

# THE DIALOGUE

Leadership for the Americas

## CHRIS COTE

### Featured Alumnus

*Current location: Somerville, MA*

*Dialogue Role: Program assistant for economics, energy, and Brazil and the Southern Cone*



#### **What is your occupation or most recent work experience?**

I work at MSCI, a financial services company with the goal of helping clients “build better portfolios for a better world.” We provide indexes, ESG ratings of companies, and research, among other things. In my role in ESG Research – ESG stands for Environment, Social, and Governance and is a framework for assessing financial risks outside of the more traditional factors – I help explain how energy companies are managing risks associated with climate change. It’s an interesting and fast growing field. I’m always learning. For the prior four years, I worked as an energy markets analyst, mostly focused on Latin America.

#### **What has surprised you most about your career?**

I’m surprised that I can draw a somewhat straight line from my time at the Dialogue to today. I became extraordinarily interested by the dramatic and exciting world of energy, thanks to Peter, Genaro, and Joan, and I also realized that I wanted a much deeper understanding of Brazil. At the same time, I began to understand that politics and policy are distinct but related things (more on this below). Pursuit of these interests and ideas led me to Brazil, graduate school, and to my previous and current roles. The emphasis has shifted among security, politics, markets, or finance, but I continue to focus on the same big areas.

#### **What advice would you give to a young professional?**

Learn to write, learn to work with data. Of the two, spend more time on writing. Good writing follows clear thinking, so it’s not an easy task. Peter quickly showed me how awful my writing was. I had so many ideas but struggled to organize them. He helped as much as he could, having me read Orwell’s “Politics and the English Language” and covering my page with ink or rewriting my papers in all capital letters. I was embarrassed by my shortcomings but motivated to improve, and I’ve taken writing seriously since. Data literacy is useful because numbers are everywhere and the tools become more accessible each year. Don’t forget: the tools are the easy part. As with writing, clear thinking is the hard part when using numbers to make a point, build a model, or, more generally, look for truth.

#### **What was your most impactful Dialogue moment/experience?**

I was only at the Dialogue a short time but could write five pages here. But, in brief: being exposed to so many people. A third point of advice for the prior question would be “learn to listen.” Whether I was running to fill up more coffee or presenting at the Energy Working Group, I was always considering the ideas invited speakers were sharing. I learned so much about the distinction and overlap between politics and policy. I remember right when I started, I joined Peter and Michael at a small talk with a former president. Later, Michael asked what I thought, and I just said “it was cool.” Michael teased me, rightly. In part it did feel cool – there was an awe in the room as he (the former president) walked through and shook every person’s hand – but also the talk had felt so unspecific to me and I didn’t want to reveal my disappointment. Of course, I had missed the point. This person had done the hard political work of helping a country transition to and maintain democracy. He understood more about people and politics than I can hope to. On the policy side, other guests at the Dialogue had brilliant ideas and frameworks that have improved the world in their own way. I still think about some of Santiago Levy’s talks on informality in Mexico, ten years on.

# THE DIALOGUE

Leadership for the Americas

## POLYANA FERREIRA DE OLIVEIRA

### Featured Alumna

*Current location: São Paulo, Brazil*

*Dialogue Role: Corporate Relations Intern, 2007*



#### **What is your occupation or most recent work experience?**

I own a travel company, Viare Travel. We have a strong focus on responsible travel, working with local communities and providers to welcome travelers from around the world and help support destinations throughout Brazil. With the onset of the pandemic, we paused our operations, and with the help of our local providers, I wrote a book! It is called *Travel to Brazil: The Cookbook*, and it takes the reader on a trip through the country, with stories of and recipes by local travel providers. The idea is to get readers to want to travel to Brazil at some point, by keeping our local providers top of mind, but also to give people an option to “visit Brazil,” from their own homes. It has been incredibly humbling to work on and has brought such great pride and a sort of restoration of self-esteem to myself and my partners on the ground.

#### **What has surprised you most about your career?**

I never really thought I’d be an entrepreneur so early on. Initially I’d planned on developing a solid career in corporate international relations, or CSR. After some time in marketing, I decided to build my own business at 25, and Viare is my third and most successful business to date. One thing that has been consistent, and which actually started at the Dialogue, is that everything I’ve done has involved a high level of intercultural communication and understanding – going beyond simple language skills.

