

Homeward Bound

Caracas, 22<sup>nd</sup> Abril 2017

Dear Homeward Bound:

Since the first time I heard about Homeward Bound I was convinced it was an initiative I wanted to join. Born in Venezuela, the nation with the biggest oil reserve in the planet, and also the Latin America country with the greatest greenhouse emissions per capita I have witnessed the effects of human activities on ecosystems on a daily basis. I am aware of the need to change the way we use natural resources, and the need to empower researchers with tools to influence decision making and actions. Homeward Bound is an initiative that I believe can make this change, therefore I am committing 100% of my time to raise the funds needed to finance my participation in the programme.

I have successfully created a crowdfunding campaign, that has been shared 923 times in social media and visited by 1,702 people. I have written a personal email to 200 contacts (close friend and family). As a result of this campaign I have received 83 donations for a total of US\$ 3,256. In order to booster my campaign, this week I have sent the first Newsletter about my participation in Homeward Bound to all my donors. Thanks to my campaign in social media, Jessica Giannotti, another beautiful Venezuelan heard about my participation in HB. Jessica is the founder of Crubag (<http://www.crubag.co.uk/>), a company that produces sustainable textiles with integrated science outreach. Crubag offered to donate part of the sales of their HB collection produced in collaboration with Raeanne Miller (HB2016 alumni) to my crowdfunding campaign.

I have had 26 interviews in national (Tv: 2, Radio: 13, Newspaper: 3, webpages: 5 and 1 more to be published), and international (webpages: 1 and one more to be published next week) media. Thanks to the great media coverage I have received, I am already recognized as a leader in Climate Change in my country. However, interviews have resulted only in 2 donations that in total added AU\$ 100 to my campaign. The failure of getting donations from people that have listened or read my interviews in Venezuela is the consequence of the currency exchange control established in 2003 by the Venezuelan government. This exchange control seriously limits Venezuelans to obtain any kind of foreign currency. Simultaneously with the exchange control, the government established a fix price for foreign currencies, which are only accessible for governmental dependencies. I know that for anybody not living in this country it is hard to understand what an exchange control is and how it works, so I will try to explain it in a simple way. Without the approval of the government we cannot buy any foreign currency with our own money (Bolívares, <http://econ.st/2p1m53s>). Until five years ago we still could get approval from the government to buy foreign currencies if they were going to be used for education purposes, however this exception was eliminated in 2012. As consequence of the exchange control a black market started, where foreign currencies are sold illegally at prices that are up to 600% higher than the price established by the government (<http://wapo.st/2oyzkGX>). This has resulted in Venezuela having the highest inflation in the world (800% for 2016 <http://cnb.cx/2p1jt5x>), which means that something you bought in January last year costed 800 times more in December. In summary, Venezuelan's cannot contribute to my crowdfunding campaign, and if they do, it has to be in Bolívares which I will need to exchange illegally in the black market, an action I am not willing to do.

In addition to my crowdfunding campaign I started searching for grants. For the majority of grants, I cannot apply because I do not meet their selection criteria: i) I am not an employee or student at a University or Research Institute, ii) for most of the grants funds can only be used for developing a project not covering travel expenses, iii) grants are region specific, been Venezuela excluded from them. So far, I have applied to one grant that can cover US\$ 1.000, and have two more in the list to which I will apply in the next following weeks, which can fund US\$ 2,000. I have also contacted several potential donors i.e., government representatives in Venezuela (British Embassy, French Embassy, German Embassy, Canadian Embassy, United States Embassy, European Union, ONU Women Programme), and private companies (Movistar-Telefonica: biggest cell phone provider in my country, CAF: Development Bank of Latin America, BID: Inter-American Development Bank). All these institutions have refused to collaborate with my crowdfunding campaign for two reasons: 1) they also have restrictions to access foreign currencies in Venezuela, 2) they do not fund individuals, tuitions or travel expenses.

