

JOINT COMMUNIQUE III REGIONAL CONFERENCE ON MIGRATION

The III Regional Conference on Migration was held in Ottawa, Canada, on February 26 and 27, 1998, with the participation of Belize, Canada, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama and the United States of America.

Representatives of the International Organization for Migration (IOM), the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) participated as observers. Representatives of Colombia, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Jamaica and Peru also participated as observers.

The Vice-Ministers took the opportunity to engage in an intensive exchange of ideas, views and experiences related to issues of common interest to all member countries of the Conference, such as human rights, links between migration and development, combating illegal migrant trafficking, technical cooperation, and the return and reintegration of migrants.

The Vice-Ministers expressed their satisfaction with the advances made by the Regional Conference on Migration with respect to its institutionalization and consolidation. They all agreed that this regional forum should be strengthened and promoted as an opportunity for dialogue, understanding and cooperation on an issue of fundamental importance. In this regard, the Vice-Ministers exchanged ideas on areas of cooperation, such as sharing timely and sufficient information on returned migrants, and technical support to strengthen migration management.

The Vice-Ministers expressed their satisfaction with the actions undertaken to implement the Plan of Action adopted in Panama in 1997, including the following:

- The progress made at the meeting of the Regional Consultation Group held in San José, Costa Rica, in November 1997. The governments expressed their appreciation to the Government of Costa Rica for organizing and hosting the meeting.
- The holding of the Seminar on Combating Illegal Migrant Trafficking, in Managua, Nicaragua, in January 1998, whose conclusions and recommendations were helpful in the further development of the Plan of Action. The Vice-Ministers expressed their appreciation to the Government of Nicaragua and the IOM for the organization and results of the seminar.
- The meeting to be held in Washington, USA, on April 23 and 24, 1998, on migration policy and human rights, with the participation of immigration authorities, foreign ministries, other government agencies concerned with human rights and non-governmental organizations (NGOs).
- The workshop to be held in Mexico City on May 21 and 22, 1998, on the issue of migration and development, with the participation of migration authorities, foreign ministries, other government agencies and international agencies, as well as academic institutions concerned.

The Vice-Ministers agreed that in the next meeting of the Regional Consultation Group the recommendations emanating from the different seminars and studies mandated in the Plan of Action be analyzed, in order to present for its consideration at the IV Regional Conference on Migration the tasks to be incorporated in the Plan of Action for 1999-2000.

The Vice-Ministers had an opportunity to meet with representatives from NGOs interested in migration issues, to consider ways that these organizations could assist in the implementation of the Plan of Action. Participating NGOs are from Canada, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama and the United States of America.

After analyzing the degree to which goals of the Action Plan had been achieved, the Vice-Ministers agreed on the inclusion of new activities aimed at realizing the objectives of the Plan, in particular that of holding a seminar in Honduras, with the support of IOM, in November 1998, on the return of regional and extra-regional migrants, and the reintegration of regional migrants. Another important activity will be a seminar for the exchange of experiences in the area of consular protection and assistance, which is scheduled to take place in Guatemala during the first quarter of 1999.

The Vice-Ministers acknowledged with great sympathy the request submitted by the Dominican Republic to become a member of the Regional Conference on Migration. However, they identified a need for criteria for the acceptance of new members before reaching a decision, and therefore instructed the Regional Consultation Group to develop such criteria before its next meeting. These criteria are to include conditions for new memberships, as well as rules governing the participation of observers.

The participating delegations congratulated and thanked the Government of Canada for the excellent organization of the Conference and for its warm hospitality. They acknowledged the need to continue and strengthen the constructive dialogue which has characterized this forum.

The governments decided to hold a meeting of the Regional Consultation Group in Canada in the fall of 1998. They also decided to hold the IV Regional Conference on Migration in the city of San Salvador, El Salvador, in the first quarter of 1999. The government of El Salvador, for this purpose will request logistical support from the IOM. To this meeting, they agreed to invite as observers the countries of Colombia, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Jamaica, Peru and the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB).

Ottawa, February 27, 1998