

Ecuadorian President, Rafael Correa visits London

By Doris Noboa

Meeting with the Ecuadorian community

In order to fulfil my journalistic duties and also driven by the curiosity to know the man who is making radical changes in my country of Ecuador, I attended Rafael Correa's meeting with the Ecuadorian community at the Congress Centre on 26 October 2009.

The first of many surprises was that even though I made sure to be early I found the auditorium already almost full, two hours before the event.

Correa entered exactly at 8pm with the musical backdrop of "Patria tierra Sagrada" a song that has become the Ecuadorian President's mantra. At that time I was surprised again by the way that the public welcomed Correa. He was applauded with shouts, cheers and revolutionary watchwords like: "...Alerta, alerta que camina la espada de Bolívar por América Latina". I have never seen such enthusiasm and glee in a political event, which not only included Ecuadorian citizens and organisations but also groups of solidarity with Cuba, Colombia and Venezuela.

The Ecuadorian Consul, Javier Mendoza gave the official welcome while Fidel Narvaez, co-ordinator of Movimiento País in England gave a powerful speech on the name of the community.

Narvaez underlined the achievements of the President who:

"Without hesitation finished out with the tercerizadoras,
Fulfilled the promise to end the US Military Base in Manta,
Dared to confiscate the property from corrupt bankers,
Made possible the creation of a sovereign Constitution and universal citizenship and
Was able to review the external debt and declare it illegal, illegitimate and immoral..."

Narvaez also stated that the Ecuadorian community in London have been forgotten and that the ambitious government schemes for the migrants have not yet arrived.

The next speaker was Lorena Escudero, National Secretary for the Migrants, she presented a promotional video of the international campaign called "Tod@s somos Migrantes"

At 8.40 pm Rafael Correa began his speech acknowledging that there is still a lot to do, particularly in England. He promised the building of Casa Ecuador for next year. As a President of UNASUR he saluted fraternally at all Latin Americans and said: "You know that in Latin America there is not an epoch of change but there is a truly change of epoch"

Correa acknowledged that migrants are the heroes of today and added that it is one of the biggest national shames that 3 million Ecuadorians live outside their country, searching in other lands for what their own home denies them.

He gave an account of the achievements of Revolución Ciudadana as well as details on his diary whilst in the UK, a country which he has visited for first time and on academic grounds.

In his speech which lasted for one hour and 5 minutes The Ecuadorian president talked about his 33 months in charge of a government that had encountered fierce

opposition, particularly from the media. The announcement of such systematic anti government propaganda was of no surprise in Great Britain, whose tabloids play a major part in shaping public opinion. The President also used colloquial expressions such: “care tuco” and “cuchimbolo” which made the audience laugh as they looked upon a man whose charisma inspired trust and familiarity.

A familiarity that lead towards disorganisation, something that is not expected when meeting with a country’s leader. It was evident that the occasion was beyond the ability of the organisers but nevertheless was understandable since this was the first time an Ecuadorian president met with the Ecuadorian community in London.

Correa, the academic

Yesterday I had experienced first hand the affection that the Ecuadorian people have towards their President. Today I wanted to see Correa before a different audience. This man whose birthday is on the same day that the UK’s financial year begins was invited to give the lecture “ The international economy, and the process of the citizen’s revolution in Ecuador” by the London School of Economics , which historically is one of the most prestigious universities in the world. Fifteen Nobel Prize winners and 32 past or present heads of state have studied or taught at LSE.

Among the public were students, academics and media representatives. Correa’s lecture was 80% in English.

He started to give a historic compilation of the Economy from its origins until the 21st Century Socialism, which he underlined as socialism based on moral principles and humanism. He mentioned the differences between Neo-liberalism and Classical Socialism and its difference with 21st Century Socialism.

21st Century Socialism is the path of the Citizen’s Revolution and is completely against violence and utilizes the vote as the only useful bullet . It also promotes the state control of strategic resources.

Correa finished his speech quoting the Uruguay writer Eduardo Galeano.

After that he answered 13 questions from members of the public, who were chosen at random by Howard Davies, chair of the LSE.

Answering the questions I saw a more relaxed and confident Correa. He was asked about matters such as immigration, Yasuni, the relationship with Colombia, similarities with Venezuela, creative thinking, role of the citizens, enemies’ identity, WB, Galapagos.

The answer of one question regarding the privatization of water was particularly amusing because of the agitation of the government functionaries who by the President’s command were frantically searching for a Constitutional article which states that water is national heritage and therefore it is forbidden for any form of privatization to occur to this natural resource.

Reading out that Constitutional article the President invalidated the recent false accusations made by indigenous groups and which have been published by the international media.

In general this lecture made evident the Ecuadorian President’s knowledge on the Economy, his charm and sense of humour were also appreciated by a demanding audience. The success of the evening could be measured by the fact that a colleague journalist from Dow Jones , who had threatened to leave if he found the lecture boring ,stayed until the end.

My final surprise came when I witnessed the President's patience and ability to listen attentively to members of the Ecuadorian community who had eagerly waited outside of the university for him. Even after two hours since the end of the lecture President Correa had the courtesy to listen to the likes of Julia who in a naïve and innocent way decided to tell her life story, introduce her family and to finally say goodbye to the president promising to return to Ecuador within 3 years.

Like Julia many compatriots have plans to return and embrace the government projects. Others, like me, prefer the virtual return. Nevertheless for everyone the President's visit to London gave the assurance that our country is well represented. For once the Ecuadorian migrants do not have to feel ashamed of the clowns, corrupts and locos that took our name in vain.

The next day of the lecture the British newspaper "The Guardian" published an article by Mark Weisbrot entitled "Ecuador and Bolivia are achieving remarkable growth because they reject conventional economic wisdom".