



Dear Sir/Madam,

The Government of Bolivia, the Department of Sustainable Development (DSD) of the Organization of American States (OAS) in cooperation with the Summit of the Americas Department, and Development Gateway Foundation would like to invite you to participate in the **Virtual Consultation Forum with Civil Society and Indigenous Peoples**. The forum is being organized as part of the preparation process of the **First Inter-American Meeting of Ministers and High-Level Authorities on Sustainable Development** that will address economic development sustainability and strengthening of environmental management through public participation, governance, gender equality, and protection of the rights for indigenous peoples.

The First Inter-American Meeting of Ministers and High-Level Authorities on Sustainable Development will be held in December 4-5, 2006 in Bolivia, and will identify and advance concrete partnerships at the regional and hemispheric level to integrate environmental considerations into development, poverty alleviation, social and economic policies. The Bolivia meeting will take into account progress in implementing sustainable development, including, *inter alia*, the 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, the 1996 Santa Cruz Summit on Sustainable Development, and the 2002 Johannesburg UN Conference on Sustainable Development.

In order to achieve MDG's policy objective to build "a comprehensive approach and a coordinated strategy, tackling many problems simultaneously across a broad front" the meeting shall identify practical, replicable project and policy lessons integrating the three pillars of sustainable development that is, economic development, social issues and environmental protection.

The virtual consultation is scheduled to begin May 17th and will end November 24th, 2006. This virtual forum has been created to facilitate the discussion on three important themes related to sustainable development in the region and that will be analyzed during the Meeting: (1) sustainable development of water resources, supporting integrated water resources management; (2) reducing the risk of natural disasters; and (3) sustainable agriculture, sustainable forestry and sustainable tourism.

The objectives of the forum are:

- 1) Mobilize civil society and indigenous peoples support for the preparation of the Santa Cruz Declaration.
- 2) Build consensus positions and recommendations among representatives of civil society and indigenous peoples and obtain recommendation and follow-up activities on the three themes to be analyzed during the meeting.
- 3) Benefit from the best practices efforts, including advocacy, of civil society and indigenous peoples work on the three themes to be analyzed during the meeting.

Comments and recommendations posted in the Virtual Consultation Forum will be compiled in a document that will be presented to the Working Group on Sustainable Development (composed by delegates from the Member States to the OAS), during their series of meetings as part of the preparatory process for the Ministerial meeting, in order to consider this document for the preparation of the draft **Declaration of Santa Cruz**. The resulting draft Declaration of Santa Cruz will be presented during the one-day Preparatory Meeting of Governments Representatives (each Member States assigns a representative of their Government to attend this meeting) for their consideration. Furthermore, a final document containing a compilation of comments and recommendations posted in the Virtual Forum will also be presented at this meeting. The Declaration of Santa Cruz will be presented during the **First Inter-American Meeting of Ministers and High-Level**



Authorities on Sustainable Development, to be held in Santa Cruz de la Sierra, Bolivia, December 4-5, 2006, to be considered for the discussion of the Ministers and its approval.

Please visit

<http://topics.developmentgateway.org/environment/discussion/default/showDiscussion.do?id=1441> or simply visit the DSD website <http://www.oas.org/dsd/> and follow the link to access to the virtual forum. Once you are on the page of the virtual forum you will find all the instructions necessary to register, participate, and navigate throughout the virtual forum. A discussion document will be posted that will provide a common starting point for all participants. Several background documents will also be posted for a more in-depth look at the Meeting. Participants are welcome to provide comments or questions in either English or Spanish. Moderators will reply in the language comments or questions were posted. Participants may also reply to other participants' questions or comments in either English or Spanish.

We believe that this forum will complement links among governments, international organizations and civil society, and will also serve as part of the follow-up activities of the Fourth Summit of the Americas that took place in November 2005. We thank you in advance and look forward to your participation in the forum.

Sincerely,

Scott Vaughan
Director
Department of Sustainable Development