

**INSTITUTE OF LATINO AND  
LATIN AMERICAN AFFAIRS OF THE  
AMERICAN JEWISH COMMITTEE**

**BUSINESS PLAN**

**September 2004-July 2005**

The recent creation of the **Latino and Latin American Affairs Institute of the American Jewish Committee** underscores the growing importance that the organization is placing on key domestic, regional and hemispheric issues which have become central to its outreach efforts and coalition building with the Latino communities in the US, to the welfare of Latin American Jewry, to the strengthening of ties between the US-Latin America and Israel and to the stability and prosperity of all of the Americas.

In the last year, as we launched some mayor initiatives reflecting AJC's vision in these areas, we continued surveying future possibilities for our involvement in innovative programs which would allow us to advance our institutional goals while reinforcing our role as the pre-eminent Jewish interlocutor in the topics of Latino and Latin American Affairs.

AJC is keenly aware of the increasing intersections between Latino priority concerns and issues driving the US- Latin American agenda today, as this community increasingly articulates its links to the homeland. In fact, recent surveys have shown that Latinos are expressing greater interest and concern for the welfare of all of the Americas. Some Latin American specialists have come up with a new characterization for this complex set of issues. They call it an *intermestic* agenda where the borders between the domestic and the international have become blurred.

Included in this proposal is

- A blueprint for the Institute's governing and decision making structure
- A program of activities for the coming year, incorporating elements of the Road Maps we last prepared but with some adjustments to accurately reflect current circumstances and pertinent observations and experiences derived from our activities in the last months.

## Latino Affairs

In order to continue setting the stage for successful interactions with our Latino partners, we must keep in mind that the diversity and complexity of these communities warrant a multi-pronged approach that takes a multiplicity of factors into consideration in the process of identifying priorities, developing strategies and finding effective interlocutors:

- **Geographical diversity-** Almost 70% come originally from Mexico, 14.3% from Central America, 8.6% from Puerto Rico, 3.7% from Cuba and the rest from different places in Latin America
- **Ethnic Diversity-** The largest percentage is white, 35.8 million, 1.5% black and the rest mestizo (Indian, Asian, Pacific Islander, etc.) Most Latinos identify themselves as “white.”
- **Religious Diversity-** The vast majority of Latinos identify as practicing Catholics, Evangelical or main stream Protestants. There are approximately around 100,000 Latino Jews and an increasing number of Islamic practitioners (The WSJ identifies Islam as the “fastest growing religion in the region...”)
- **Generational Diversity-** The proportion of Latinos born in the US is 59.8%. Among those born outside the US, 40.2%, 52.1% entered the country between 1990 and 2002, 25.6% came in the 1980’s and the remaining 22.3% arrived before 1980. Some Mexican Americans trace their origins to this land to the 16<sup>th</sup> century, claiming they did not cross the border, rather the border crossed them. Understandably, each generation has differentiated degrees of assimilation and incorporation into this country and thus their focus on different agendas.
- **Socio-Economic diversity.-** Most Americans have the perception that the Latino community is monolithic, particularly in socio-economic terms. Based on stereotypes, Latinos are perceived as poor and ill educated. Indeed, according to the 2000 Census, the median annual income of Latinos was considerably below the national median and a large percentage of Latinos live under the poverty line. However, a new class of affluent Latino entrepreneurs and professionals made up of around 3.7 million is becoming more and more influential and establishing links with the rest of the elites in this country. According to Merrill Lynch, this segment of the population will have a combined buying power of \$292.4 billion by 2006.
- **Organizational Diversity.-** Most traditional national Latino organizations such as Maldef, La Raza and LULAC were initially created to advocate on behalf of Mexican Americans. In fact most of their leaders are still Mexican-American. However, they claim to represent the whole of the Latino community nationwide and undertake efforts on behalf of a Pan-Latino agenda mostly gravitating around civil rights issues. In the last few years we have seen the creation of organizations focused on other agendas, such as the New America Alliance, which has a

- membership base made up of successful Latino entrepreneurs who share philanthropic goals and whose goal is to ensure that an increasing number of Latinos have access to venture capital and to decision making positions in the financial sphere.
- Some questions linger regarding how representative of their communities are some of the major Latin organizations. However, nobody can deny the important role they play to galvanize the Latino population for political purposes and to provide vital community service and legal defense. They are key interlocutors for us and key in helping us identify venues for cooperation.
- Increasingly, some sectors of the Latino community are realizing that in order to be more effective on issues such as immigration or remittances involving their country of origin, they would be better off creating country- specific lobbies. We are now seeing a strengthening of national Diasporas and the beginning of efforts to advocate on behalf of their countries of origin, an area on which the US Jewish community can be of great help.

