

Washington, DC, March 24, 2000

**DECLARATION OF THE VICE-MINISTERS ON THE STRENGTHENING OF
THE REGIONAL CONFERENCE ON MIGRATION**

(PUEBLA PROCESS)

At the beginning of the new millennium and upon the occasion of the fifth meeting since our inaugural session at Puebla, the governments of the eleven member countries of the Regional Conference on Migration (RCM) reiterate the importance of this forum as a mechanism for dialogue and for sharing experiences regarding the migration phenomenon. This forum allows us to strengthen cooperation among member states and promote a comprehensive, objective and long-term approach to the manifestations, origins and effects of migration in the region.

The member governments of the RCM wish to reaffirm the principles that guide this regional and multilateral effort, highlight the main achievements of the Conference and outline future steps to ensure its strength and sustainability and its expected benefits for our peoples.

Principles

1. Immigration is a fundamental building block of the societies of all member countries of the RCM. All our nations are composed of the fusion of Old and New World cultures. We carry within us the contributions of many peoples and this makes us into optimistic, forward looking, dynamic societies.
2. We recognize and reiterate that orderly immigration continues to enrich the economic, political, social and cultural fabrics of our countries. Consequently, we believe in the maintenance of well-managed immigration regimes that provide opportunities to immigrants to better their lives and those of their families and that, at the same time, present a highly positive element in the continued building of our societies.
3. While we believe that migration is beneficial for individuals as well as countries of origin and countries of destination, in order for these benefits to be fully realized, migration should be orderly, to the extent possible.
4. At the same time, we recognize that migration is a complex historical phenomenon resulting from, among other things, tradition, asymmetries among economies and labour markets, rapid population growth, natural disasters and other political and social factors.
5. We note that migration is a transnational phenomenon and we recognize the benefit of addressing these issues cooperatively as a region, rather than in isolation.
6. We reaffirm that a comprehensive, objective, and long-term approach to migration is the most effective way of reducing its negative effects and of enhancing its many positive effects.
7. We recognize that every country has the sovereign right to develop and enforce its immigration laws consistent with its national interest. Nevertheless, given the international consequences of national actions in this area, we will make every effort to inform one another on a timely basis of relevant changes in our laws and practices.
8. We reaffirm our respect for the dignity of all migrants and condemn and will strive to eliminate violations of the human rights of migrants and

refugees, regardless of their immigration status. In this regard, we will seek to comply with relevant international standards and agreements. We will continue to combat anti-immigrant attitudes, discrimination and abuses against migrants and their families.

9. We agree to involve civil society, including non-governmental organizations, in these efforts, as appropriate.
10. We will combat all criminal activities associated with the phenomenon of migrant trafficking.
11. We are committed to promoting the efficient and orderly administration of our borders and to modernizing our respective border and migration management systems, in a cooperative manner.

Accomplishments

1. We have adopted and are committed to the full implementation of our Plan of Action.
2. We have carried out nine technical meetings of the Regional Consultation Group on Migration and five vice-ministerial meetings of the RCM, which have made possible a thorough exchange of information, experiences and views, and strengthened our ability to cooperate on migration issues, both multilaterally and bilaterally.
3. We have established the Virtual Secretariat, which will allow immediate access to relevant information and will facilitate our ability to organize future RCM activities and communicate with each other.
4. We have held six seminars on migration-related topics, as well as several training workshops, which have highlighted key issues, facilitated exchange of valuable information and produced important recommendations for action.
5. We have made progress on a number of concrete migration issues in the region, including the establishment of safe and orderly repatriation programs, the reintegration of migrants in their countries of origin, the fight against migrant smuggling and trafficking, the promotion of measures to enhance the protection of the human rights of migrant workers and their families, and the modernization of border management systems.

Future

1. Our priority for the current year is to evaluate the activities we have undertaken to date with the goal of consolidating the gains made and identifying areas where more work is needed. These actions are aimed at sustaining the RCM beyond any changes in our governments.
2. We should strive to develop best practices to guide the work of our governments in the migration arena.
3. We will seek to engage international institutions in support of cooperative regional projects adopted by the RCM