Venezuela has been at the forefront of sweeping changes in Latin America. Its Bolivarian Revolution heralded in a transformative decade that propelled millions of Venezuelans out of poverty, and inspired other democratic revolutions throughout the continent. Today's Latin America looks nothing like it did 15 years ago: tens of millions of citizens have unprecedented access to education, health care, and dignified housing.

What was the weapon of mass transformation that unleashed these massive changes? The ballot box.

On December 6th Venezuelans return to the ballot box to elect representatives to their National Assembly. These elections will occur at a critical moment. Venezuelans are standing in long lines to obtain food and basic supplies, due - in large part - to an economic war waged by those who have long sought to unlawfully topple the Bolivarian government. Adding to the drama is the plunging global price of oil –over 90% of Venezuela's income - generating an economic crisis along with a dialogue about the nation’s dependency on oil extraction.

This time the ballot box offers new choices that somewhat shake up the 16-year political divide. Landmark decisions by the ruling PSUV party and the National Electoral Board will result in many more youth and women candidates on the ballots. There will also be some options that mix and match political ideals, a sign of the Venezuelan democracy’s ability to evolve and respond to the times.

International witnesses will again play a critical role in these elections given the aggressive attitude of mainstream media towards Venezuela. The presence of US citizens is especially important, given recent economic sanctions imposed by the Obama Administration that label Venezuela as an unusual and extraordinary threat to the US. This position - deemed ridiculous by the rest of the world - is seen by some as part of US efforts to place Venezuela as the new regional “bad guy” to replace Cuba.

Delegates will meet with political parties, election officials, media and social movements in Caracas. They will travel to the state of Lara to witness elections and will also visit communities to learn about Venezuela’s social missions in areas such as education, agriculture, housing, music and health care, They will also meet with local grassroots democratic organizations such as community councils and communes.

Lisa Sullivan, a 30-year resident of Venezuela, will lead the delegation, and will be joined by TFA staff who have made numerous visits to Venezuela over the past decade. The delegation fee of $1,000 includes all lodging, three meals a day, in-country transportation, snacks, water, translation and materials. It does not include airfare to and from Venezuela. Participants should book their own flights and plan to arrive by the evening of December 2 and leave any time on December 10.

An optional add-on trip will be offered to Los Roques archipelago for a cost of $500. These participants should book their return to the US for December 13. Just 80 miles from the Venezuela’s main port, Los Roques consists of hundreds of tiny islands and cays surrounding a central lagoon. Bursting with bio-diversity, its pristine coral reefs, mangroves, and seagrass beds are rich in a wide variety of seabirds and aquatic life. Activities include snorkeling, diving, birding, paddling, fishing, and windsurfing. There are no cars on the islands, only the beauty of nature. The fee of $500 includes round trip flight from Caracas to the main island, lodging, breakfast and dinner.

For more information please contact Teri Mattson at Teri.Mattson@yahoo.com