#### **What advice would you give to a young professional?**

Learn to understand your own definition of professional success, and it’s okay if it’s not the same as your peers’. For me, I learned early on I needed flexibility to create, develop and manage my own products and time. I love the impact my work has on others’ lives and other small businesses. Although it would most certainly mean more stability if I had followed through with a career in marketing, I couldn’t see myself feeling as professionally fulfilled.

#### **What was your most impactful Dialogue moment/experience?**

Working at the Dialogue was the catalyst I needed to move to Brazil. At the time, I’d only shared this with a few of my colleagues there, but I was undocumented in the US, and a recent graduate. I didn’t have many career prospects. The opportunity to speak with high-level managers throughout Latin America, including in Brazil, and getting affirmation from them that I would be an asset in the country, was incredibly impactful in starting my career in meu Brasil. Also, working at the Dialogue was just so fun in that it was a very Latin-leaning culture. People actually stopped to take breaks for lunch, we’d go out salsa dancing as a team, and there was very easy access to the directors, which I really appreciated, and made for a most memorable summer in DC!

## WILLIAM PEREZ

### Featured Alumnus

*Current location: Arlington, VA*

*Dialogue Role: China – Latin America Program, Intern, 2013*



#### **What is your occupation or most recent work experience?**

I led Trimble's business development and go-to-market in Latin America and the Caribbean for projects that required the provision of technology solutions that leveraged geospatial technologies and location-based data to improve productivity, reduce costs, increase safety, and decrease environmental impact. My focus was on projects and initiatives funded by the World Bank, United Nations, Inter-American Development Bank, Organization of American States, and other donor agencies. A few examples of the application of these technologies are using geographic information systems and GNSS/GPS technologies to create maps, update cadastral systems, and issue land titles. This is relevant in the context of prevention of land-related conflict, facilitating social mobility, urban planning, and taxation. Another use case was monitoring seismic activity by building networks and alarm systems of critical infrastructure to prevent disasters such as the collapse of dams or the government's critical infrastructure. Location-based data was used for a wide set of projects from tallying illicit drug eradication efforts to smart agriculture techniques that control water usage, autonomously guide tractors, and vehicles.

I recently joined Amazon Web Services in Arlington, VA. I will work within the World Wide Public Sector's Federal Financials Team as Global Account Manager for International Financial Institutions. I will focus on increasing the adoption of cloud solutions and facilitating success in their cloud journey.

#### **What has surprised you most about your career?**

The dependencies and reinforcing dynamic of business, government, and international development. This may sound a bit academic, but I had the chance to have a front-line view both academically and professionally of these interactions. I have worked in and with actors in all these sectors and I have witnessed how these interdependencies operate. Particularly, when it comes to technology adoption and how it directly benefits people's lives. You need the confluence of innovation and risk-taking by the private sector, knowledge exchange, and funding from development partners, and the institutional leadership from governments to accept innovation and modernize policies to realize the potential of a project. When the three come together, you can achieve impact at speed and scale: from improving water access, increasing agricultural yields, increasing infrastructure ROI, driving economic productivity among many others. It has been interesting to see all these dynamics in action and very rewarding to be a part of these processes.

#### **What advice would you give to a young professional?**

Learn and be curious! You may have an interest in policy, economics, international affairs or regional studies. You will most likely find that you have shared interests with people that gravitate towards those same interests. It is far more enlightening to learn about topics outside of your comfort zone. This will help you approach issues from a different vantage point and will allow you to better understand people that come from different backgrounds. Once you expand your intellectual curiosity, you will find yourself with a broader mindset and a larger toolkit to address the issues that you originally wanted to focus on.

#### **What was your most impactful Dialogue moment/experience?**

As an intern, it was illuminating to learn the vast level of scholarship in China and Latin America. I am Colombian and I had lived in China. I was knowledgeable of the bilateral relationship between both countries. At the Dialogue, the perspective broadened at a hemispheric and global level. Interning at the Dialogue provided a more holistic perspective in understanding the big picture not only in the Americas but also globally.

Equally important was the continuous engagement with Dialogue activities as an alumnus. I found particularly insightful reading the Latin American Advisor and some of the conferences organized by the Dialogue. These helped me greatly in my professional career to understanding the economic and political dynamics in different countries where I was doing business. This information allowed me to recalibrate and refocus different business development activities that I was working on in the region.

