

**CIFAL MIAMI CENTER**

**EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS AND  
MANAGEMENT WORKSHOP**

**October 7 & 8, 2025**

**SPEAKERS BIOGRAPHIES**



**Elizabeth M. Béjar, PhD,**  
**Provost**

***Executive Vice President***

***and Chief Operating Officer***

***Florida International University (FIU)***

**Elizabeth Béjar, Ph.D.** serves as Provost, Executive Vice President, and Chief Operating Officer at Florida International University (FIU), where she provides oversight and strategic direction for more than 56,000 students, 2,000 faculty, 11 colleges, and 30 institutes. As the university's chief academic officer, she leads a team of academic deans and senior staff in advancing FIU's bold vision to become a top 30 public university in research excellence and student success. In her dual role as CAO and COO, she oversees the university's \$1.45 billion annual budget, aligning academic priorities with operational excellence.

Dr. Béjar has served as principal investigator on several major grants, including a study of minority-serving institutions' models of success and a \$2 million U.S. Department of Labor grant focused on building the cybersecurity workforce of the future. Under her leadership, FIU also secured a \$975,000 U.S. Department of Education grant to expand financial wellness programming and re-enroll students who paused their studies during the pandemic or were at risk of stopping out.



**Maricarmen Estrada**

*Director CIFAL Miami Center*

*Senior Program Director*

*Outreach Aid to the Americas (OAA)*

**Maricarmen Estrada** is an accomplished international development and emergency preparedness professional with over three decades of experience in program management, humanitarian assistance, and disaster resilience. She currently serves as UNITAR Associated Fellow and Director of CIFAL Miami, providing leadership to the International Training Centre for Authorities and Leaders (CIFAL) Miami and supporting UNITAR's Social Development Program by enhancing capacity-building initiatives and advancing the center's growth and impact.

Since 2016, Maricarmen has been Senior Program Director and Monitoring & Evaluation Specialist at Outreach Aid to the Americas (OAA), leading the Community and Ports Disaster Preparedness and Resiliency Program (C-PReP), which has trained over 1,500 individuals and engaged 185 airports and ports across 20+ countries. She manages U.S. federal and private-funded projects in complex environments, including a \$4.5 million humanitarian program in Cuba, and oversees monitoring, evaluation, and learning efforts for USG-funded programs totaling over \$15 million.

Previously, she held multiple roles with USAID/EI Salvador, directing regional projects in health, rule of law, and governance, including initiatives addressing migration, community development, and crime prevention across Central America. Maricarmen holds a bachelor's in business administration (Magna Cum Laude) and has received extensive training in project management, monitoring, and evaluation. Her work has earned multiple USAID awards recognizing her leadership, innovation, and excellence in crisis response and program delivery.

**Speaker**



**Robert Jorge, MPA**

*Senior Director of the Academy for International  
Disaster Preparedness (AIDP)*

*Florida International University (FIU)*

**Robert M. Jorge** is Director of the Division of Operations and Security and the Academy for International Disaster Preparedness at Florida International University (FIU), representing CIFAL Miami. He has more than three decades of leadership experience with the Miami City Fire Department and Miami Dade College. He has served as Deputy Fire Chief and brings expertise spanning Emergency Incident Management, Emergency Medical Services (EMS), and academic program development. He has collaborated with local, state, and federal agencies during most of the major local disasters that have occurred over the past 30 years.

With a strong track record in leadership, administration, and collaboration across sectors, he leads the Division of Operations and Safety and the Academy for International Disaster Preparedness.



**Annette Flores**

**Assistant Director of the Department of Emergency**

**Management**

**Florida International University (FIU)**

Meet **Annette Flores**, a dedicated emergency management professional with a relentless commitment to advancing emergency planning, training, and preparedness. She currently serves as the Assistant Director of the Department of Emergency Management at Florida International University (FIU) and is a proud two-time FIU graduate.

