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Jan. 15, 2009

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## **The Smithsonian's Anacostia Community Museum's 24th Annual Martin Luther King Jr. Program Focuses on Latinos and Civil Rights**

The Smithsonian's Anacostia Community Museum presents Baldemar Velásquez, founder and director of the Farm Labor Organizing Committee, AFL-CIO, as the featured speaker for the museum's 24th Annual Martin Luther King Jr. Program being held Thursday, Jan. 15, at 7 p.m. Velásquez will speak on the topic, "Latinos and Civil Rights: Changing the Face of America" at Baird Auditorium in the Smithsonian's National Museum of Natural History. This year's program is co-sponsored by the Smithsonian Latino Center.

The event will include a performance by Chicano guitarist and singer Rudy Arredondo. Admission is free, but seating is limited. To obtain more information or make reservations, e-mail [acmrvsp@si.edu](mailto:acmrvsp@si.edu) or call (202) 633-4875.

"Each year we select a speaker or presentation that embodies the philosophy of Dr. King," said Camille Giraud Akeju, museum director. "Dr. King was empathetic to the plight of migrant workers. A grass-roots organizer like King, Baldemar Velásquez has effectively worked through the system, sometimes one person at a time, and emerged a powerful advocate against injustice."

"The Smithsonian Latino Center is proud to be partnering with the Anacostia Community Museum on this important event which highlights the shared struggles and support between our communities," said Eduardo Díaz, director of the center. "Baldemar Velásquez embodies the center's mission to highlight the contributions of Latinos and their positive impact in the United States, particularly its labor history."

Velásquez is a highly respected national and international leader in the farm-labor movement and in the movement for Latino and immigrant rights. In 1967, he founded FLOC, AFL-CIO, a union of migrant farmworkers in the eastern United States, to provide these laborers a voice regarding their work conditions. Incensed by the injustices suffered by his family and other farmworkers, Velásquez began organizing migrant and seasonal farmworkers in northwest Ohio. He ultimately focused

FLOC's efforts on changing the structure of the agricultural industry through three-way negotiations among farmworkers, growers and agricultural corporations.

Based in Toledo, Ohio, FLOC rose to national prominence in 1978 when it led more than 2,000 workers in one of the largest agricultural strikes in Midwestern history, demanding unprecedented trade-union recognition in multiparty collective bargaining agreements. Since most FLOC members are immigrant workers, the organization has assumed a prominent grass-roots leadership role in building a broad network in the larger society to advocate for policies ensuring the human, civil and working rights of immigrants. Recognizing that the policies of multinational agricultural corporations affect workers worldwide, Velásquez has also expanded FLOC's influence to unions beyond the United States into Mexico and other countries where similar crops are grown.

Velásquez's work has been recognized by labor, government and progressive organizations. His numerous honors include a MacArthur Fellowship, an Aguila Azteca Award by the government of Mexico and honorary doctorates from Bowling Green State University and the University of Toledo.

Arredondo returns to the Smithsonian after performing with La Danza Company at the 2002 Days of the Dead program at the National Museum of the American Indian. He is also a farm organizer and agricultural policy analyst.

Community partners for this year's program are Fiesta DC, the Health Foundation for the Americas, the Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities, the Labor Council for Latin American Advancement, LatinoJustice PRLDEF, the National Alliance for Hispanic Health and the National Council of La Raza.

The Smithsonian Latino Center is a division of the Smithsonian Institution that ensures Latino contributions to art, science and the humanities are highlighted, understood and advanced through the development and support of public programs, scholarly research, museum collections and educational opportunities at the Smithsonian Institution and its affiliated organizations across the United States and internationally. More information about the center and its programs is available at [www.latino.si.edu](http://www.latino.si.edu).

The Anacostia Community Museum was opened in southeast Washington in 1967 as the nation's first federally funded neighborhood museum. Renamed in 2006, it has expanded its focus beyond African American culture to documenting, interpreting and collecting objects related to the impact of historical and contemporary social issues on communities. For more information, the public may call (202) 633-4820, (202) 633-1000 or (202) 633-5285 (TTY). Web site: [anacostia.si.edu](http://anacostia.si.edu).

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