

Written contributions / Report prepared by the organization “Barrios Unidos” for the summary prepared by the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights Universal Periodic Review of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela.

The California Coalition of Barrios Unidos began as a community based peace movement in the violent streets of urban California in 1977. Accepted as a non-profit organization in 1993, the national office of Santa Cruz Barrios Unidos established as a mission to prevent and curtail violence amongst youth within Santa Cruz County by providing them with life enhancing alternatives. Over the past thirty-four years Barrios Unidos has developed a model that seeks to reclaim and restore the lives of struggling youth while promoting unity amongst families and neighbors through community building efforts.

The ultimate goal of the Institute is to transform the most impoverished and disenfranchised sectors of society—our ghettos and barrios which are currently plagued by poverty, violence and internal conflicts—into peaceful and prosperous communities in which human, natural, technological, and financial resources are fully developed and utilized for the individual and social well-being of all members of society. As an evolving grass-roots organization that grew out of the Mexican-American civil rights and anti-war movements of the 1960s and 1970s, Barrios Unidos harnessed the power of culture and spirituality to rescue at-risk young people, provide avenues to quell gang warfare, and offer a promising model for building healthy and vibrant multicultural communities. Today, Barrios Unidos chapters exist in several cities around the country, including San Francisco; Venice-Los Angeles; Salinas; San Diego; Washington, DC; Yakima; San Antonio; Phoenix; and Chicago. The History of Barrios Unidos gives voice to contemporary inter-generational leaders of color and will lead to the continuation of necessary

public dialogue regarding racism, poverty, and violence. Santa Cruz Barrios Unidos programs are organized in three separate areas to service the local community: the Cesar E. Chavez School for Social Change, Community Outreach, and Community Economic Development.

The Coalition of Barrios Unidos uses these occasions with the Universal Periodic Review of Member States of the United Nations to present its written contribution to the Human Rights Commission of the United Nations on Venezuela. In particular, we hope that our findings will aide in the betterment of community building efforts in Venezuela through the social missions such Misión Cultura, Educational Missions, Barrio Adentro medical Missions, Negra Hipólita and others.

Our relationship with Venezuela started with our first trip to that country in 2005 and since then we have gone there other three times. Above of that, we have been working throughout the years with the Venezuelan official institutions in the United States.

In 2003, a group of social programs known as misiones or “social missions”, were established and developed in Venezuela. As we see it, these missions or programs are being conceived as a way to materialize constitutional and humanitarian rights, rather than helping with charity, working to build and unify communities rather than divide them. When we first went to Venezuela, they were in the process of developing these programs, and they wanted to know from us if they were on the right track.

Today we can say that Venezuela has surpassed our expectations. You can see that now Venezuela has achieved the Millennium goals, by being illiteracy free territory as well as it has

enormous results in education, health, including every citizen in public discussion and decision making, as well as the creation of official institutions oriented to build communities with social and mutual responsibility, especially in underserved communities or poor neighborhoods.

Regarding education, Venezuela is recognized by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), as one of the leading countries in literacy. Venezuelan Official statistics show that in less than ten years 95.2% of the population which did not have any instructions have been literate. When it comes to the education efforts, at the end of school year 2008-2009 the dropout rate in primary and secondary levels of basic education subsystem showed a considerable decrease of 30% compared to data of ten years earlier filings in the period 1998-1999.

Other than educational missions, they also work with culture: Mision cultura promote the cultural and traditional values of Venezuela around the Venezuelan territory and has educate young people called “cultores”. On that prospective, Mision Cultura works with the popular culture specific by regions and historical publications such as “Memorias de Venezuela”; artistic publications such as “A Plena Voz” and “Todos Adentro”. At the same time, through this mission, there are liaison offices with the underserved and rural communities, with immigrant communities, with Indigenous Communities, with African Descent and others. We believe that this mission is really important because it helps population find their common values and interests through the Venezuelan and regional culture, history and tradition.

Regarding Healthcare, which is also one of our subjects in Barrios Unidos, great results have been achieved in Venezuela: beginning in 2003 and up to 2010, Mision Barrio Adentro has

reached over 80% of the Venezuelan population and has inaugurated over one thousand new health centers. Mision Barrio Adentro has also developed educational programs regarding community health issues, especially in the poor neighborhoods, including topics such as preventive medicine, tropical medicine and other common diseases. What we think is amazing is the fact that these community medicine programs have increased the overall living conditions of all those who come in contact with Mision Barrio Adentro, a health initiative accessible to all social classes disregarding economic status.

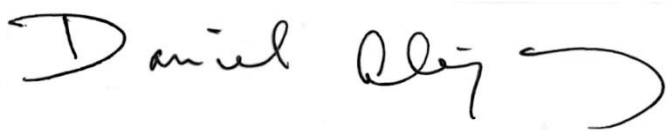
Another interesting mission is Mision Negra Hipolita. Even though at the beginning the goal of this mission was to rescue the homeless and to give them a place to live and to be feed and so, throughout the years, this mission has not only rescued people from the street, but also created and developed shelter in good conditions for those individuals to live. It promotes and assists in social and cultural activities in the communities which mean that this mission has taken people off the street and integrates community activities with other Government institutions and other Misiones.

As far as we have seen the progress of Venezuela in those matters, these Missions and the creation and development of others programs are aiming to find and further develop the well-being of the society and especially acceptable conditions of life for the poor people. Good conditions and vast development opportunities will prevent the young people to join gangs or other illicit activities, by transforming their lives and work within the community and the family as whole.

In this sense, experiences like the Venezuelan community councils, social movements in the frame of the missions, cultural expressions, education goals, and others are a good example of what is needed in some of our communities, all in the boundaries of a respectful mind set and particularities of each community.

We recommend Venezuela to further develop quality control measures, a check and balance program to the Misiones and other social welfare programs. These control measures include but are not limited to more community involvement and participation.

Head of Misiones need to keep working closely with the communities and promote a two way street feedback, for an eventual pass over of responsibility to the community members themselves with some financial and logistical support from government in the future.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Daniel Alejandro". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, sweeping flourish at the end.

Daniel "Nane" Alejandro

Executive Director Santa Cruz Barrios Unidos