

CLAB: MORE THAN 40 YEARS PROMOTING TEACHING AND INTEGRATION IN LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN

The Latin American Center for Biological Sciences (CLAB) is a regional center created in 1973 through an agreement between the United Nations Organization for Education, Science and Culture (UNESCO) and the Government of Venezuela, with the aim to promote research and teaching in the biological sciences in Latin America and the Caribbean, and to foster the integration of the region through cooperation in this field of knowledge. CLAB is an autonomous center at the service of UNESCO Member States and Associate Member States and has its headquarters in the Center for Biophysics and Biochemistry of the Instituto Venezolano de Investigaciones Científicas (IVIC).

Throughout its 42 years of existence, CLAB has organized 47 courses and international workshops at the highest scientific level, providing a service that facilitates the research and teaching of the biosciences in the region. Similarly, more than 20 seminars and scientific meetings, and four international congresses have been carried out.

CLAB is the oldest UNESCO center in Venezuela and through the organization of its courses, workshops, symposia, seminars and congresses has permitted that the students from all of Latin America and the Caribbean share in vivo with teachers expert in the scientific wisdom who have come to the country thanks to their spirit of cooperation, in order to share their knowledge. It is worth mentioning the participation of a Nobel prize recipient and of several nominees.

On the occasion of the celebration of 42 years since the foundation of CLAB it is appropriate to make a summary of the activities that have been organized in the four decades of its existence. In the initial 10 years, CLAB organized 13 courses where 157 foreign and 97 Venezuelan professors participated, together with 198 foreign and 126 Venezuelan students. Between 1984 and 1994 13 courses and 10 events (workshops, symposia and seminars) were organized, which involved 107 foreign and 70 Venezuelan lecturers, and 285 foreign and 401 local students. In the third decade, between

1995 and 2005, eight courses, nine events and four congresses were organized, with the participation of 252 foreign and 240 Venezuelan professors, 135 foreign and 1079 Venezuelan students.

However, since 2006 a dramatic reduction in the participation of Latin American and Caribbean students has taken place, as well as that of foreign professors. Despite 13 courses and two events having been organized, only 38 professors and 63 students came from abroad, while 68 professors and 523 students from Venezuela attended. The decline in the participation of professors and students from other countries has become even more notorious after 2012 due to the crisis in the sale of international airline tickets in Venezuela, resulting in the fact that CLAB's organization of international events has been practically null. This sets an alarm, as it can be observed how the Venezuelan students and teachers in this scientific field are isolating themselves from the rest of the world and, if we consider that the reason for the existence of CLAB is to provide a learning space for Latin Americans and Caribbean biologists, the problem does affect all of us in the region. In the specific case of Venezuela, if the current difficulties in the access to scientific journals and in the acquisition of the needed supplies necessary to carry out research are added, it can be expected that in the forthcoming years the scientific production in the country will continue to drop dramatically.

CLAB has fulfilled since its beginnings its purpose of promoting cooperation amongst Latin American and Caribbean countries and the teaching of biological sciences. 4,108 people have participated in its activities, coming from over 30 countries around the world. Nevertheless, at the moment, its future is uncertain due to the ever growing difficulties to invite foreign professors and students to Venezuela

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