With a strong foundation in emergency preparedness, response, and recovery, Annette has refined her expertise in developing and reviewing emergency and continuity of operations plans, facilitating trainings and exercises, and leading FIU's successful reaccreditation through the Emergency Management Accreditation Program (EMAP), reinforcing the university's commitment to national standards of excellence. She also leverages emerging technologies to strengthen emergency management capabilities and ensure the university's readiness for all hazards.

In addition to her role in emergency management, Annette serves as a First-Year Experience professor, where she helps guide and mentor new students as they transition into the university community.

## **Speaker**



### **Pete Gomez**

**Director**

**Department of Emergency Management**

**Miami-Dade County**

Pete Gomez is the Director of the Department of Emergency Management for Miami-Dade County. He is a highly motivated and enthusiastic Public Safety professional with a current specialty in the field of Emergency Management. With over 40 years of Public Safety experience, Pete brings a very well-rounded perspective and wealth of experience to any organization. A dynamic leader with great people skills allows him to work closely with all disciplines as well as the private sector and non-governmental organizations. Pete joined the public sector as a Police Officer in the City of Hialeah in 1983 and worked there until 1985 when he joined the Miami Fire Department. Previously, as a member of the Miami Fire Department,

He was proactive in becoming certified in many of the special response areas such as the Dive Team, Hazardous Materials Team, and the Urban Search and Rescue Team (USAR). Pete has held the ranks of Lieutenant, Captain, Executive Assistant to the Fire Chief and held the rank of Assistant Chief of the Division of Emergency Management, with the responsibility of being the City's Emergency Manager. His last assignment was the Chief of the Training Divisions in charge of all recruit training as well as all in-service training for the fire department. Prior to the joining Miami-Dade County he also served as the Senior Director for the Academy for International Disaster Preparedness at FIU.

As the Assistant Chief of Emergency Management, Pete was the administrator of the Department of Homeland Security's Urban Area Security Initiative (UASI) which brings millions of dollars into the South Florida region for the purpose of homeland Security. The Urban Search and Rescue Team is one of the 28 Federally funded Teams that respond to disasters nationally as well as internationally such as the World Trade Center collapse and the recent earthquake in Haiti, the response to Florence and most recently, the Pan Handle of Florida for hurricane Michael. He was a member of the State of Florida's Domestic Oversight Council, Executive Board, Co-Chair of the Special Response Teams Coordinating Group and belongs to the Regional Domestic Security Task Force. Pete was one of the founding committee members of the City of Miami's Sea Level Rise Committee.

Pete received an Associate of Arts degree from Miami Dade Community College and his Bachelor's degree from St. Thomas University in Fire Science Management. He received his Master's degree from American Military University graduating Cum Laude with a 3.975 GPA.

Being married to his wife Denise of 35 years, Pete has a 32-year-old son that graduated from Florida State University and a 29-year-old daughter who also graduated from FSU with her bachelor's degree and a Master in Business Administration from FIU



**Kerri Knox**

**Associate Management Consulting**

**Arup**

**Kerri Knox**, a certified CBCP, serves as a leader within Arup's Management Consulting team, specialising in operational readiness and business continuity. She oversees projects involving people, operations, and technology, with experience in incident-specific and enterprise-level coordination and planning. Working with clients to understand their business requirements and objectives, Kerri manages projects according to the ten professional practices outlined by Business Continuity CBCP guidelines. She designs and facilitates stakeholder engagements across multiple departments or agencies, ensuring the alignment of project goals and deliverables, and collaborates with colleagues from various technical backgrounds to advise and implement strategies. Kerri holds a Master of Interdisciplinary Studies from Royal Roads University, integrating coursework from the MBA programme and the Master of Emergency and Disaster Management to deepen her expertise in business resilience and continuity planning.

