Toledo's Opportunity

Por Martha Lucia Pinzón

On June 3, Alejandro Toledo was elected president of Peru. Nearly 15 million people cast their ballots on Election Day, the culmination of a campaign characterized by voters' skepticism and distrust of the leading candidates.

For Toledo, his victory marked an opportunity to "share the dream of a more just Peru, with more jobs, greater social justice and no corruption." Change in Peru would begin the very same day, he vowed in his acceptance speech.

During his campaign, Toledo promised to increase spending on health and education, ensure greater access to agricultural credit and create more jobs. Many observers point out that these promises will be difficult to keep considering the divided Congress (Toledo's party, Peru Possible, won 45 of 120 seats), a 10% unemployment rate, and ongoing efforts to recover from the crisis left by the disgraced Fujimori-Montesinos regime.

The economy will undoubtedly be one of the greatest challenges for Peru's new leader. According to political analyst Carlos Reyna Izaguirre, achieving economic growth will be the key to Toledo's political survival. The president-elect himself has acknowledged this challenge on numerous occasions; in a recent interview with Time magazine, he stated that one of his goals will be restoring the country's economic credibility.

Toledo's government will also have to grapple with the issue of illegal drugs. Coca cultivation in Peru declined significantly in the 1990s, but there are fears that it could rise again as a consequence of the implementation of Plan Colombia. In declarations to the press in April, Toledo stated that he did not believe that crop fumigation was the answer to the drug problem. He said then that if elected president, he would meet with US officials to seek solutions to what he called "a common problem that requires common solutions."

Toledo will take office on July 28. Some view him as a political novice with no experience in public office. According to Toledo himself, however, his presidency is an opportunity to change the way politics are conducted in Peru.