## MISSY REIF

### Featured Alumna

*Current location: Washington, DC*  
*Dialogue Role: Program Associate,*  
*Conferences and Special Projects, 2016-2019*



#### **What is your occupation or most recent work experience?**

I am a senior program officer for Latin America & the Caribbean at the National Democratic Institute (NDI), where I work closely with colleagues in our Colombia and Mexico offices and partners across the region to implement USG-funded programs strengthening democracy and democratic governance. I oversee NDI's work in Jamaica and Mexico and manage a regional South America program (which includes Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Paraguay and Peru). I also work with another Dialogue alum, Zuleyma Alvarez, and the LAC team deputy director on the Global Debates program. Sometimes, I get a little panicked that my portfolio is so large, but I enjoy that I get to work on really diverse programming—on everything from open parliament and transparency to women and youth political participation to political party strengthening. In pre-Covid times, I had the opportunity to travel quite a bit to join program activities in Argentina, Bolivia, Colombia, Peru and Mexico. While I don't anticipate traveling for work anytime soon, Covid has created a great opportunity to join activities in the field. For instance, I've moderated two panels on electoral campaigns for Mexican political parties; observed and led trainings for women political candidates; and participated in advocacy trainings for youth activists in Bolivia.

#### **What has surprised you most about your career?**

I think the most surprising thing is that I'm actually working in this field. When I attended my five-year college reunion (I won't say when), a classmate pointed out that I was the only one from our international studies major actually doing "something international." I feel very lucky that I knew from a young age that I wanted to work at some intersection of international relations, Latin America, diplomacy, and government but I'm still surprised that I'm actually doing it!

#### **What advice would you give to a young professional?**

It's cliché, but I think networking is still extremely important, especially in DC. I would recommend that you begin networking before you're actively job searching. It's often a lot more natural when you're asking questions about an industry or a person's trajectory rather than a specific ask ("do you have openings?"). Also, people love talking about themselves! Then, once you have a relationship with that person, even if you've only spoken once, it is easier to go back to them to ask for a favor ("can you connect me with X?" or "I'm interested in Y opening at your company"). I'm grateful that several Dialogue alumni, even people who were quite senior, took the time to speak with me about their careers and am happy to do the same for other Dialogue alumni.

#### **What was your most impactful Dialogue moment/experience?**

It's hard to pinpoint a single experience, but when working on events like the CAF Conference or the Gala, I would spend months focused on minute details for a 1-2-day event, like how the stage is set up or inviting speakers, so to see everything come together was always an amazing feeling. Another obvious highlight was having then-Vice President Biden speak at the 2016 CAF Conference about his vision for the region. Thank you to another Dialogue alumnus, Dan Erikson, for helping us with that invitation!

I would also say that having up-close access to thought leaders from the region, including former and sitting presidents, academics and civil society leaders, was a particularly unique experience as a young professional. I'll never forget when then-President Luis Guillermo Solis (Costa Rica) came to the office for a meeting with Michael Shifter and stopped to ask every junior staff member what they worked on and thanked us for our work. While I don't work planning events anymore, I feel that these regular interactions with high-level speakers and USG officials at the Dialogue has impacted my current work. Although I am still considered "junior staff," I feel empowered to speak up in meetings with government officials from the region, moderate events in English and Spanish, and gained more confidence in my voice as an expert on democracy issues in the region.

## CAITLIN REILLY

### Featured Alumna

*Current location: Silver Spring, MD*

*Dialogue Role: Program Assistant*

*Office of the President, 2014-2016*



#### **What is your occupation or most recent work experience?**

I am currently a program manager at Counterpart International, an international development NGO based in Virginia. I started as a program officer in February 2016, and I have been there more than five years now.

#### **What has surprised you most about your career?**

How your career can evolve over time and how you can end up in places you didn't expect. I started my professional life as a paralegal at an immigration law firm and did that for about five years before segueing into the think tank sphere at the Dialogue, and then into international development. The type of work is different across these sectors and roles, but it's nice to see how many skills are transferable and how the in-depth knowledge you've accumulated can be relevant in your next position. For example, my immigration law experience comes into play as we plan to deploy expatriate staff to projects overseas, and of course development practitioners rely heavily on think tanks like the Dialogue for solid information and insightful analysis that informs our work.

#### **What advice would you give to a young professional?**

I suggest trying different things to find what is most fulfilling for you. You can still learn a lot (or even more) when a position is not the best fit, and then you know what you want and do not want for your career. And I think it's important to remember it's never too late to change course or try something new.

