

# OUR VOICE

Elections were held recently to designate the member countries for United Nations working commissions. For Mexico and our North American neighbors, the decisions about which countries were to be part of the Commission on Human Rights and the UN International Narcotics Control Board were particularly important.

Surprisingly, the United States was not elected to either of these two commissions. There are two probable explanations for this. The first is that this is the result of the U.S.'s lukewarm attitude in everything regarding the United Nations, reflected in the fact that the new administration has not yet named its ambassador to the General Assembly (who will very probably be John Negroponte, former U.S. ambassador to Mexico). The U.S. government trusted too much in its allies and did not even take the trouble to negotiate their support in this case.

The second probable explanation is more profound and is related to the clear anger on the part of the U.S.'s European allies, Russia and China. In the first place, they are clearly very unhappy with the U.S.'s unilateral, arrogant actions, particularly with regard to the world's next 30 years of nuclear security. They are also displeased with the U.S. refusal to support the Kyoto Protocol, which regulates the carbon emissions into the atmosphere that are responsible for global warming. Although not all the European countries have yet ratified it, they still blame the United States for the protocol's non-application. There is also increasing irritation among the world community with the U.S. government for its reticence to sign the treaty to create the International Criminal Court. At the same time, while outlawing capital punishment is now a condition for European Union membership, President Bush has distinguished himself as a defender of the measure in many different fora.

Seemingly, it was a combination of all these factors that led to teaching the U.S. a lesson, with such unfortunate results for the United States. The lesson: the multi-polar world of today is not willing to just forgive and forget, not even with the only surviving world superpower. The unfortunate outcome for the world community could lie in the consequences that the U.S. absence from two such internationally important commissions could have.

Two scenarios are possible: in the first, if the U.S. decides to take its revenge, it could opt for unilateral action, ignoring the United Nations, and for stopping payment on its UN debt, in a clear challenge to the international community, that would have grave consequences for the viability and possibilities for the organization's action. The other alternative is that the United States take on board the implications of its allies' discontent and try to build a new consensus to legitimize its positions. Undoubtedly, this last scenario is the less probable one, but it would also be the most beneficial in today's international context.

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Women are acquiring more and more importance in political activity in Mexico. María del Carmen Alanis explores this issue in her contribution to our "Politics" section. Alanis points to the fundamental role women played in last year's federal elections and their important contribution to the consolidation of our democracy. However, she also notes that despite certain advances in gender equality in politics, women's participation in important elected posts is still at a minimum. She suggests the need to promote a political culture that takes gender equality as one of its fundamental points if we really want to have an important impact among women.

Also in “Politics”, we present our readers with a contribution from international relations expert Alonso Gómez-Robledo, who makes a profound analysis of the general principles guiding Mexican foreign policy and the importance of their having been elevated to a constitutional level in 1988. Gómez-Robledo reviews each of these principles, and he looks at the different interpretations that each has been subjected to in international law and their underlying ideological and geopolitical interests.

We close this section with an article by Tanius Karam about another of the political actors that have had an important impact on society at the turn of the century in Mexico: alternative positions in the Catholic Church, represented above all by the Christian base communities and liberation theology. Karam describes how today, when politics has “gone to the right,” the movement has lost ground and influence with regard to the space it occupied from the 1960s to the 1980s. He also says, however, that, far from disappearing, the movement is still alive since clearly the conditions that gave rise to it continue to exist, as shown by the Zapatista uprising in Chiapas.

With these contributions, *Voices of Mexico* continues its practice of analyzing the role of new political and social actors in Mexico at the beginning of the millennium. That is why we have also included in our “North American Affairs” section an article by John Dickson, which looks at the important contribution that we must expect from academia in our three nations for understanding the new situation created by globalization and the expansion of international free trade. Dickson introduces the issue of the viability of a Free Trade Area for the Americas (FTAA) by 2005, one of the priorities in the discussions and accords at the recent Quebec Summit and shares his thoughts on the political significance of the anti-globalization protests.

We have dedicated our “Science, Art and Culture” section to painters Olga Costa and José Chávez Morado, who made their home in the city of Guanajuato where they had fruitful lives as artists and promoters of art and culture. José Chávez Morado, born in Silao, Guanajuato, is one of Mexico’s outstanding painters, committed not only to his art, but also to his political and social convictions. Carlos Magdaleno has contributed to this issue with his personal, intimate view of the life and work of Olga Costa, whom Carlos Mérida defined as “the white angel of Mexican painting.” This section also includes a brief description of the next International Cervantes Festival, which for 29 years has been celebrated in the city of Guanajuato. Lastly, Juan Marcial’s article “Popocatepetl. Living in Danger” reminds us of the perils of living in the shadow of a volcano.