**Speaker**



**Stephanie Mendoza Berríos, C.M.**

**Airport Director**

**Emergency Management**

**Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport**

**Stephanie Mendoza Berríos** is the Airport Director of the Emergency Management IOC at the Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport, where she leads the development of the future Integrated Operations Center (IOC), a state-of-the-art hub designed to centralize coordination across airside, landside, facilities, security, ground transportation, and traffic management. While still under development, the IOC is envisioned to resolve incidents at the lowest operational level possible, creating a seamless escalation model from the Airport Operations Center to the IOC and, when necessary, to the Emergency Operations Center. Under her leadership, the IOC is advancing toward a FIFA-ready posture, establishing the foundation for a new level of situational awareness and a common operating picture critical for large-scale events.

As an Aviation Sciences Management graduate, Stephanie's aviation career began at the Luis Muñoz Marín International Airport in San Juan, Puerto Rico, where her internship laid the foundation for her passion in emergency management. There, she supported compliance exercises and developed a visual annex for the Airport Emergency Plan, sparking a trajectory that has blended operations, emergency preparedness, and business acumen. She progressed through roles in administration, maintenance, and operations, earning her Airport Operations Diploma and certification as a Planning Section Chief. Expanding into airport real estate and contract coordination, she became a Certified Manager of Commercial Properties, gaining critical experience in lease management and tenant negotiations.

Her career has since taken her to leadership roles at Tweed New Haven Airport, where she became certified as an Aircraft Rescue and Firefighting (ARFF) responder and participated in her third full-scale exercise. She later moved to Atlanta, where she has managed the Emergency Operations Center, overseen training and exercise programs, and spearheaded the design and live testing of the IOC. She also holds the Certified Member designation from the American Association of Airport Executives and multiple certifications across operations, emergency response, and preparedness. Throughout her journey, Stephanie has demonstrated a commitment to innovation, collaboration, and operational excellence, positioning her as a leader in shaping the next generation of airport emergency management and integrated operations.

**Speaker**



**Carla Hanson**

**Former Manager of Emergency Planning for  
Vancouver International Airport**

**Carla Hanson** spent 21 years at Vancouver International Airport, managing emergencies and planning for major events like the Olympics. She served as EOC Director for nine years and pursued a Master's in Disaster and Emergency Management. In 2023, she joined Surrey Schools to develop an emergency management program and became a part-time instructor at the Justice Institute of BC.

Carla Hanson dedicated 21 years to responding to and planning for emergencies at Vancouver International Airport. She began her career in 2002 as a scribe in the emergency operations centre, eventually taking on roles such as incident commander and various EOC positions. For about nine years, Carla served as the EOC Director, where she managed numerous emergencies and business continuity events, including full baggage system failures and a plane crash. When she wasn't managing emergencies, she was leading a diverse team of operational specialists, planning major transitions of technology and systems, or preparing for significant events like the Olympics on behalf of the airport.

Driven by a passion for improving emergency response and recovery, Carla pursued a Master's degree in Disaster and Emergency Management at Royal Roads University. Her thesis focused on how the Kwantlen First Nation manages the risk of spring freshet on the Fraser River. Transitioning to an emergency planning focus at the airport, she trained hundreds of people in EOC operations, led major emergency exercises, and spearheaded the airport's pandemic response.

In 2023, Carla left the airport and joined Surrey Schools to develop an emergency management program for the largest school district in the province. With a passion for helping others succeed in the face of disaster, she also joined the Justice Institute of BC as a part-time instructor in the emergency management division. In her spare time, Carla is a mother to an 8-year-old, lives on a farm with 16 goats, 3 cats, and a beloved dog, and is active in the local Rotary Club.

**Speaker**



**Jeanette M. Nuñez**

**President**

**Florida International University (FIU)**

**Mrs. Jeanette M. Nuñez** is the President of Florida International University. The FIU Board of Trustees voted unanimously to name Mrs. Nuñez as the university's seventh president. Her presidency was confirmed by the Florida Board of Governors on June 18, 2025.

