

**Written contributions / Report prepared by “*Cimarrones*” for the summary
prepared by the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, Universal
Periodic Review of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela**

1. *Cimarrones* is a Howard University student organization that was originally formed in 1999 as *ALMA (Afro-Latinos Making Alliances)* by a group of Afro-descendent students with roots in Spanish-speaking countries. In 2004 it was changed to *Cimarrones* and our members now include current students as well as alumni.

2. Our primary objective is to educate the world about the presence of people of African descent in Central America, South America, the Caribbean and beyond. It also aims to build concrete relationships with African descended communities. We have organized forums, lectures, movie screenings, trips abroad and hosted guest visits by African descendent leaders on Howard’s campus and the wider Washington DC area. In the past two years, *Cimarrones* has been working with the Afro-Venezuelan Network (ROA) to build sustainable programs with Afro-Venezuelan communities. Since 2009, we have traveled to Venezuela twice and have formed relationships with Afro-Venezuelan educational and cultural institutions.

3. This report will speak specifically about *Cimarrones*’ research trips to Venezuela in 2009-2010; each trip lasted approximately three weeks.

The primary focus of *Cimarrones*’ in Venezuela has been to build relationships with and

to learn and share the experiences of Afro-Venezuelan communities. While in Venezuela, we traveled to a number of Afro-Venezuelan communities, in states and regions such as—Nirgua, Puerto Cabello, Coro-Falcon, Yaracay, Veroes, Barlovento (Miranda), Valencia, Aragua and Caracas. During this trip, we visited, presented and partook in various Afro-Venezuelan cultural-educational events (such as Cruz de Mayo)¹ at several Afro-Venezuelan schools, communities, television stations, historic maroon communities (Cumbes) and institutions, such as Macuquita, a former maroon community in Coro-Falcon. We were hosted by the Afro-Venezuelan Network (ROA).

4. Since the presidency of Hugo Chavez, ROA has emerged as a nation wide network represented by various Afro-Venezuelan communities, organizations, activists and educators. The Chavez administration has provided resources for a number of Afro-Venezuelan initiatives, primarily in the areas of education, culture and media. For example, in Veroes (Yaracuy), a Cumbe (branch) of ROA established a radio station and community center sponsored by the Government (the Government is supporting the creation of a number of radio stations in Afro-Venezuelan communities). They were also able to have a highway renamed to reflect the name of an enslaved Afro-Venezuelan maroon leader, Androsete, who led an uprising in 1732. In Barlovento, the historically Afro-Venezuelan region of Venezuela, ROA has been able to establish a TV station called Afro TV, which is housed within the Center for African and Caribbean Research (CEIBA). Also in Barlovento, the University of Barlovento or Instituto de Universitario

¹ *Cruz de Mayo* is a major Afro-Venezuelan festival based on African spiritual traditions syncretized with Catholicism.

Barlovento (IUB) is a newly created university that serves a majority Afro-Venezuelan student population. Originally an institute, resources have been provided by the Government to elevate the IUB to university status.

5. ROA has worked to create a number of initiatives to recognize the historic contributions of Afro-Venezuelans in the struggles against colonialism, slavery and other forms of oppression. The Chavez administration has supported a number of these projects, such as Afro-Venezuelan Day (May 10th) and the recognition of ancestral lands of maroon communities in Veroes, Venezuela.

6. Afro-Venezuelans have historically struggled against slavery, racism and oppression in a society that has tended to deny even their rights to conceptually and figuratively exist. In doing so, ironically, they have contributed to the national history of Venezuela by being pioneers in a struggle for freedom and democracy. Nevertheless, the legacy of the past remains as the present—as do the *barrios* and their populations of large numbers of Afro-Venezuelans—and Afro-Venezuelans still face a number of economic and political challenges. But there are also increased opportunities in the areas of access to basic necessities, media and involvement in the political process. For the first time since the abolition of slavery Afro-Venezuelans will be counted as an ethnic group in the Venezuelan census. This once again suggests that the Chavez administration has made efforts to assist Afro-Venezuelans in obtaining more visibility, state-funded educational opportunities and access to basic rights.

7. *Cimarrones* would suggest that the administration increase its funding of social programs geared towards addressing the needs of the critical masses of Afro-Venezuelans, continue its support of Afro-Venezuelan initiatives and *create a specific Ministry geared towards addressing the needs of Afro-Venezuelans*, who have made outstanding contributions to the tradition of freedom and human rights in Venezuela. There is much work left to be done, but in our opinion Afro-Venezuelan communities themselves have produced outstanding leaders (women and youth included) who can advocate best for their communities. What is required is more resources from the state.