical Integration, South American Council on Social Development, the South American Defence Council, the South American Economic Council, the South American Energy Council, the South American Council of Health, and the South American Council on Education, Culture, Science, Technology and Innovation.

One of UNASUR's projects is the Bank of the South which aims to finance the economic (Seabra 2010:4), social and environmental development objectives of its members. It is meant to "strengthen regional integration, reduce asymmetries, poverty and social exclusion which will in turn foster sustainable development and so transform the region." (Ortiz and Ugarteche 2010:95)

Unfortunately the proper functioning and operation of the Bank of the South has been delayed due to issues of "differences in opinion among member countries and an inadequate work method." (Ortiz and Ugarteche 2010:95) Work on a common currency has also been halted and focus has been shifted to working on having an "inter-regional trade compensated with local currencies." (UNASUR looking at the EU, freezes project for common currency and central bank 2011)



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Another of UNASUR's projects is the South American Defence Council. This council was created at a summit in 2009 by UNASUR defence ministers.

*"The council will strive to diffuse regional conflicts [through] [conflict] [resolution] [strategies]; promote regional military cooperation and allow for increased transparency in military expenditures."* (Sugget, South American Nations form regional defence council 2009.)

This council will facilitate technological transfer, knowledge sharing and military innovation, as well as the linking of existing military academies to create a "South American Centre of Strategic Defence Studies." (Sugget, South American Nations form regional defence council 2009) This Centre for Strategic Studies was inaugurated in Buenos Aires on the 26<sup>th</sup> and 27<sup>th</sup> of May 2011 by the Pro Tempore President of the South American Defence Council, Minister of Defence Jaime Thorne Leon.

The Planning, Infrastructure and Physical Integration council has "524 physical integration projects, of which 25% are under construction or have been finished", (UNASUR looking at the EU, freezes project for common currency and central bank 2011) focusing mainly on tunnels, passes, bridges and roads.

UNASUR also very recently added an additional protocol to the constitutive treaty of UNASUR on commitment to democracy. The protocol will come into effect when there is

*"a breach or the threat of a breach against the democratic order, a violation of the constitutional order or any situation that jeopardizes the legitimate exercising of power and*



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*the application of the values and principles of democracy.”* (Additional protocol to the Constitutive Treaty of UNASUR on Commitment to democracy)

Thus UNASUR recognizes the importance of democracy and reiterated its commitment to the promotion, protection and defence of the democratic order. The UNASUR is a work in progress and represents a valiant attempt at a region striving to become self-sufficient.



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## MY EXPERIENCE

Guyana is a beautiful country and it is unfortunate that so many of its people are poor. I unfortunately did not do a lot of sightseeing but what little I saw will forever remain with me. I was originally supposed to participate in the internship for 6 weeks but had to cut it short due to personal reasons. I therefore left on Tuesday July 19<sup>th</sup> 2011.

I arrived in Guyana on June 20<sup>th</sup> 2011 at approximately 2:50 p.m. and proceeded to the home of my lecturer as lodgings were not yet organized. As a result of my late arrival I did not proceed to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Guyana where the Pro Tempore Secretariat of UNASUR is housed, till the next day. I went in on Tuesday June 21<sup>st</sup> but was unable to begin the internship as I found out that the mother of the Minister of Foreign Affairs had passed and the Ministry was closed. I was directed to return the following day.

The next day I went in and began my duties as an intern. There I was welcomed by the staff of the Pro Tempore Secretariat and shown around the building. I was given material to familiarize myself with UNASUR. I was informed that because Guyana did not possess the resources; financial, infrastructural or the human resource capacity, that Guyana only chaired the Social Development Council. There are three thematic concerns around which working groups of the Social Development Council were created. These are food security and the threat of hunger, social protection and security and social economy. My time was spent on doing research on these three areas for the council so



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that it can present a stance on each issue as well as prepare informational bulletins on them to pass on to both its Ministry officials and other UNASUR country representatives. It was during this internship that I realized why many of Latin America's regional integration projects have been unsuccessful. The main reason stems from the fact that there is a certain mistrust amongst countries, present for many years, that leads to many disagreements over important matters. Another is a lack of communication amongst member countries and almost a certain flagrant disrespect for the Pro Tempore Secretariat in Guyana. I say this because Guyana currently holds the rotating chairmanship of the Pro Tempore Secretariat and during my time there saw on countless occasions that many important decisions were made, and meetings held without the knowledge of officials from the Secretariat.

I understand that there would be challenges and that no organization can be perfect but at the same time certain things must be in place for something of this magnitude to be achieved. If on an inter-ministerial level within the organization itself there is bickering, how then is regional integration supposed to work? How is the region supposed to benefit or become transformed for the better?

Recently a wikileaks published a leaked diplomatic cable where an Ecuadorian official was quoted as saying that "Guyana will likely not assume the presidency for lack of resources and personnel to effectively administer the presidency." (Leaked diplomatic cable) This statement shows that there was not much faith in Guyana to effectively take



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over the rotating presidency. As the former holder of the rotating Presidency, Ecuador should have provided guidance and personnel to help Guyana in the initial stages of the assumption of the presidency. That is what true regional integration is all about; providing support and assistance when needed, but in this instance it did not happen. Small wonder why integration projects in Latin America never really come to fruition.

In conclusion due to the constraints mentioned above, it was unfortunate that I was unable to conduct a more exhaustive study on the regional integration body.

Kimberly Mitchell

25.07.2011



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