## ***PROGRAM OF ACTIVITIES***

### **1.- Strengthening chapter activity.-**

- Several of our chapters, particularly those with significant Latino populations, have developed successful coalitions with Hispanic organizations and communities. In most cases, these were reinforced this year through the workshops organized by the Belfer Center and deriving joint initiatives. For several of these chapters as well as for others who are still in the process of strategizing on future inter-group programs, we hope to remain a resource to help reach out to national or local Hispanic leaders and organizations and to provide timely insights into sociological, organizational and political issues and trends.
- We will be investing time and resources to help develop chapters which have key Latino and Jewish populations such as Miami and Houston. Miami, in particular, is of prime importance to AJC as it remains the gateway to the Americas and has experienced a significant growth of Latin American Jews in the last decade.

### **2.- Development of a PR/ media outreach plan-**

- The *AJC Spanish website* has continued to develop nicely since launched last year. Continuous efforts are undertaken to keep it current by publishing translated as well as original pieces on issues of concern to the Jewish and to the Latino communities. Information on programs at the Chapter and National levels, links to Latino and Jewish media outlets and facts and figures on both communities will continue to be featured

- With the exponential growth of the Spanish media, we will identify and reach out to major printed and electronic outlet to explore collaboration.
- Plans are underway to ensure that our voice is permanently heard on key issues on major Spanish radio networks
- We will increase our contribution of articles on Latino-Jewish issues or AJC concerns on a systematic basis to Hispanic outlets.
- We will increase the circulation of our biweekly e-newsletter *Interactions*, featuring current information of relevance to both the Latino and Jewish communities, AJC programs and projects and news and analyses on Latin America and Israel.

### **3.- Contacts with national Latino organizations and opinion leaders.-**

- We will fine-tune the mission and scope of action of the National Latino Jewish Leadership Council. At its best, this entity will act as a crisis management tool and as a clearinghouse of efforts between both communities needing to be handled at the multilateral level. The next meeting of the Board of Directors of the Council will take place next December and will be focused on exploring the impact of the elections on the agendas of each community.
- At the bilateral level, we will expand our efforts to identify and reach out to national Latino organizations, with differing profiles and agendas and with whom we feel we can develop mutually beneficial relationships, so that our relations reflect the wide diversity of the community. Key to this effort is an upcoming meeting with the members of the National Hispanic Leadership Agenda which incorporates the top 40 Latino organizations and which sets and advances the policy priorities of the Latino community.
- We will continue identifying emerging or established Hispanic leaders in the business, intellectual, academic circles and we will attempt to establish contacts between them and AJC members and leaders who are active in the same circles.

### **4.- Contacts with Churches and Religious Leaders.**

In cooperation with AJC'S Department of Inter-Religious Affairs, we will identify Hispanic leaders in the Catholic Church and evangelical churches or those who serve as liaisons with the Hispanic community and open channels to establish a two-way communication.

### **5.- Development and Support of Policy Initiatives:**

**a.- Domestic Agenda .-** We will continue to work with our Latino partners to identify opportunities for mutual support on domestic issues that are front and center for our communities. These include immigration reform, access to public education, and affirmative action, among others.

In addition, we are in the process of exploring how AJC can be of help to the National Hispanic Media Coalition which advocates on behalf of one of the community's central

issues: a fair and accurate representation of Latinos in the media and entertainment industries.

**b.- *Foreign policy agenda.***- We will work on the establishment of working relations with organizations such as the Hispanic Council on International Relations .

Concurrently, we should continue cultivating our relations with Latin American embassies with large immigrant populations in the US. Increasingly we are witnessing the emergence of organizations based on Diaspora identities  
AJC has started offering the possibility of organizing workshops, to embassies and some of these organizations, in order to share the model of political and community activism developed by American Jewry. El Salvador and Mexico have expressed initial interest and we are in the process of conceptualizing and implementing the project both at the local and national levels.

**c.- *Hispanic Congressional Caucus and Hispanic Congressional Conference.***- We will continue to reach out to congressional organizations, on both sides of the aisle, to remain plugged in to their legislative priorities and sensitize them to ours. At the same time, we will try to act as a catalyst for collaboration with Jewish members of Congress.

After the November elections, we will start the process of acting as facilitator of a third encounter between Latino and Jewish Members of Congress

## **6.-Links with Latino Professional Associations**

We will act as a bridge to foster cooperation between Latino and Jewish professional associations, such as the American Association of Hispanic Journalists, which annually organizes the UNITY conference in which it addresses problems of image and access to the media of minorities.

