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SUBJECT: EMBASSY CONFERENCE HIGHLIGHTS LATIN AMERICAN AND CATHOLIC
CONTRIBUTIONS TO HUMAN RIGHTS

¶1. Summary. Ambassador Glendon recently hosted a substantive and well-attended conference commemorating the 60th Anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) and the critical contributions of Latin American countries and Catholic social teachings to the creation of that document. In addition to Ambassador Glendon, WHA Assistant Secretary Shannon and Professor Paolo Carozza -- the newly elected chairman of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights -- addressed the conference. There was also a moving presentation by Pablo Perez-Cisneros, the son of Guy Perez-Cisneros, who as Cuba's UN delegate in 1940s played an important role in the creation of the UDHR. More than 140 diplomats, academics, journalists, and students attended the conference. Media coverage was extensive: Ambassador Glendon's remarks were reprinted in their entirety in the Vatican's daily newspaper L'Osservatore Romano, and additional reports appeared in a wide variety of national and international outlets. This conference is the first in a series Embassy Vatican has planned on the theme of Human Rights. End Summary.

Honoring the Past, Committing to the Future

¶2. The U.S. Embassy to the Holy See, together with the Chilean and Costa Rican Embassies to the Holy See, sponsored a conference entitled "The Latin American Human Rights Project: Past, Present, and Future." The conference took place on May 2, 2008, at the Pontifical University Regina Apostolorum. Speakers at the conference included Assistant Secretary Thomas A. Shannon, Ambassador Mary Ann Glendon, Prof. Paolo Carozza, Prof. Maria Sara Rodriguez Pinto, Mr. Pablo Perez-Cisneros, Dr. Guzman Carriquiry of the Holy See, as well as the Ambassadors of Chile, Costa Rica, Panama, and Brazil to the Holy See. Financial support for the conference was provided by the Knights of Columbus.

¶3. The conference highlighted the oft-forgotten contributions of Latin American countries such as Chile, Costa Rica, and Cuba to the drafting and implementation of the UDHR, and underscored the region's continuing contribution to the human rights dialogue. Assistant Secretary Shannon examined the continuing vitality of the human rights project in the Americas, while Ambassador Glendon delivered a speech that highlighted the many contributions of Latin American countries to the creation of the UDHR. The background to those contributions was explored in a speech by Professor Paolo Carozza in which he examined the origins of the human rights tradition in Latin America. One strong influence throughout the Latin American human rights tradition was Catholic social thought, the subject of two afternoon lectures by Dr. Guzman Carriquiry and Prof. Maria Sara Rodriguez Pinto.

¶4. The important individual role played by Latin American delegates at the time of the UDHR's drafting was the subject of moving tributes. The principal leader of the Latin American group in 1948 was a charismatic young Cuban representative named Guy Perez Cisneros. His son, Pablo Perez-Cisneros, attended the conference and recounted his father's contributions to the UDHR, noting the gap between the Cuba of his father's day and the deplorable state of human rights under the present regime. The work of Guy Perez-Cisneros and other delegates was captured in a 12-minute video presentation featuring archival footage of Eleanor Roosevelt and Guy Perez-Cisneros' UN speech in support of the UDHR. The Chilean and Panamanian Ambassadors to the Holy See also spoke about the contributions of their UN delegates to

the formation of the UDHR.

Media Coverage Highlights Human Rights

¶5. The conference themes reached an audience far beyond those in attendance through wide-ranging press coverage in the national and international media. In addition to full coverage in the Vatican's daily newspaper, L'Osservatore Romano, Ambassador Glendon also conducted interviews with ZENIT and Catholic News Service, both of which are distributed internationally in multiple languages, as well as with the regional Italian daily La Sicilia. In addition, the international TV and production company Rome Reports recorded the entire conference for use in reports broadcast throughout Central and South America. The conference was also recorded by Embassy personnel for use on Embassy Vatican's website, where the speakers' remarks will be featured and published in their entirety.

Looking Ahead

¶6. The conference was the first in a series of planned conferences designed to celebrate the 60th Anniversaries of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Genocide Convention by highlighting the shared commitment of the United States and the Holy See to human rights and human dignity. The next conference will take place on October 16, 2008, and will examine the question of the universality of human rights in a multi-cultural world.

GLENDON