

Higgins to make historic visits next month

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**Michael D Higgins is to become the first serving Irish president to visit Peru, Colombia and Cuba.**

He will undertake the three country visit in February, after Áras an Uachtaráin confirmed he accepted the invitations.

Mr Higgins made the announcement as he opened an exhibition on 'The Irish in Latin America', celebrating the role of Irish men and women in the development of the modern and independent republics of Latin America.

President Higgins, who is patron of the Society for Irish Latin American Studies (SILAS), spoke of the deep and extensive scholarship that currently exists on the relationship between Ireland and Latin America.

He also highlighted our shared history of colonialism, subsequent independence and revolutionary struggles.

He will pay an official visit to Peru, at the invitation of President Pedro Pablo Kuczynski, before going on to meet senior members of the Peruvian government.

The president will deliver a keynote address on issues of indigeneity and the contribution of Roger Casement to human rights in the Putamayo region of the country.

While the Peruvian president has indicated he will be awarding President Higgins with the Gran Collar of the Order of the Sun - Peru's highest honour.

In Colombia, he will meet with President Juan Manuel Santos and hold discussions on the background to the peace process in Colombia.

President Higgins will also have meetings with participants involved in the peace process - and deliver a keynote address on peace, reconciliation and ethical remembering.

The president will then travel to Havana at the invitation of President Raúl Castro.

He will attend the Havana International Book Fair - one of the largest book fairs in the world, which Ireland will participate in for the first time.

Mr Higgins will attend the launch the Cuban edition of 'Star of the Sea' by Irish author Joseph O'Connor, along with the Cuban Culture Minister Abel Prieto.

He has also been invited to deliver his keynote address at the University of Havana, and will formally open the Cuban launch of the Irish in Latin American exhibition.

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