Prior to her appointment, Mrs. Nuñez served as Florida's Lieutenant Governor. She was first elected in 2018 and subsequently re-elected in 2022. Mrs. Nuñez oversaw the Florida Department of Health and served as Chair of Space Florida, Florida's Cybersecurity Advisory Council, and the Health Care Innovation Council. She was reappointed as Chair of the Space Florida Board of Directors on February 17, 2025.

Before her tenure as Lieutenant Governor, Mrs. Nuñez served as a State Representative of the Florida House of Representatives from 2010 to 2018. She held several positions such as Speaker Pro Tempore and Vice Chair of the Appropriations Committee, as well as Chair of the Select Committee on Hurricane Response and Preparedness following Hurricane Irma. In addition, she served as Chair of the Health Quality Subcommittee, Government Operations and Technology Appropriations Subcommittee, and Higher Education and Workforce Subcommittee.

Over the years, Mrs. Nuñez has served on a number of professional boards and as a member of various organizations. She has been involved with the Greater Miami Chamber of Commerce, Leadership Miami, and various other local, state and national organizations.

In addition to her extensive experience in public service, Mrs. Nuñez has contributed to the academic community as an adjunct professor and guest lecturer at Florida International University.

Mrs. Nuñez is a proud FIU alumna. She earned her Bachelor of Arts in International Relations and Political Science and her Master of Public Administration from Florida International University.



**Dr. Patricia Ryan**  
**Training Director and**  
**Assistant Director**  
**CIFAL Miami Center**

**Dr. Patricia Ryan** was staff at Daytona Beach International Airport, Richmond International Airport, Washoe County Airport Authority, and Miami Dade Aviation Department which oversaw 5 airports including Miami International Airport. She was responsible for all commercial operations, all airport properties, implementing the airport's strategies, assisting with public relations and communications for all events (including emergencies) including the Command Center assisting with logistics and recovery:

Dr. Ryan has consulted with over 130 airports and governments all over the world. Over the past ten years, Dr. Ryan has developed and delivered workshops in the Caribbean and Latin America for airports and ports on disaster preparation and conducted table-top exercises. She was a consultant delivering these workshops for the past eight years with Outreach Aid to the Americas (OAA). OAA is the prime organization partnering with Florida International University to create CIFAL Miami Center. As Director of Aviation for CIFAL, Dr. Ryan assists with developing educational opportunities for the United States and the Caribbean.

She is a former professor and Dean of Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University.

**Speaker**



**Jimmy Morales**

*Chief Operating Officer*

*Miami Dade County*

**Jimmy L. Morales** serves as the Chief Operating Officer (COO) for Miami-Dade County, a position he has held since December 2020 under the administration of Mayor Daniella Levine Cava. In this capacity, he provides strategic oversight of several critical county departments, including Aviation, Seaport, Transportation and Public Works, and Water and Sewer. His role encompasses managing large-scale infrastructure projects, enhancing operational efficiency, and driving innovation across the county's public services.

A Miami Beach native, Morales brings a wealth of experience to his current role. Prior to his tenure as COO, he served as the City Manager of Miami Beach, where he led the city through significant challenges, including the COVID-19 pandemic. His leadership was instrumental in navigating the city's response to the crisis and implementing measures to ensure public health and safety.

Morales holds a law degree from Harvard Law School and has a background in public service that includes serving as a District 7 Commissioner on the Miami-Dade County Commission from 1996 to 2004. During his time on the Commission, he chaired the Budget and Finance Committee and the Mayor's Task Force on Efficiency and Competition, demonstrating his commitment to fiscal responsibility and government efficiency.

Beyond his professional achievements, Morales is deeply involved in community service. He has held leadership positions with several prominent organizations, including the Miami Beach Chamber of Commerce and Autism Speaks, reflecting his dedication to civic engagement and public welfare.

In his personal life, Morales is married to Dori Foster-Morales, with whom he has two children. His longstanding ties to the Miami area underscore his commitment to the community he serves.



