

Living Testimony to Enduring Struggle

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Ollanta Humala's government in July, and says she's determined to end the discrimination that has long made second-class citizens, not just of blacks, but also of Peru's indigenous people.

Baca has been Peru's de facto ambassador to the rest of the world for more than two decades, a musical anthropologist and a chanteuse who seduces audiences with her velvet voice and barefoot dancing.

popular Cabinet minister, with a 62 percent approval rating.

To be sure, endearment is Baca's style, and she's already begun employing it to try to boost the \$30 million annual budget of a ministry that is just eight months old. She's a slight woman careful not just with her words but also her enunciation.

"I am the beggar minister" is how she put it to Peru's finance minister, Baca was quoted by a Lima newspaper as saying. "I don't even have leather for my tambourine."

dancing at band concerts on Chorrillos' promenade.

Most of the region's 155 million descendants of African slaves are jobless or eke out a living by working in the informal sector, according to organizers of the first U.N.-sponsored Summit of Afro-Descendants held in Honduras last month.

The estimated 100,000 African slaves brought to Peru toiled in sugar plantations and silver mines, with some becoming urban artisans. At one point, they and their descendants were more than 40 percent of Lima's population.

Blacks now amount to less than a tenth of Peru's 29 million people. Yet socially, they've barely advanced in the 157 years since emancipation.

They "have always lived in misery because they never had access to property," said prominent Afro-Peruvian academic Jose Campos, a dean at the National Education University from which both he and Baca graduated.



Peru's Culture Minister and singer Susana Baca dances during a benefit concert. Baca, 67, is living testimony to Afro-Peruvians' enduring struggle, and she is determined to end the discrimination that made second-class citizens, not just of blacks, but also of Peru's indigenous population.

"I am the symbol of inclusion," said Baca in her Lima home. "I don't hate the people who segregated us, who punished us, who hurt us. I just don't want anyone else in our country to go through what I did."

Baca is known among world music fans for her soulful, inventively phrased interpretations of centuries-old rhythms, lyrics and dances. Her earthiness distances her from Peru's widely discredited political class.

A recent Ipsos Apoyo poll showed Baca to be Peru's most

Baca grew up in Lima's seaside Chorrillos neighborhood but her clan hails from Canete, where black field workers today earn little more than \$5 a day picking cotton and corn.

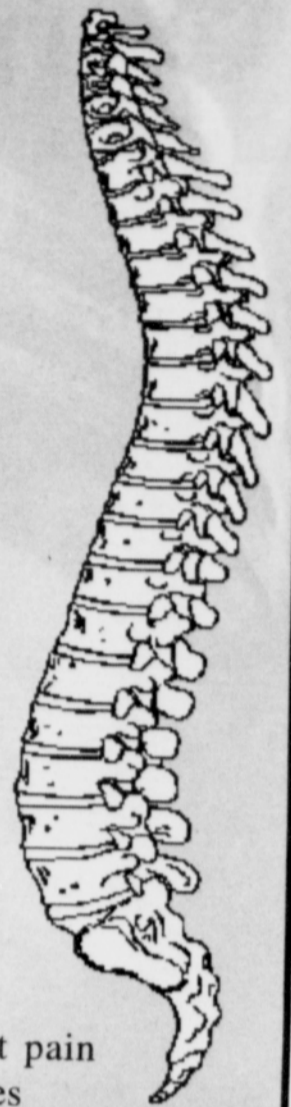
Thanks to the perseverance of Baca's mother, who raised three children cooking and washing clothes for Lima's wealthy, she's among the estimated 2 percent of Afro-Peruvians with a post-secondary education.

The lot of Latin America's blacks has improved little since Baca, as a girl of five or six, earned her first tips

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