



DELEGATION RETURNS, FINDS VENEZUELANs READY TO VOTE, ELECTION PROCESS & MACHINES EASY TO USE



Pictured (back row) NAACP Director of International Affairs Crispian Kirk, NAACP's Deputy Counsel Angela Ciccolo, National Policy Director John Jackson, NAACP International Committee members Peter Cohn, NAACP Board Member Roy Levy Williams, (front row) National Research Director Shelly Anderson, National Civic Engagement Coordinator Chereese Williams, National Civic Engagement Policy Manager Carolina Espinal.

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A National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) delegation has returned with positive impressions after observing Venezuela's recent presidential elections.

The 8-member NAACP delegation joined more than 400 representatives of public interest entities from around the world to act as independent international observers in Venezuela's presidential elections held Dec. 3. Generally, the NAACP found the nation's electoral process open, transparent, democratic and inclusive. A full report on the delegation's observations and recommendations will be released at a later date.

"We were impressed with the fact that many of the people of Venezuela were so committed to the electoral process that they arrived at their voting centers as

early as 3 a.m.," said NAACP Director of International Affairs Crispian Kirk, who led the delegation.

The trip was the result of the NAACP engaging in dialogue with Venezuelans for nearly a year, reviewing the nation's Constitution as well as meeting with government officials, opposition groups and media.

"NAACP observers met with citizens and voters prior to the election and in its aftermath and found that all people, regardless of background or political party affiliation, were seriously and very thoughtfully engaged in the electoral process. Civil society was very engaged in the electoral process as represented by the over 70 percent turnout of the electorate," Kirk added.

NAACP observers had full access to the opening and closing of polls. Observers had unfettered opportunities to interview poll workers, witnesses (from political parties), security officials and voters.

As a part of two days of training by Venezuela's National Electoral Council (CNE) leading up to the elections, all international observers were afforded training on the use of the country's voting machines. NAACP observers considered the voting machines exceptional because they made the electronic voting process as easy as simply selecting a candidate's picture and party logo. After a vote was cast, a paper receipt was printed so the voter could verify their selection and that a ballot was actually cast. That paper receipt was placed in a box. Later 54 percent of the paper receipts were audited for accuracy along with the tallies from the machines. The Venezuelan government has made great strides to help insure the legitimacy of its voting machines. NAACP observers witnessed the commitment of the people working to perfect the computer technology that Venezuela has utilized in five nationwide elections.

In order to further understand the political aspirations of the people, NAACP observers participated in various meetings, including ones hosted by the Afro-Venezuelan Network in Caracas and areas where there were significant Afro-Venezuelan populations, like Barlovento.

The mission was part of the NAACP's Human Rights Program and its effort to connect African Americans with people of African descent around the world for the mutual attainment and protection of human rights.

The NAACP has been reviewing the status of Afro-Latinos and has found that like in the United States, people of African descent in Latin America are disproportionately marginalized and disenfranchised the most. They face great disparities in health care, education, shelter and face extreme poverty.

In Brazil, Bolivia, and Guatemala, the United Nations High Commission for Refugees has stated that Afro-Latinos and indigenous communities are facing extinction, poverty and discrimination. The largest number of internally

displaced persons (outside of Sudan) is in Columbia, where most of the nation's 3.5 million internally displaced persons are Afro-Columbian.

In Venezuela, Afro-Venezuelan communities are just starting to be recognized. President Hugo Chavez has pledged to encourage the inclusion of the Afro-Venezuelans in every aspect of Venezuelan society.

The delegation included the NAACP's Deputy Counsel Angela Ciccolo, National Policy Director John Jackson, National Civic Engagement Policy Manager Carolina Espinal, National Civic Engagement Coordinator Cheresse Williams, National Research Director Shelly Anderson, NAACP International Committee members Peter Cohn and Roy Levy Williams and Kirk.

Founded in 1909, the NAACP is the nation's oldest and largest civil rights organization. Its members throughout the United States and the world are the premier advocates for civil rights in their communities, conducting voter mobilization and monitoring equal opportunity in the public and private sectors.