#### **What was your most impactful Dialogue moment/experience?**

I learned so much planning CAF conferences. It required a myriad of skills – developing panel topics and identifying speakers, logistics, communicating with speakers and guests, attention to detail, budgeting, graphic design, report writing, and more! On top of that, we had access to influential leaders and experts who spoke on the most important issues in the Western Hemisphere. I always came away learning something new and considering an issue from a different perspective. Helping carry out the events themselves was exciting, exhausting, and energizing at the same time. I learned so much and built so many skills that I rely on to do my job at Counterpart effectively now.

## DANIELA VAYAS

### Featured Alumna

*Current location: Washington, DC*

*Dialogue Role: Intern, Summer 2018*

*Energy, Climate Change, & Extractive Industries Program*



#### **What is your occupation or most recent work experience?**

I currently work at the Inter-American Committee against Terrorism (CICTE) at the General Secretariat of the Organization of American States (OAS). I am the Program Officer in charge of the Inter-American Counter-terrorism Network project. To give you some context, CICTE is the only regional entity whose sole purpose is to prevent and counter terrorism in the Americas. CICTE supports and works closely with OAS Member States, and its main programs include: cybersecurity, maritime and port security, cargo and container security, tourism security, UNSCR 1540 implementation (prevention and combat of the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction), terrorism financing, prevention of violent extremism and the Inter-American Counter-Terrorism Network. Each program is unique and important as they deal with different security issues affecting the region. On June 3, we commemorated the Inter-American Day against Terrorism, a day to reflect on the challenges and threats that our region faces. My work experience at CICTE has been exceptional and I have been able to work with a great cohort of professionals and experts.

#### **What has surprised you most about your career?**

I honestly never really thought I'd be working on terrorism issues. My past work experience was mostly related to energy, but as I pursued the Master of Science in Foreign Service at Georgetown University, I realized I wanted to explore other career opportunities. I realized that now more than ever regional security in the Americas is crucial for international security. This past year has been very challenging to all of us. Covid-19 reshaped the world order and our lives. We experienced loss, we learned to work remotely, and we stopped traveling. But as our lives changed, terrorists didn't stop, they continued working. I currently have the opportunity to work in this field focused on terrorism prevention and cooperation among Member States, other international organizations, civil society, private sector, and academia.

#### **What advice would you give to a young professional?**

Don't be afraid to explore new career opportunities or change your line of work. If there is an issue you are passionate about, go for it. We live in a world that is constantly changing and new opportunities are open for those who seek them. In my case, though transitioning from the energy to the security sector was definitely a challenge, I couldn't be happier of what I am currently doing. Don't forget that it is never too late to pursue a new career path; you build your own way.

#### **What was your most impactful Dialogue moment/experience?**

Interning at the Dialogue was my first work experience in DC, so every moment was impactful! But I will say that meeting high-level political leaders in the region was definitely an important one. I remember we hosted a conversation with Carlos Alvarado, Costa Rica's president. Once he arrived to the office, he stopped at the front desk to say hello and speak to us for a couple of minutes. I would also say that the people I met during my internship were VERY impactful. I am still in touch with them, and they have become mentors, close friends and even teachers.

Disclaimer: The opinions expressed here do not strictly reflect the official position of the OAS or its Member States.

## BELEN CUMSILLE ROJAS

### Featured Alumna

*Current location: Temuco, La Araucanía, Chile*

*Dialogue Role: Intern, Education Program, Summer 2014*

*Program Associate, Education Program, 2015*



#### **What is your occupation or most recent work experience?**

I currently work in the Institutional Planning and Analysis Unit at Temuco Catholic University, where I have been since 2018.

#### **What has surprised you most about your career?**

It has been an unpredictable journey that has taken me to many unexpected places. After my master's program in Austin I was planning to return to Santiago (Chile), but instead I started a job in Washington, DC at the Dialogue. Then, when I returned to Chile, I had never thought about moving outside of the capital, Santiago, but I am currently living in Temuco, southern Chile. It has been a discovery to learn how flexible your skills can be and how to adapt to different jobs and settings.

#### **What advice would you give to a young professional?**

I would recommend being open to new opportunities and challenges. It is the time to try different professional paths and find what works best for you. You may have some preconceptions of what a certain position or workplace may be like, but they can always surprise you. You just have to stay open to the experience!

#### **What was your most impactful Dialogue moment/experience?**

I am not able to pin one down. I have great memories of the events, the research and, of course, my colleagues. There was always something going on at the Dialogue: one of the programs was releasing a report, another was organizing an event or there was an important meeting. We had to be prepared to do different tasks and collaborate with all the programs. I also appreciate the emphasis the Dialogue places on education in the region, which is an interest I have kept pursuing in my career.

