

THE EARTH INSTITUTE COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY



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For Immediate Release

**Fundación ALAS and the Earth Institute Announce the Creation of
High Level Secretariat for Early Childhood Development in Latin America**

*Issued call to put early childhood development on the agenda
At November's Ibero-American Summit*

New York – August 29th -To develop proposals that advance early childhood development programs in Latin America, international recording artist Shakira, founder of Fundación ALAS, together with leading macroeconomist Dr. Jeffrey Sachs of Columbia University's Earth Institute, announced the creation of an Early Childhood Development Secretariat and Advisory Panel for the region. The secretariat seeks to develop best practices, pilot programs and monitoring procedures for the implementation of early childhood development strategies in the Americas. Members of the secretariat and advisory board include experts in the field of education, health and development from all sectors of society including civil society, international organizations and governmental leaders.

The President of the Fundacion ALAS Board of Directors, Alejandro Santo Domingo, and its Vice President, Antonio de la Rua, joined Shakira and Dr. Sachs at the event announcing the creation of the entity.

“Currently 9 million Latin American children younger than 5 years old suffer of chronic malnutrition and 22 million don't have access to education. Though this situation seems bleak, we of ALAS are optimistic that through the creation of these two bodies of experts to build a road map for the region we are now one step closer to a society free of inequality,” said Shakira during today's press conference.

The Early Childhood Development Secretariat and Board will present Latin American leaders with recommendations at the 2009 Ibero-American Summit on November 30 in Portugal. At this annual meeting of 22 heads of state, ALAS and the Earth Institute will ask the leaders of the region to commit themselves to adopt the ECD proposal and will offer to serve as an ongoing partner for these nations on their path to implement these policies.

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The advisory panel is composed of 24 leaders from numerous Latin American countries such as Colombia, Panama and Chile, and international development institutions, including UNICEF, the World Bank and the Inter-American Development Bank.

“Research shows that helping children in the early stages of life not only helps the children of Latin America, but also has a multiplier effect on society and experts agree it is one of the best tools to fight poverty,” said Colombian entrepreneur ALAS president Santo Domingo. “As a businessman I examined the entire spectrum of an individual’s life and identified that that highest return on investment comes from investing in very young children. Even a very small investment in early childhood development will bring huge improvements to labor productivity, and long-term economic growth.”

“Cultural leaders have a strong platform from which to bring change to a region. In the case of ALAS celebrities like Shakira and Alejandro Sanz, they are using their reputation to get the attention of governments, but they are not stopping there, they are also talking directly to civil society raising their awareness on the importance of giving children between the ages of 0-6 years old the ability to live up to their potential through proper health, nutrition and education,” said De la Rúa,.

A complete list of secretariat and advisory board members and event photos are available upon request.

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ABOUT ALAS:

ALAS or Latin American Solidarity in Action (from the Spanish America Latina en Accion Solidaria) is a non-profit organization founded by prominent artists and business leaders in December 2006. ALAS’ mission is to raise awareness and promote the Early Childhood Development policies in the Latin American region. ECD policies are aimed at increasing the wellness of children, but also for laying the foundation for long-term socioeconomic growth in the region.

For more information visit fundacionalas.org

About the Earth Institute at Columbia University:

The Earth Institute mobilizes the sciences, education and public policy to achieve a sustainable earth. Through interdisciplinary research among more than 500 scientists in diverse fields, the Institute is adding to the knowledge necessary for addressing the challenges of the 21st century and beyond. With over two dozen associated degree curricula and a vibrant fellowship program, the Earth Institute is educating new leaders to become professionals and scholars in the growing field of sustainable development. We work alongside governments, businesses, nonprofit organizations and individuals to devise innovative strategies to protect the future of our planet.

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