



PRESS RELEASE

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STATEMENT BY SENATOR RICHARD LUGAR SUPPORTING PROGRESS MADE TO REACH AGREEMENT ON BOLIVIA'S DRAFT CONSTITUTION

(Washington, D.C.) – U.S. Sen. Dick Lugar met yesterday with Bolivia's Minister of Finance, Luis Arce. The meeting was also attended by Ms. Erika Dueñas, Chargé d'Affaires of the Bolivian Embassy in Washington D.C.

In the meeting Lugar expressed his support for the progress made by President Morales and the opposition to reach agreement on a draft constitution.

"This agreement was made in a spirit of fundamental compromise. It is my hope that this important step will help bring to conclusion a long standing historical impasse and put Bolivia on the path of political reconciliation" Lugar said.

"I would recommend that President Morales of Bolivia and the next President of the United States consider carefully what steps would be constructive in repairing Bolivia-U.S. relations at this critical stage of Bolivian constitutional reconstruction. Needed now are measures geared toward helping Bolivia and the United States move toward closer engagement. In this regard, I consider this an appropriate time to continue the Andean Trade Preference Assistance Act (ATPDA) to this embattled country. When Bolivia stands at the cusp of a new era, with a new Constitution, U.S. assistance should be forthcoming as an effort to help Bolivia, and not to be an impediment to its progress."

The opposition had initially rejected the referendum bill, saying the draft constitution would have concentrated too much power in the President's hands. The lengthy debate in Congress produced a number of changes, including an agreement by President Morales to seek only one more five-year term. If re-elected, he would have to leave office in 2014.

The new constitution includes a bill of rights, including a chapter dedicated to Bolivia's 36 indigenous peoples.

The arguments over constitutional reform began in 2006 when a new assembly was elected to draft a new charter.

The wrangling has spilled over into deadly violence at times. Last month rioters seized government offices in some parts of the country.

The referendum on January 25, 2009 will be followed by elections for president, vice-president and congress on December 6, 2009. The constitution is expected to be approved.