

JOINT COMMUNIQUÉ I REGIONAL CONFERENCE ON MIGRATION

A Regional Conference on Migration was held on March 13 and 14, 1996, in Puebla, Mexico, with the participation of the Governments of Belize, Canada, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama and the United States of America. The participating governments had a useful and productive dialogue and issued the following joint communiqué.

The governments recognized that the origins, expressions and effects of migration, including refugees, are important issues on the international community agenda. By and large, migration is a beneficial phenomenon with potential advantages for both countries of origin and countries of destination; however, in order for these benefits to be realized, it is essential that migration be orderly. Migration is a complex historical phenomenon. Large migratory flows have grown in recent years and result in part from asymmetries among economies and labor markets, political and social factors, natural disasters, environmental degradation, rapid population growth, barriers to trade and investment, and civil conflicts. In that respect the governments emphasized the need for reciprocal cooperation to promote economic growth and employment in order to reduce poverty.

The governments recognized national differences with respect to perceptions of the causes, dimensions and consequences of migration. They agreed that a comprehensive, objective and long-term approach to the origins, manifestations and effects of regional migration should contribute to a better understanding of the phenomenon, counteract anti-immigrant attitudes and enhance relations among participating States.

On the other hand, they also recognized the need to promote regional cooperation aimed at attenuating the structural factors that motivate migration in the region, without detriment to bilateral cooperation programs.

The governments recognized the sovereign right and legitimate interest of each country to safeguard its borders and to enforce its own migration laws, always observing strict respect for human rights of migrants, as defined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948 and other relevant international instruments, regardless of nationality, race, age, religion, gender or migratory status.

The participating governments agreed to:

1. Enhance the development and adoption of a comprehensive, objective and long-term approach to the regional migration phenomenon in order to address both its causes and its manifestations in an effective manner.
2. Promote a better understanding of the regional and international phenomenon of migration through specialized studies to identify and aid the implementation of measures designed to solve the problems inducing and stemming from it.
3. Promote the economic and social development of the region by fostering trade and productive investment, and implement economic and social policies as factors that, along with international cooperation, can help to address some of the causes of migration.
4. Acknowledge that migration can make a positive economic and cultural contribution both to countries of origin and countries of destination.

5. Condemn violations of the human rights of migrants and others, regardless of their migratory status, and strive towards the elimination of such violations. Particular attention shall be given to the special needs of women and children, including their protection when appropriate.
6. Encourage public awareness about the human rights of migrants as a means to promote respect for their dignity, to counteract anti-immigrant attitudes and to eradicate unlawful acts targeting migrants.
7. Promote regional and other forms of cooperation to establish programs to cover the basic needs of populations of undocumented migrants who are in the custody of migratory authorities in each country while their migratory status is being determined.
8. Recognize and encourage the work of non governmental organizations (NGOs) that develop assistance programs for migrants, which complement government efforts in this field.
9. Encourage States of the region, especially those with common borders, to promote mechanisms for consultation on migration issues and protection of the human rights of migrants between authorities at the different levels of government, law enforcement personnel and diplomatic and consular representatives of the countries.
10. Promote in the appropriate fora the exchange of information and experiences on labor migration issues.
11. Consider, and encourage when appropriate, consultations prior to adopting migration-related measures that affect countries of the region, especially bordering States, with full respect for each country national sovereignty.
12. Establish an exchange of migratory legislation and procedures as resources for the use of countries in the region in analysis, review and improvement of migration laws and procedures.
13. Affirm the importance of taking measures to facilitate documented migration.
14. With full respect for the national sovereignty and territorial jurisdiction of each country, and in the framework of legal arrangements with other States, coordinate efforts to fight criminal organizations involved in migrant trafficking. To that end, governments pledge to exchange information in a timely manner so as to afford countries the opportunity to take appropriate actions to combat networks and connections of migrant traffickers and exchange additional data to prevent and detect such criminal organizations.
15. Promote the establishment in national legislation, in States that do not have it, of trafficking in migrants as a criminal offense, in order to contribute to the eradication of trafficking organizations operating in the region.
16. Promote a better understanding, in order to create awareness in society, of the adverse effects of migrant trafficking, condemning the human degradation, indignities and abuses associated with this activity, through public information programs as a means, among others, to contribute to the identification and implementation of measures aimed at reducing and solving the problems stemming from this activity.

17. Broaden regional cooperation in matters of technical assistance and training to improve national systems for the investigation, handling of evidence against and prosecution of migrant traffickers.

18. Encourage the exchange of experiences on the migration phenomenon in suitable multilateral fora and, when appropriate, promote consultations with relevant international agencies.

19. Hold periodic consultations among the countries of the region in order to enhance cooperation on specific migration-related issues. In this regard, among others, encourage meetings of Directors of Migration, using the experience of the Central American Commission of Directors of Migration (OCAM), and other regional coordination mechanisms.

20. Promote the exchange of information and regional cooperation on technical assistance and training of human resources to control extra-regional flows of undocumented migrants.

21. Promote more effective mechanisms to combat the forgery and alteration of migratory documents.

The governments expressed their satisfaction for the positive spirit and the cooperation that characterized the discussions. The participating delegations also thanked the Government of Mexico for organizing the Conference and acknowledged the need to continue constructive dialogue on this important issue, in order to strengthen regional cooperation on the migration phenomenon. In this regard the governments decided to hold a meeting at the technical level in Mexico during the third quarter of the current year, in order to follow up on and implement the agreements reached at this Conference. They also decided to hold another meeting at the policy level in Panama City, Republic of Panama, during the first months of 1997, to which end they will consider the possibility of inviting, as observers, some South American countries. To that effect, the Government of Panama will request the International Organization for Migration (IOM) to extend logistical support.

Puebla, March 14, 1996.