## **7.- Project Interchange Trips**

- As a joint venture with our Mexican partner Tribuna Israelita, we are organizing a trip of Mexican bishops and archbishops and Latinos high up in the US Catholic hierarchy to Poland and to Israel the second week in November, 2004.
- With the support of Latino organizations such as NCLR and the International Council on Hispanic Relations, we are planning a trip to Israel , sometime the first trimester of 2005, of prominent Hispanic political and opinion leaders.

## **8.- Outreach efforts to Hispanic College Students**

- As college campuses continue to become hotbeds for anti-Israel sentiment, it is important that we establish links with Hispanic student organizations. We are contemplating organizing a Summit of Latino and Jewish College Students in Boston and surrounding areas to be cosponsored by Brandeis University in the Fall of 2005.

- We have established links with the Hispanic Congressional Caucus Institute and with the Hispanic Student Leadership Conference which place college interns with Democratic and Republican Members of Congress and with NGOs. We hope to work with them to incorporate, as part of their internship, some activities geared towards learning about the political agenda of the American Jewish community as well as to explore placement with Jewish organizations

### **Latin American Affairs**

Latin America seems to experience no respite in the critical challenges it has been facing since the late nineties. While it is true that some regions, such as Central America, are enjoying the blessings of a new found democracy and are betting their future on free trade and free market economies to improve the lot of its citizens, and that despite major contractions in their finances, Argentina, Brazil and Uruguay are far better off than a year ago and have good prospects for future growth, the Andean region remains in a permanent crisis mode. Venezuela is facing long-term instability regardless of Chavez's gains or losses, Peru is on the verge of civil war and Colombia continues to be deeply polarized and immersed in drug related violence. Most Latin Americans have lost faith in democratic governance and are yearning for the strong hand of the 'caudillo'. Poverty, inequality, corruption, rampant crime, and impunity coupled by lack of credibility in the political system and in institutions in general provide for a very dangerous mix which does not bode well for the stability and development of the Americas.

Most Jewish communities have crafted strategies to deal with this reality. More than ever they are looking up to organizations, like the AJC, to help them help themselves and to aid their homeland. They are concerned about the growing radicalization of Arab communities, albeit mostly Christian, and of the presence of Muslim representatives and centers. Although there is no clear evidence about active Islamist terrorist groups in the area, money-laundering operations can be traced to the Tri-Border region shared by Argentina, Brazil and Paraguay and beyond. With the two terrorist attacks in Argentina remaining unsolved, Jewish communities feel a permanent sense of vulnerability. Since the Iraq war, anti-American sentiment in the region has increased substantially and this of course has a deleterious effect on Israel's image although bilateral relations between most Latin American countries and the Jewish State remain all together good.

In order to play a constructive role, AJC's strategy in Latin America needs necessarily to incorporate all these elements as we seek more effective ways to strengthen Jewish life in the region, deter terrorism, ensure that democracy and pluralism remain well and alive and help solidify relations with the US and with Israel.

## ***PROGRAM OF ACTIVITIES***

### **1.- Promoting Democracy and Sustained Development**

AJC's will persist in its efforts to help ensure that democratic systems remain in place and will monitor developments in nations facing social, political and economic dislocation. Contacts with government and political officials, the media, representatives of the intelligentsia, and of civil society in general will be expanded and a cooperative agenda developed based on common goals.

### **2.- Expressing Solidarity with Communities in Distress.**

As a central part of its commitment to Jewish welfare in the region, AJC has been attentive to the needs of communities affected by socio-political upheaval or by natural disasters. AJC will increase its level of involvement in addressing those challenges, however symbolically, to underscore our concern for the well-being of all the Americas.

### **3.- Impacting Domestic and Foreign Policies affecting Latin America.-**

*a.- Immigration and homeland security.-* AJC will work hand in hand with organizations, both in the Jewish and in the Latino communities and with Latin American governments, to ensure that immigrants into this country are treated fairly and that the United States' tradition as a haven from persecution is upheld while balancing the needs for homeland security. It will weigh in on legislative initiatives that reflect this balance and which recognize not only the special relationship between the US and its neighbors but which are based as well on a pragmatic understanding of current national demographic trends.

*b.- Trade.-* Because AJC firmly believes that open borders allow for a free flow not only of trade but also of ideas and ensure new opportunities for development, it has remained a staunch supporter of the establishment of a Free Trade Area of the Americas. It will continue to support this important initiative as well as the efforts of friendly countries looking at establishing bilateral and/or regional trade agreements with the US such as the Central American Free Trade Agreement.