## ARTURO LOPEZ-LEVY

### Featured Alumnus

*Current location: Fremont, California*  
*Dialogue Role: Graduate Intern, 2004*



#### **What is your occupation or most recent work experience?**

I am an assistant professor of Political Science and International Relations at Holy Names University in Oakland, California. Most of my experience is as a professor, analyst (consultant) for political risk firms, NGO's, and governments. I am a public intellectual in the United States and Cuba.

#### **What has surprised you most about your career?**

Plateaus are very important but underestimated in most professional careers. It is easy to get enthusiastic when you are climbing to a new level or when you need to fight not to fail in the middle of a tempest. But there is a lot to learn during the plateaus if you have always a student-attitude and find ways to motivate your intellectual search. These are the times for you to look at different questions and think about your own agenda with different approaches beyond the traditional ways.

#### **What advice would you give to a young professional?**

For a young professional at the Dialogue, presumably planning a career related to the Americas, I will suggest paying attention to the activities at the intersection between international relations and domestic politics that take place in the organization. Second, if your interest is to learn, be suspicious of your own ideological rigidities and search for comparison beyond regions. Using Isaiah Berlin's advice, be a fox, not a hedgehog.

#### **What was your most impactful Dialogue moment/experience?**

At the Dialogue, I had the honor to meet Peter Vaky, a legend among US diplomats in the Western Hemisphere for his knowledge and his values. Before I went to the Dialogue, I already knew about his role highlighting the importance of coherence in the defense of human rights for American image in the region. He also proposed a well thought rational approach to Cuba as early as the end of the Johnson Administration. Mr. Vaky even reviewed a memo/essay I wrote for an essay contest on creative thinking in foreign policy of the American Academy of Diplomacy. His feedback was quite useful, and the essay received the first prize. Every time I am invited to give an opinion for the Advisor or to present at a panel, I think about people like Pete as the audience. The alumni's relationship with the Dialogue should never be an experience of the past. When one of my students is interested in gender and power in the Americas, I recommend them to look at the Dialogue webpage on the subject because I know of the great work and pluristic visions that Joan Caviano gathers there. I still exchange views with Peter Hakim. When I am lucky, he answers with questions that make me think again.



## GUY MENTEL

### Featured Alumnus

*Current location: Arlington, Virginia*

*Dialogue Role: Writing Intern, Summer 2017*



**What is your occupation or most recent work experience?**

I am currently the Executive Director of Global Americans, a US-Latin America relations think tank in Washington, DC.

**What has surprised you most about your career?**

How serendipitous many of my biggest career transitions have been. My career path has hardly been linear. I feel extremely privileged to have had the opportunity to make multiple professional stops along the way, with each stop providing more insight into the type of work that I'm most interested in and best suited for. When I started this work, I never would have anticipated that my career would take me to Colombia or to Capitol Hill—or to law school for that matter. I was fortunate to have friends and mentors wiser than me at each fork in the road—many of them affiliated with the Dialogue in some way—who encouraged me and pushed me to pursue new and exciting opportunities. I've found that if you work hard at being a good colleague and surround yourself with people you admire, your career will surprise you in many ways.

**What advice would you give to a young professional?**

I would encourage young professionals, if they do draw up some sort of master career plan, to allow for sufficient flexibility to zig and zag along the way. I would urge those starting their careers not to fear the path less traveled. I cannot speak more highly of the benefit of "on the ground" work experience and the way in which these experiences can both shape your perspective on issues and your outlook on your work. I would encourage young professionals to be open to those opportunities if they arise and more broadly, to be open to less conventional paths, so long as those paths provide opportunities for learning and growth.

**What was your most impactful Dialogue moment/experience?**

The opportunity to work with and write alongside Michael Camilleri and Ben Raderstorf. I was with the Dialogue for a short period of time before law school. I feel extremely privileged to have had the opportunity to work within the Rule of Law program and to learn from both Ben and Michael. It was Michael's example and wisdom in particular that informed so many of my professional choices while in law school. Even after leaving the Dialogue, I feel so grateful that the team continued to involve me in the organization's work through events and other initiatives. The relationships and friendships I developed from my time at the Dialogue have meant so much to me as I've moved along in my career.