**Ralph Cutié**

*CEO and Airport Director*

*Miami Dade County Aviation*

*Miami International Airport (MIA)*

**Ralph Cutié** serves as the Director and Chief Executive Officer of Miami International Airport (MIA), a position he has held since September 2021. With over 30 years of experience in public service, Cutié has dedicated his career to enhancing the efficiency and global competitiveness of Miami-Dade County's aviation infrastructure.

Prior to his appointment as CEO, Cutié served as the Assistant Director for Facilities Management and Engineering at the Miami-Dade Aviation Department. In this role, he managed a team of over 440 employees and oversaw a substantial operating budget, demonstrating his capability in large-scale infrastructure management. His leadership was instrumental during the COVID-19 pandemic, where he prioritized health and safety measures, leading MIA to become the first airport in Florida and the second in the U.S. to receive Airports Council International's Airport Health Accreditation.

Under Cutié's leadership, MIA has embarked on a transformative \$9 billion capital improvement program aimed at modernizing facilities, expanding capacity, and enhancing the passenger experience. This initiative includes upgrades to terminals, baggage systems, and the introduction of advanced technologies to streamline operations. His strategic vision has positioned MIA as the fastest-growing hub airport in the United States post-pandemic.

Cutié's commitment to excellence has been recognized within the industry. In 2024, he was honored as the "Best Airport Industry Leader" by FXExpress Publications, publisher of Global Traveler magazine. Additionally, MIA received accolades for "Best Family-Friendly Domestic Airport" and "Favorite Airport Shopping," reflecting the comprehensive improvements made under his guidance.

A Miami native, Cutié holds a bachelor's degree in business administration from Florida International University. His leadership philosophy emphasizes respect, collaboration, and a relentless focus on operational excellence, ensuring that MIA continues to serve as a vital gateway for international trade and travel.

**Speaker**



**Branson P. Rector MPA, MS**

*Strategic Logistics &*

*Disaster Response Consultant*

**Branson Rector** is a dynamic and results-driven Strategic Logistics and Disaster Response Consultant with a proven track record of leading complex supply chain operations, optimizing logistics strategies, and driving resilience in high-pressure environments. With extensive experience in logistics planning, crisis management, and emergency preparedness, he specializes in designing innovative solutions that ensure operational continuity and mitigate risks during critical situations.

As a trusted advisor to organizations across government, non-government and the private sector, he brings a unique blend of strategic vision and hands-on expertise to help clients navigate the challenges of global supply chains, disaster recovery, and humanitarian logistics. His approach combines data-driven decision-making, cross-functional collaboration, and a deep understanding of risk management to deliver tailored solutions that enhance efficiency, reduce costs, and build long-term resilience.

Key achievements include:

- Leading large-scale disaster response logistics efforts for the Department of Defense ensuring timely delivery of critical resources under tight deadlines.
- Developing and implementing end-to-end supply chain strategies that improved operational efficiency across multiple commodities.
- Advising organizations on crisis preparedness and continuity planning, resulting in enhanced readiness and reduced downtime during emergencies.

A catalyst that builds strong partnerships, inspires teams, and drives transformation, Branson is passionate about helping organizations achieve their goals while maintaining agility in the face of uncertainty. Whether optimizing supply chains, managing disaster recovery efforts, or advising on strategic logistics planning, he delivers measurable results that make a lasting impact.

**Speaker**



**Dr. Ali Asgary**

*Director CIFAL York*

*York University*

**Ali Asgary** is a disaster and emergency management professor at York University, Toronto, Canada. His research portfolio encompasses a broad spectrum of critical areas, including business continuity and risk assessment, advanced disaster simulations and modeling, the integration of emerging technologies (AI, VR, AR, MR, drones, and GIS) for enhanced disaster response, post-disaster recovery and reconstruction, and decision-making under conditions of risk and uncertainty.