*c.- Aid.-* AJC believes that beyond the fact that the Latin American governments and societies are primarily responsible for providing the optimal conditions for the developments of their citizens, the US has much at stake in the region and should share part of the responsibility to create a more prosperous hemisphere. Therefore, we will support efforts such as the Millennium Account Initiative and the Social and Economic Investment Fund for the Americas introduced by Rep. Menendez in the House.

## **b.- Fostering US-Latin America-Israel relations**

AJC will bring to the attention of the US policy community the compelling reasons why Latin America should become a sustained, not intermittent priority. It will develop a permanent program to foster closer relations between Israel and Latin American countries.

To address this, in cooperation with Project Interchange a permanent program of visits of Latin American opinion leaders to Israel to learn first-hand about its society and about the complex situation in the region, are being planned together with local Jewish communities.

- As a joint venture with our Mexican partner Tribuna Israelita, we are organizing a trip of Mexican bishops and archbishops and Latinos high up in the US Catholic hierarchy to Poland and to Israel the second week in November, 2004.
- At the beginning of December of 2004, a group of 10 Brazilian journalists will be traveling to Israel as a joint venture AJC- Jewish Federation of Sao Paulo.

We will be focusing particularly on the 15 countries which make up CARICOM, the Caribbean community of nations, with which we have had random interaction. We have reached out to this body's officials and are planning a meeting to be attended by them, the ambassadors of the Caribbean countries to the US and AJC to explore possibilities for cooperation.

## **c.- Monitoring and Addressing the Terrorist Threat.**

New research and journalistic accounts have documented the expansion of radical groups with links to the Middle East and Europe. With the attention of the Administration, Congress and policy makers focused on the Middle East, the Western Hemisphere has become an ideal terrain for the barely noticed activity of cells closely linked to those groups and countries at the top of the State Department's list of international terrorists. It is time to identify and coordinate resources with the goal of reducing the impact of the activities of those linked with the global network of terror.

Through conferences, symposia and periodic briefings in Congress and other branches of the US government, AJC will continue shedding light on the activities of the terrorist global network in Latin America and the danger posed to Jewish communities in the area and to the Hemisphere in general. AJC will continue pressing for the resolution of the attacks against the Israeli embassy and AMIA building in Argentina and for Iran, Hizballah and Syria to be held accountable for these crimes

## **4.- Participating in Multilateral Regional Forums**

- Through its active participation with multilateral agencies such as the Organization of American States, AJC will continue to place on their agenda issues of prime importance to the Jewish communities in the Hemisphere and to Israel. We will be attending the OAS' 2005 General Assembly to take place in

Fort Lauderdale and the Summit of the Americas which will be held in Argentina in November, 2005

- In addition, cooperative relations will be developed with the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, with the Inter-American Committee against Terrorism and with other bodies within the Organization of American States aimed at involving civil society in their deliberations and decisions affecting the welfare of our Hemisphere. We would like to see cooperation renewed between the Blaustein Center for the Advancement of Human Rights and the Inter-American Human Rights Institute.
- We will be presenting incoming OAS Secretary General and former President of Costa Rica, Miguel Angel Rodriguez, with an award for his commitment to strengthening Inter-American relations at a reception on October 28<sup>th</sup>, 2004 in Washington, DC, to be attended by Jewish organizations, the Latin American diplomatic corps, OAS ambassadors and officials, Members of Congress and staffers working on Latin American as well as think tank representatives.
- During our visit with Argentina's President Kirchner in July, he proposed working together to organize a conference on antisemitism in the context of MERCOSUR. We are following up on this project which hopefully will come to fruition sometime in 2005 and which would involve all the countries considered leaders in Latin America. This conference can be particularly timely given the fact that Brazil is organizing a major meeting of the Arab League in the country during the first trimester of next year.

#### **5.- Shifting the Latin American UN Vote**

We will continue with our efforts each fall when world leaders come to New York for the opening of the United Nations General Assembly, to meet with Latin American presidents and foreign ministers in order to advocate on behalf of Jewish communities, democratic principles and the well-being of Israel.

In addition, AJC will continue to press administration officials, Congress and Latin American diplomatic representatives to ensure that Latin American nations change their anti-Israel voting pattern and align politically with the US

#### **6.- Organizing Fact Finding, Advocacy and Solidarity Missions**

AJC delegations will continue traveling regularly to Latin American countries to meet with leading political, religious, business, cultural and Jewish leaders. Countries that need to be in our radar screen permanently are Mexico, Brazil, Chile, and Argentina who are considered regional leaders.

