



THE UNIVERSITY OF WINNIPEG

M E D I A R E L E A S E

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For Immediate Release

UWinnipeg ‘Community’ to Help Ensure Fair & Democratic Elections in Peru

WINNIPEG—As observers in the upcoming Peruvian election, University of Winnipeg students, alumni, and faculty have been given an outstanding opportunity to witness “democracy in action.”

University President Lloyd Axworthy is leading an Organization of American States (OAS) Electoral Observation Mission monitoring the April 9, 2006 general elections in Peru. He was appointed in January by OAS Secretary General José Miguel Insulza to head the mission. The University of Winnipeg, through its Global College, is the first post-secondary institution ever to have students involved in an OAS mission of this kind. UWinnipeg is leading the way to further youth involvement in other OAS-monitored elections in the hemisphere.

Current UWinnipeg students Ewald Friesen and Derrick Martens, UWinnipeg alumni Emina Cingel and Jennifer Zorn-Ford, St. Boniface College student Remi Gosselin, and UWinnipeg Geography Professor Geoff Scott are participating in the Peru mission from April 3 - 12. (*See students’ background information at end of media release.*)

“It’s a dynamic time in Peru’s history,” said Dr. Axworthy, noting there are three front-runners in the fiercely-contested presidential race, each representing a different segment of Peru’s polarized society. “As Canadians, we have an important role to play as impartial observers and defenders of democracy.”

For 28-year-old Cingel, a 2005 graduate in International Development and Conflict Resolution studies and a Yugoslavian refugee who fled her war-torn country in 1993, representing Canada on this mission is especially meaningful.

“In the eyes of the world, Canada’s reputation is huge and our Canadian values are upheld as examples of democracy,” said Cingel, who will continue her studies this Fall at Humber College’s International Project Management program. “This is a great opportunity after studying international development to get experience in the field. It will prepare me for Latin American politics and give me first-hand experience of what to expect if I become a United Nations worker.”

Ewald Friesen, 27, a fourth-year Honours Politics student, believes it is incumbent upon mature democracies like Canada to meet its obligations and serve to enhance the democratic process on the world stage. “Going to Peru on this mission is an amazing opportunity and a great complement to my otherwise theoretical degree,” Friesen said, adding he has studied Latin American politics through the duration of his degree and plans to attend graduate studies in Politics. “The work of the OAS is vital for the maintenance of legitimate governments and the hope of people in all states in the Americas. I am thrilled to be involved with this dedicated vehicle for change.”

The OAS, the premiere democratic institution in the Americas, will send approximately 40 election observers to the country's eight regions on Peru's Election Day. Members of the mission will observe the voting process to ensure against intimidation, fraud, and counting irregularities. They will also handle complaints of voting discrepancies and report them to OAS headquarters.

Since 2000, Dr. Axworthy has led a national dialogue to explore ways to strengthen democracy in Peru culminating in a 28 point Action Plan to Democracy. It also resulted in an agreement with Peruvian government and electoral authorities to establish the parameters of the OAS electoral observation mission.

"It will be exciting to see the new reforms put into action and if democracy governs the electoral process, it will be a big step forward for the Americas," Dr. Axworthy said.

A presidential candidate must win more than 50 per cent of the vote in Peru's proportional representation electoral system. With 22 candidates vying for President, a May 7, 2006 runoff is expected between the two top candidates. UWinnipeg election observers will likely travel to Peru again to fulfill their mission obligations.

"I am personally delighted to be involved and our students and alumni will be great ambassadors for The University of Winnipeg," said Geography Professor Geoff Scott, who has previously visited Peru four times for research. "I love the country and the people and appreciate the significance of this election in Peru's rich history and look forward to assisting in ensuring the democratic process rules the day in fair and free elections."

This University of Winnipeg initiative is a further demonstration of the University's commitment to international and global issues. The University's Global College, established just over a year ago, was created to build such connections with the global community through prominent international guest speakers, dialogue, research, and action. Global College serves as a dynamic catalyst for new ideas, critical thinking, and open discourse on issues of global significance affecting our local and global communities. As well, the Global College, together with partner institutions and organizations, is committed to doing its part as global citizens to help define Canada's international responsibilities, raise the profile of international concerns both at home and abroad, and chart a course of action for the challenges of this new century. The student involvement on the OAS Electoral Observation Mission is just one way The University of Winnipeg is facilitating opportunities for its students and alumni to make a difference as global citizens.

Located in the heart of downtown, The University of Winnipeg is a compact, diverse, multicultural academic community committed to access and excellence. Home to more than 9,200 full- and part-time students, UWinnipeg has been ranked by our graduates in the Top Ten of all Canadian universities when asked about their "Entire Educational Experience" (Maclean's Graduate Survey, November 2004). The Globe & Mail 2005 Report Card gives The University of Winnipeg an overall 'A' grade in the areas of teaching quality, class sizes, faculty-student interaction, and the availability of faculty outside classroom hours. Find out why. Visit www.uwinnipeg.ca

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Student Backgrounds

- **Emina Cingel** is a 2005 UWinnipeg graduate with double major in Conflict Resolution Studies and International Development Studies with an interest in Latin American Development. Throughout her university education, she has taken courses in Latin American Development, Human Security Issues, Global Political Economy, and this past semester Human Rights 101. She is fluent in Spanish and Portuguese. As a part of her practicum she spent four months in Brazil volunteering with an organization advocating for the rights of Landless Rural Workers Movement (MST). Emina also participated in the 2006 Federal Elections Canada as a polling clerk, overseeing conduct of the polling station and assisting in counting ballots, and filling out all documents and forms. She will continue her studies this Fall in the International Project Management program at Humber College in Toronto
- **Ewald Friesen** grew up in Steinbach, Manitoba and has lived in Winnipeg for the past six years. He has traveled extensively in Europe and the Middle East and briefly in Russia. Ewald is completing his course work for his fourth and final year of an Honours degree in Politics. He is presently enrolled in Dr. Axworthy's Seminar in Foreign Affairs. He has always had a deep interest in Central and South American Politics and is looking forward to putting his education to use. He intends to pursue graduate studies in Politics. He feels OAS work is critical and necessary to ensure that governments are accountable to their electorate and to one another, and that elections are conducted in as free and fair a manner as possible.
- **Derrick Martens** is enrolled in Intermediate Spanish at the UWinnipeg. He has a Bachelor of Theology from Canadian Mennonite Bible College (now CMU), a BA from U of M in Political Studies, and a Post-Degree Diploma in Peace and Conflict Studies from the University of Waterloo. Derrick spent five months in Nicaragua living and working with campesinos, and completed a one year CIDA internship with the Independent Jamaica Council for Human Rights in Kingston. While in Jamaica, he also sat on the planning committee of the Citizens' Action for Free and Fair Elections, a citizen election monitoring body. This Fall, he will begin study at the University of Bradford in England in the Peace Studies MA program (International Politics and Security Studies stream). He feels the experience in Peru will help in his future studies.
- **Jennifer Zorn-Ford** graduated from UWinnipeg in 2005 with a B.Sc. in Biology. She is working as a Laboratory Monitor for the University's Spanish Department, and is moderately fluent in Spanish. She has previously studied in Mexico and has plans to return there for an extended period. She believes it is important in Peru's move towards democracy to give people a voice and ensure the electoral process is carried out fairly.
- **Remi Gosselin** is a fluent Spanish and French speaker, has worked in Mexico, and has traveled widely through Latin America. He has worked with CBC French for some years now as a journalist, technician, researcher, and producer and is currently completing a degree in Translation at college St. Boniface.