## MARIE LEFEBVRE

### Featured Alumna

*Current location: San Francisco, CA*

*Dialogue Role: External Relations & Development Coordinator,  
July 2015 - July 2016*



**What is your occupation or most recent work experience?**

I am currently an investigator at Facebook on the Developer Operations Team, where I investigate third party apps for potential user data misuse; my team was created after the Cambridge Analytica scandal in 2018.

**What has surprised you most about your career?**

My first job out of college was a sales role at Google. I actually left that role to work at the Dialogue thinking I had left tech for good and would eventually transition into public service. I ended up coming back to the West Coast for my Master's in Latin American Studies, and I ultimately transitioned back to the tech industry, which I was ambivalent about at first. However, last year I was fortunate to find a new role at Facebook that bridged my interests in research and social impact, as my team is mission-driven with the goal of protecting user data. What especially surprised me was how I was able to pivot and adapt to a more technical role, despite my background which previously leaned more on soft skills and qualitative research.

**What advice would you give to a young professional?**

My number one piece of advice would be to leverage your network, including weaker connections, even if it may feel awkward at first. I can't overestimate how much a personal connection who already has their foot in the door at a company/organization can influence the hiring process through a referral or even just putting a good word in. Also, in my experience having a growth mindset is essential to professional success.

**What was your most impactful Dialogue moment/experience?**

For me there are two: 1) For the 2015 Gala since we exceeded fundraising goals significantly. This was partially thanks to a platinum donor for which I felt a particular sense of accomplishment as they had never supported the Dialogue before. We sent them a letter out of the blue, unsure if they would reply. However, through online research I was able to make the connection that a Dialogue employee at the time was a former colleague of one of the company's decision-makers. I asked him if he would reach out and speak to his former colleague about the work the Dialogue does, which he graciously agreed to do. It was a decisive factor in securing the donation!

2) In the summer of 2016, Dialogue president emeritus Peter Hakim invited me as his plus one to attend a reception at the Brazilian embassy in honor of the Rio Olympics, which included an exhibit on Olympic torches over the years. There was delicious Brazilian barbeque, caipirinhas, and I even got to meet the Brazilian ambassador - as a Brazilianist it was such a special experience and a dream come true!

## ADREAN SCHEID

### Featured Alumna

*Current location: Washington, DC*

*Dialogue Role: Program Associate, Central America, 1997-1999*



#### **What is your occupation or most recent work experience?**

I am currently a Principal International Policy Advisor at Arnold & Porter, where I draw on my corporate affairs and global public policy experience to provide strategic counsel across a range of policy, trade and investment, and commercial issues.

#### **What has surprised you most about your career?**

When I first started my career doing grassroots development work in Nicaragua, I knew my love for Latin America and the Caribbean would guide my professional life but I never imagined the diverse path my career would take. I moved from international development work to think tanks to industry associations and finally to the private sector, always focusing on new opportunities that would help me grow and develop my skills and abilities and where I felt I could make a positive contribution.

#### **What advice would you give to a young professional?**

The best advice I have for young professionals is to get a mentor and be a mentor. The mentors I have had throughout my career have not only provided invaluable professional advice and guidance, but have encouraged me to set and achieve ambitious goals. I believe their support has helped drive my success and has made me feel more satisfied with my career and my life. Equally important is to seek out opportunities to do the same for others - don't underestimate the value of what you have to offer, you can be a mentor at any stage in your career.

#### **What was your most impactful Dialogue moment/experience?**

During my time at the Dialogue, the second meeting of the Sol M. Linowitz Forum was convened and it was all hands on deck with the junior staff. While we were there to work, we were thrilled with the opportunity to be in the room with former presidents, ministers, legislators, private sector leaders, and academics as they discussed the critical issues facing the region and developed concrete proposals for action. During a break in the discussions, I was waiting in line for the ladies room and a former head of state walked up and examined the line with serious deliberation. Her pronouncement that "this is the sign of a great meeting - a line for the ladies room" produced a collective chuckle but it was an important moment that has stuck with me over the years. Each woman in line had overcome considerable challenges to be there that day, and each was keenly aware that despite their success there were more challenges ahead for them and for other women following in their footsteps. I was proud that day to work for an organization that made an early and deliberate commitment to being fully inter-American and incorporating more diverse groups into its Board, membership, staff and its work. This commitment - embraced by senior leadership and implemented over the span of many years by Joan Caivano and countless staff members - is in my opinion a key driver of the Dialogue's success and credibility and an important area for continued focus and progress moving forward.