Professor Asgary has conducted extensive research and simulations across various natural, technological, and human-made disasters, with particular expertise in the aviation sector. His leadership and collaborative efforts have resulted in numerous research projects supported by prominent agencies, including NSERC, GEOIDE, SSHRC, PreCarn, CIHR, NFRF, ORF, Transport Canada, Public Safety Canada, Wellcome Trust, IDRC, and DRDC. His scholarly contributions are reflected in publications within leading disaster and emergency management journals, such as the *International Journal of Business Continuity and Risk Management*, *Disasters*, *International Journal of Disaster Risk Reduction*, *International Journal of Disaster Science*, *Disaster Prevention and Management*, *Environmental Hazards*, *International Journal of Emergency Management*, *Transportation Research Record*, *The Police Journal*, *Journal of Contingencies and Crisis Management*, and the *International Journal of Emergency Services*, among others.

A pioneer in disaster and emergency management education, Professor Asgary served as a founding faculty member of Canada's inaugural university program in this field at Brandon University in 2003 and subsequently played a pivotal role in establishing the Disaster & Emergency Management programs at York University in 2005. He has also demonstrated significant leadership within the professional community, serving as President of IAEM-Canada and a member of the IAEM Global Board from 2007 to 2009. Since 2015, Professor Asgary has served as the Executive Director of York University's Advanced Disaster, Emergency and Rapid-response Simulation (ADERSIM) and, since 2021, as the inaugural Director of CIFAL York.

**Speaker**



**Eric Lipp**

*President*

*Open Doors Organization*

**Eric Lipp** founded Open Doors Organization (ODO) in 2000, after personally experiencing the restrictions that people with disabilities face in everyday life. He has co-authored 5 groundbreaking Harris Polls on travelers with disabilities and works with the world's largest travel related companies. He has worked on numerous TRB and ACRP aviation contracts as well as FHWA and ATTRI initiatives. He was appointed to the U.S. Travel and Tourism Advisory Board in 2021 and again in 2025. Since 2018 he has been a member of the Aviation Security Advisory Committee (ASAC) for the TSA. He sits on numerous advisory boards in travel and tourism including Alaska Airlines, Portland International Airport, Royal Caribbean and United Airlines to name a few. He presents at dozens of travel and tourism events every year and is considered a leader in accessible transportation and tourism over the past two decades.



**Matthew Shaw**

*Head of Accessibility Practice*

*Rick Hansen Foundation*

Born with a degenerative deafblind condition, **Matthew Shaw** is a recognized expert in accessibility legislation, policy and practice as tools to remove barriers and create economic and social value.

Life with a disability, he says, is not about courage in the face of adversity, but finding ways to live ingeniously. Matthew brings this philosophy to help governments, global brands, thinktanks, institutions and businesses across sectors and industries deliver strategies, spaces, products, and services that respond to their people and drive results that matter.

As Head, Accessibility Practice at the Rick Hansen Foundation, Matthew provides leadership counsel across functional teams to deliver on the foundation's mission create and deliver innovative solutions that accelerate a global movement to remove barriers to inclusion for people with disabilities. Previously, Matthew founded two consulting practices serving corporate, non-profit and public sector clients across North America. He has also held executive roles in Canada's charitable sector.

Matthew writes and speaks about disability and serves on various committees and boards, including Vice Chair of Accessibility Standards Canada, Chair of the Accessibility Standards Advisory Council for the province of Ontario, and Vice Chair of Canadian Blind Hockey, the fastest growing parasport in Canada.

His passion, insights and stories as a deafblind professional, husband and dad bring meaningful access to life for professional and casual audiences alike.

**Matthew Shaw**  
**Head, Accessibility**  
**Practice Rick Hansen**  
**Foundation**  
[mshaw@rickhansen.com](mailto:mshaw@rickhansen.com)



**Barbara Webster**

***Executive VP Americas***

***GoCrisis***

**Barbara Webster** is the Executive Vice President and Partner at GoCrisis, a global crisis management company specializing in commercial aviation response, family assistance, and business continuity. She has over three decades of international crisis management experience, including 25 years focused on aviation-related incidents and accidents, leading on-site operations and providing direct support to affected passengers, crew, and families.