- A mission to Brazil is being planned for the beginning of December, 2005. Brazil is considered a leader in Latin America and sees itself as a countervailing force to the US. Incumbent President Lula and his Administration sympathize with positions harking back to the 1970's non-aligned movement. Brazil has an Arab

community of 7 million and is seeking closer ties to the Arab world. The Jewish community, 100,000 strong, is seeking to engage the government and open permanent channels of communication. AJC will be hosted by CONIB, the political representation of Brazilian Jewry, the Sao Paulo Jewish Federation and the Rio Jewish Federation and will include meetings with President Lula and other high officials of his administration, with representatives of local governments and with leaders of the Jewish communities.

- The Union of Jewish Congregations of Latin America and the Caribbean, representing around 10 small communities in the region, has extended an invitation to Bruce Ramer, to be their keynote speaker at their next convention in El Salvador the last week in January. Our presence in this convention and in El Salvador is important because there will be representatives of communities which are important for our work in Latin America and for Israel's cause. Even though these communities are small, their members wield important influence in national affairs and are individuals of means. In addition, El Salvador has been a staunch ally of Israel and one of only two countries to keep its embassy in Jerusalem.
- Future missions should be planned to Chile and to Colombia. Chile will soon be facing presidential elections. Its Jewish community is avidly seeking to work closely with the AJC in order to be more effective in facing the challenges stemming from a numerous, radicalized and active Palestinian community. Colombia is the number three recipient of US military aid after Israel and Egypt and could become a strong ally of the Jewish State if the case is effectively made that there is much that both countries share in their fight against terrorism.

#### **7.-Undertaking Studies and Publications.**

AJC is the leading organization collecting and analyzing quantitative data on subjects such as attitudes towards Jews and other minorities, and on Holocaust information taught in schools. The AJC will develop this pioneering series of research studies and will expand its analyses other Latin American countries. AJC will also continue to publish a comprehensive assessment of the state of the official investigation of the destruction of the AMIA community building, as well as of the inquiry into the 1992 bombing of the Israeli embassy in Buenos Aires.

#### **8.- Becoming a resource for Latin American Jewish communities**

- AJC holds an annual conference of current international Jewish leaders and promising young Jewish professionals from around the world after its Annual Meeting. The International Leadership Conference brings key Jewish leaders to Washington, D.C. from distant locations around the globe for the opportunity to exchange information on leadership development, political advocacy and communication strategies. Around 25 Latin American representatives attended this year's Conference, including the presidents of small communities such as Bolivia and Ecuador.

- In February and in the context of AJC's Policy Conference taking place in Washington, DC after the presidential elections, we are putting together a political advocacy workshop for Latin American Jewish communities. We are seeking to act as facilitator for the exchange of experiences and expertise developed to address common and specific challenges. At the same time, we will share some effective tools that have been perfected by US Jewry as part of its advocacy and lobbying efforts.
- Permanent efforts will be undertaken to help identify the areas of interest in which AJC can act as a valuable resource for Latin American Jewish leaders. We hope to continue to be responsive to each community's priorities and immediate needs.

**September 2004-July 2005**

**TIMELINE**

**September 7<sup>th</sup>**

Dinner hosted by H.E. Ambassador Ayalon together with the National Latino-Jewish Leadership Council in honor of Raul Yzaguirre

**September 27-29**

Field trip to Miami chapter

**October 28<sup>th</sup> -**

Reception in honor of H.E. Miguel Angel Rodriguez/ Secretary General of the OAS

**November 8-19**

Mission of Mexican and Latino bishops to Poland and Israel

**November 27-December 4**

PI trip of Brazilian journalists to Israel

**December 1**

Meeting of the Board of Directors of the National Latino-Jewish Leadership Council

**December 12-17**

Mission to Brazil

**Last week January, 2005**

Mission to El Salvador and participation in the conference of the Union of Jewish Congregations of Latin America and the Caribbean

**January-February**

Field trip to Houston/San Antonio/Dallas

**February-March 2005**

First political advocacy workshop for Latin American Jewish communities

**March, 2005**

Field trip to Arizona, Los Angeles, San Francisco, San Diego

**June, 2005**

OAS General Assembly- Fort Lauderdale

## **Dates to be determined**

- Initiative with the National Hispanic Media Coalition
- Workshops for Diaspora populations in conjunction with El Salvador's and Mexico's embassies
- Meeting with CARICOM officials and with ambassadors of Caribbean countries
- Meeting with specialists on terrorist activity in Latin America and the Caribbean
- Mercosur conference on Antisemitism
- Follow up on AMIA case- Meeting with the OAS Inter-American Human Rights Commission
- Implementation of AJC's position on trade and aid and immigration reform
- PI Trip of top Latino opinion leaders
- Missions to Colombia, Mexico, Chile