I have already contacted all my family, friends, colleagues, and several private companies and institutions in Venezuela that could potentially invest in my campaign, and I still need to raise US\$ 12.744. I was anxiously waiting for the fundraising toolkit of Homeward Bound, to see if I could find new ideas on how to collect that amount of money needed. I was expecting to find potential grants or scholarships I could apply, since they seem to be the only option for me, as I depend on international donations as explained above. Although the recommendations given in the toolkit are excellent for developed countries and for women associated to an Institution, they do not apply to developing countries, unemployed women working in STEM like myself, and much less to Venezuela. I am aware that I am in position that is a mix of several limitations, but this is also the reality of many more women in the world than what we are aware of.

Organizing movie nights, wine and cheese events or dinners where I could charge an entrance, introduce myself to the community and explain Homeward Bound and my research is definitely not an option in Venezuela. I live in Caracas, the capital of the country and also the most violent city in the world (<http://bit.ly/21kdkwN>). This translates into people not attending social events at night or going to places like cinemas where entire movie rooms have been kidnapped for couple of hours and people stolen and murdered. Besides, Venezuela is facing a humanitarian crisis due to a lack of food and medicine as a consequence of the economic and political system established by the government 18 years ago. This means that several food items (i.e. rice, flour, sugar, bread, pasta, coffee, milk, toilet paper, tooth paste, among many others) are not available in the supermarket (<http://bit.ly/2p1iAtP>), but can be found in the black market for overblown prices (<http://bit.ly/2oSTXRH>). This has had a direct effect on the diet of the population and also on the way we socialize; meetings are not something people can afford to organize, cost or attend. Furthermore, we also have frequent water, power and internet shortcuts (you may have notice that my internet connection during the monthly calls always fails, <http://nyti.ms/2pNcw89>), which also limits the organization of gatherings. Given the situation of lack and medicine and food (<http://nyti.ms/2p0XXxV>), most organizations are dedicated to crowdfunding campaigns to give assistance and support for the more needed ones (<http://ab.co/2ovw140>).

Moreover, the situation of the country during the last month has been unstable. We have had massive demonstrations of the community demanding elections and the return of democracy (<http://nbcnews.to/2pgLpW6>). This has affected my campaign in the media (one Tv interview cancelled), and also a free forum in commemoration of Earth Day. The forum was organized for 80 attendants of the local community which we know could have potential interest of supporting my crowdfunding campaign (due to their access to foreign currencies since most of them had bank account overseas). This Forum was being organized by myself with the support of Movistar and 5 women working on successful projects on climate change in Venezuelan. The idea of the forum was to discuss what climate change is, why is it important to take action, present positive stories about successful projects lead by women in Venezuela, and explain what HB is and highlight the importance of my participation.

I am writing this letter to Homeward Bound in order to explain my, which is not easy to explain or understand. I would like to know if I could apply to one of the 10 scholarships Homeward Bound is going to give to women in developing countries. If this is not an option, I would like to have advice from HB on what should I do next, since at the moment I have no idea on what should be my next strategy to find funds. I am aware that many HB alumni complain about the amount of money that needs to be raised to participate in Homeward Bound. However, I think my situation is atypical and that there must be alternatives to guarantee my participation in HB.

In addition to all the facts explained above I wanted to mention that both my husband and myself are currently unemployed since we arrived to Venezuela last September from Australia. I have applied already to 20 jobs-postdoc positions overseas, having been shortlisted and interviewed already for 5, but so far none of them has resulted in a positive answer. We both could get research positions at Universities or Research Institutes in Venezuela, however the monthly salary will be equal to US\$ 10 plus \$US 30 in tickets to buy food. Neither my husband or myself have a health insurance, since we cannot afford to pay for a private one, and the public health system of the country is not reliable (<http://nyti.ms/2odAnAB>). At the moment, we are living at my aunt's house where we don't have to pay rent. We are living on our savings from Australia which we only use to buy food. Selling a property to get money for HB is not an option since nobody in my close family (parents, sister, husband) owns a property or a car, and the credit that I could get from my bank is equivalent to US\$12. I look forward to discussing details and options for my participation in HB in a Zoom meeting with Hayley and/or Fabian. I want to make clear that although all the difficulties I am facing, I am not going to give up on HB. I am going to be one of 2018 alumni no matter what. Willing to hear back from HB soon. Best regards,



Adriana Humanes Schumann