Micro- and small businessmen and women will undoubtedly play an important role in the Mexican economy in the early part of this century. Traditionally, this sector has contributed the majority of jobs in the economy and a high percentage of the creation of wealth. In our “Economy” section, Enrique Pino looks into the obstacles that micro- and small companies have confronted in getting credit, training and access to new technology. He also looks at the new Mexican administration’s policies with regard to them: the Fox program of supporting “hole-in-the-wall” businesses, says the author, will undoubtedly foster this sector’s dynamism to a certain extent, but by no means is it sufficient nor does it correspond to its importance in the nation’s economy.

Mexican taxi drivers are seen as true ethnographers and political analysts of the society in which they live by U.S. author Kathy Taylor. In a delightful article for our “Society” section, Taylor describes how her original project of doing an ethnographical study of Mexican taxi drivers became a work of literature full of anecdotes and reflections on Mexican culture from the point of view of taxi drivers. Taylor’s article makes us want to read her novel, published both in English and in Spanish, *Through the Rearview Mirror/Por el espejo retrovisor*.

“Society” also includes Jesús Rodríguez Zepeda’s article about one of the most difficult and complex problems facing Mexico today: discrimination. Rodríguez maintains that discrimination, far from decreasing, has reached unprecedented levels in contemporary Mexico. One of the reasons is that Mexican legislation does not contain clear and precise wording on the question, but only vague considerations that give rise to differ-

ent interpretations and therefore an evasion of responsibility. Until there is a political culture of equality and legislation that specifies what constitutes discrimination and the corresponding sanctions, it will be very difficult to combat. One strategy could be the design of affirmative action policies such as those that resulted from the civil rights movement in the 1960s and 1970s in the United States.

Luz María Valdés has written a revealing article for the “Mexico-U.S. Affairs” section about another important social actor in North America: migrants. She specifically looks at the migration from the state of Puebla to New York. People from Puebla, *poblanos*, according to Valdés’ field research, have been able to successfully incorporate themselves into productive life in the Big Apple. They are already the largest group of Mexican migrants in New York with impressive networks of family contacts there that facilitate newcomers getting jobs when they arrive.

Kelly O’Donnell has contributed a well documented article to “Canadian Issues” about the trend toward neo-conservatism in Canadian politics that has already affected two of the main provinces, Alberta and Ontario. The prime ministers of both are a clear jump toward the right from traditional Canadian centrist ideology. O’Donnell describes how these politicians have achieved great popularity, among other things, because of their neo-populist style and their images as “ordinary guys.” This strategy has functioned much better for the charismatic Ralph Klein in Alberta, recently reelected for a new term, than for Mike Harris in Ontario, who has been severely criticized by the opposition.

“The Splendor of Mexico” section takes us this time to the city of Guanajuato. Aurora Jáuregui de Cervantes takes us for a brief trip down through the past of this colonial mining city, an almost inexhaustible source of wealth and witness to important events for the nation’s history, whose original underground street, whimsical urban layout and architectural beauty have merited its being declared a World Heritage Treasure. The article “The Delights of Guanajuato” tells us briefly about Mexican confectionery, which is fighting to preserve its identity at the same time that it must adapt to the demands of modernity. We have also dedicated several pages to the world of ceramics in Guanajuato, that takes us back to both pre-Hispanic and colonial times, a world whose techniques have been handed down to us to produce pieces that can be classified as works of art.

Guanajuato is home to many museums. We have included two of them in this issue: the People’s Museum of Guanajuato and the Olga Costa-José Chávez Morado Art Museum. Both are housed in outstanding examples of local architecture and are committed to the promotion of art and culture in the city.

Our “Ecology” section consists of an article by Gerardo Vázquez Marrufo about Guanajuato state’s Santa Rosa Mountains, whose importance as a center of biological diversity was recognized from the times of von Humboldt, but which only now are being systematically studied with an eye to their conservation.

Mexico City, an archipelago of many cities –its neighborhoods, old and new–, the great creator of nightmares and dreams in third dimension. One author who has succumbed to the temptation of narrating the city is Luis Miguel Aguilar, from whose short story “Nuevos tipos mexicanos” (New Mexican Types) we publish two fragments that accompany the second part of Lauro Zavala’s essay about urban narrative in Mexico.

Without a doubt, the name Román Piña Chan will always be associated with contemporary archaeological research. Piña Chan’s contributions have benefitted entire generations of scholars. In an article by anthropologist Joel Santos Ramírez, *Voices of Mexico* pays homage in our “In Memoriam” section to this member of a generation of great archaeologists who began to emerge in the 1920s.

Paz Consuelo Márquez Padilla  
**Director of CISAN**