



CELADE'S 50th ANNIVERSARY

CELADE, the Latin American and Caribbean Demographic Centre/Population Division of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), will celebrate its 50th anniversary in 2007. Numerous commemorative activities will mark CELADE's contributions to knowledge of demography and the technical assistance it provides to the countries of the region. The first public celebration will coincide with World Population Day, 11 July, with an event to highlight the links between population and development. In August, the agreement between the United Nations and the Government of Chile that gave birth to CELADE will be commemorated at a joint ceremony with the University of Chile. And on 10-11 October, an international seminar will take place in which leading experts will debate the major socio-demographic changes of the past half-century and examine current challenges in research, training and the design of population and development policies.

Background information

CELADE traces its origins to the early 1950s, in response to the growing awareness of important gaps in knowledge about population issues. In those years, censuses were not conducted on a regular basis and analysis of demographic dynamics and variables was scarce – contrasting strongly with the momentous demographic changes, like rapid population growth and rural to urban migration, underway. At the United Nations, forceful debate within the UN Economic and Social Council resulted in the presentation to the UN Secretary General of a recommendation to create population research and demographic training centres in several developing countries. Approved by governments and hailed by population experts, this initiative gave birth to the establishment of regional centres in Santiago (Chile), Mumbai (India) and Cairo (Egypt).

The four-year Agreement between the UN and Government of Chile (represented by the University of Chile) on the Provision of Technical Assistance for the Establishment of the Latin American Demographic Centre was signed on 13 August 1957. At the head of the fledging institute was Marcelino Pascua, Spanish biostatistician and diplomat. CELADE was housed at the University of Chile's Macul campus in small offices at the Faculty of Philosophy and Education. Carmen Amanda Miró, a guiding light of the Panama Statistics and Censuses Bureau with a degree from the London School of Economics, was recruited to the post of CELADE director. Demographers Leon Tabah (France), Juan Carlos Elizaga (Argentina) and Albino Bocaz (Chile) were responsible for its academic offerings. They were joined by professors from the University of Chile and by ECLAC demographer Jorge Somoza, later director of CELADE's division of demographic analysis.

At the end of the first four years, Government of Chile extended its Agreement with CELADE, with Miró's at its head, for a similar period. In August 1962, CELADE received the wholehearted endorsement of its Governing Board, presided by ECLAC Executive Secretary Raúl Prebisch, who, convinced of the importance of CELADE's continued operation, successfully sought funding the United Nations Special Fund and other international agencies. With this support, an independent CELADE moved into its own offices in Providencia, next to former ECLAC headquarters on Av. José Miguel Infante.

As a consolidated project under the continuing leadership of director Miró, CELADE set out the following goals for its work: (a) provision of specialized training in the application of demographics to development planning and the study of economic and social problems; (b) promotion of demographic research applicable to Latin American socio-economic realities; (c) creation of standard demographic data and research techniques as a basis for comparative analysis among countries; and (d) information exchange on population issues. In May 1966, CELADE opened a subregional centre in San José, Costa Rica, with Dutch demographer Ferdinand Rath as director for the first six years.

In 1971, CELADE became an autonomous body within ECLAC, expanding the scope of its applied research and its provision of technical assistance to governments. In March 1975, CELADE was incorporated into the ECLAC system, and numerous countries and institutions interested in Latin American and Caribbean development – Canada, United States, France, Netherlands, United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) --- provided important financial, substantive and political support.

As CELADE marks its 50th anniversary, it notes with satisfaction that so many expert demographers and technicians working with national governments have studied in its classrooms and that every country in Latin America and the Caribbean, plus a number in Africa and Asia, has benefited from its technical advisory missions. Over the years, research conducted by CELADE has made critical contributions to knowledge of population and development issues in Latin America and the Caribbean. The CELADE team takes pride in this valuable legacy and extends its warmest invitation to the community at large to join it in this year's 50th anniversary celebrations.