Her work includes managing deployments worldwide for aircraft incidents and accidents, mass shootings, international repatriations, large-scale personal effects operations, building collapses, natural disasters, maritime incidents, and regional hurricane evacuations. She coordinates multidisciplinary response teams, develops operational protocols, oversees training programs, and works closely with airlines, governments, and international agencies to ensure effective crisis management and comprehensive support for impacted individuals and families.

Barbara is a citizen of both the United States and Canada and is based in Fort Lauderdale, Florida. She is a Founding Board Member and former Chair of AERO, the Aviation Emergency Response Organization, and has provided guidance to air carriers and airports globally. She is a frequent speaker at international conferences and symposia and has been a guest lecturer for graduate programs in emergency management at universities worldwide. She was also a recipient of an international humanitarian award for her response to a mass-fatality hotel explosion in Playa del Carmen, Mexico.

**Speaker**



**Chip Geiger**

*Procurement and Compliance Manager*

*Chicago Rockford International Airport*

**Chip Geiger**, currently serving as the Procurement and Compliance Manager of the Greater Rockford Airport Authority, in Rockford Illinois, Chip has 48 years of Supply Chain Management experience. Industries covered are the current public procurement management, aerospace and defense, agricultural manufacturing, thermal transfer, electronic controls, contract packaging, pharmaceuticals, and health care. He has achieved certifications from the National Institute of Government Purchasing, now NIGP; the Association of Healthcare Resource and Material Management; the Institute for Supply Management, now ISM; and the Association for Supply Chain Management, now ASCM. Chip enjoys volunteering for fun events, such as the Special Olympics, involved since the first one in 1968; International Olympic Games, such as the 1996 Atlanta Games and the 2016 Chicago Organizing Committee; Golf tournaments, such as the 2025 LPGA US Open, 2018 PGA Championship at Bellerive Country Club, US Opens at Erin Hills and Whistling Straits in Wisconsin; and Chelsea in America football club.

**Speaker**



**Estrella Merlos**

*Deputy Head*

*CIFAL Global Network, UNITAR*

Estrella Merlos serves as the Deputy Head of the CIFAL Global Network at the United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR), a position she has held since May 2013. In this capacity, she oversees and coordinates the network of International Training Centres for Authorities and Leaders (CIFALs) worldwide, focusing on enhancing capacity-building initiatives for local authorities and civil society leaders to promote sustainable development and foster international collaboration [jejuforum.or.kr](http://jejuforum.or.kr).

Previously, Ms. Merlos served as the Executive Director of UNITAR's training center in Atlanta, USA, where she played a pivotal role in implementing training programs aimed at strengthening governance and leadership capacities in the region [LinkedIn](#). Her work has involved collaborating with various governments, including those of El Salvador and Ecuador, to design and implement capacity-building programs for local authorities, thereby contributing significantly to public policy and international development efforts [virtualconferencevisionzero2020.sched.com](http://virtualconferencevisionzero2020.sched.com).

Ms. Merlos is also recognized for her leadership in initiatives such as the Road Safety Global Training Initiative, which aims to enhance road safety through training and capacity-building efforts [UNITAR](#). Additionally, she has been instrumental in the development and implementation of the Airports and Economic Development Global Training Program, a collaborative effort involving CIFAL Centres in Atlanta, Merida, Miami, Singapore, and York (Canada), aimed at empowering airport and aviation leaders to future-proof their operations and strengthen institutional resilience [UNITAR](#).

Throughout her career, Ms. Merlos has demonstrated a strong commitment to advancing sustainable development goals and enhancing the capacities of local authorities and civil society leaders worldwide. Her extensive experience and leadership continue to contribute to the success and expansion of the CIFAL Global Network's initiatives.