

## **Introduction**

The wave of 1990s Western Hemisphere integration initiatives has included the successfully launched North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), the Southern Cone initiative known as MERCOSUR or MERCOSUL, the ongoing revitalization of the Andean Pact, and the initiation of negotiations for the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA). The constantly evolving complexities of moving merchandise, commodities and persons within the region reflect the positive dynamism as well as the frictions of the integration trends. The Summit of the Americas Center at Florida International University (SOAC) continues to focus attention on the practical implications of the process for the State of Florida and the region at large. It is in that spirit that SOAC offers the present publication.

This is the third annual edition of the Customs Guide to the Americas, a collaborative effort of the Summit of the Americas Center and Sandler, Travis & Rosenberg, P.A. While trade in Latin America and Caribbean countries continues to expand, overall political trends and the prospects for further trade liberalization in the region seem progressively less clear. In some places, particularly Central America, liberalization tendencies seem to be slowing, and even pulling in the opposite direction. In this changing context, the need for up-to-date information for those who study public policy and rely on access to these markets is even more essential.

In this customs guise, we present an updated compendium of customs rules, guidelines and contact information for each of the western hemisphere's 34 democratic countries, as well as for the State of Florida. We have expanded the country profiles somewhat, providing brief summaries of some of the principal statistics for each country. In addition, we have included a list of useful customs and trade information sources available on the Internet.

The information collected in this guide comes from a variety of sources and experts in the field. In particular, the editorial team relied strongly on data provided by the US departments of State and Commerce and customs officials in the various countries. We have worked to assure that the information is correct and accurate, as of the publication deadline, and we hope that the result is useful and timely. However, because of the rapid pace of change in trade practices and customs procedures, we recommend that users directly contact the relevant authorities in the country of interest for the most up-to-date information.