

Panel:

**“CONTRIBUTION OF MIGRANTS TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE
COUNTRY OF ORIGIN AND DESTINATION”**

**THE CREATION OF JOB OPPORTUNITIES FOR RETURNING
MIGRANTS**

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I wish to thank the National Institute of Migration, Families and Society, and the Doha International Institute for Family Studies and Development, and each of you, for the invitation to be here. I appreciate your having an interest in migration, because we all will take advantage of the wealth of knowledge of each speaker, of each paper, for our specific areas of work.

My main objective is to have Mexico define migration in public policy, and in state policy, with a long-term perspective.

Another objective is that migration be an interdisciplinary issue, in order to promote the welfare of migrants and their families with respect and humility, as a human tool for national improvement. Migration should never be understood as a phenomenon, but rather as a socioeconomic, cultural and educational process. Why do I say that it should not be called a phenomenon? Because I was born a migrant. I was born on the border in Nuevo Laredo, Tamaulipas. My birth was registered in Nuevo Leon. My father is from Nuevo León. I spent my first five years in Zacatecas. My next four years in Guanajuato. My next seven years in Nuevo Laredo, Tamaulipas. And, at the age of around 15 or 16, I “jumped the puddle” as a “wetback”, and went to Seattle, Washington, for the blueberry harvest.

In Seattle, Washington, we were working as a family in stores. From there we went to Florida, after that to Ohio, and from there we went to Texas. I am talking about a period of 10 years as an undocumented immigrant. It was terrifying to hear about the immigration authorities, because while driving in the car it was: "get down and be quiet." The Ku Klux Klan, as they walked through the streets, was especially frightening because I actually got to see them. It was a palpable fear that still gives me the shivers when I think about it. However, in 1988, when amnesty was given, my family was able to be legalized, and from then on we started to get ahead. In my time as an undocumented immigrant, I worked as a farm worker, because we were a poor family, but I also worked in hotels as a maid, on the sly. In some restaurants there were piles of pots, and since I did not like washing pots, I said, "I was not born for this." But time passed and we prospered in Texas, and we went to the border at Laredo, Texas. My business was in foreign trade. I worked in imports and exports, as a customs broker. From there, I was able raise money and begin work in civic organizations in the United States. We started working with children aged 6 to 14 years.

In previous papers, when they talked about child abuse, I felt and experienced all of that. It was so frustrating to find a child in a school, knowing that he had been torn from his family and taken to another country with the grandmother, godmother, or friends, in order to study English, because if the mother was not going to be able to give him a degree, at least he was going to speak both languages. Moreover, that child was absorbed in television, the internet or in dreams, and often they were sexually and mentally abused, many of them even hanging around with satanic cults, which was most horrifying.

Then we began to work with the "Big Brothers" organization. These were undocumented children, ages 16 -17, who had studied and had got on, but were unable to continue studying because later, in the colleges and universities, they would be international students, and at the time their mother or father had no money for them to become professionals. We started working with some universities and at conferences in the State of Texas so that these undocumented children could be adopted.

As Mexicans we celebrate the interest shown and the work done for our nation, the contributions made through these kinds of forums, not only the attendance, but also all of your solidarity, the support and gratitude of these organizations that make these events possible. I want to take this opportunity to acknowledge and thank everyone, for the tireless struggle on behalf of Mexican migrant communities.

The provisions enacted through permanent public policies, built from the very foundations of each migrant community, must be steadfast.

In history, migrations are different. Migrations are opportunities, from the point of view of each migrant. The main objective that motivates the person or individual is the family.

People think that emigrating to a certain sector or place is to achieve progress in their economic, social or educational lives. No one emigrates to go backwards; they always emigrate to get ahead. People do not have the same causes or the same results, much less the same characteristics. They can emigrate for a short time or for a long time. Also, they can emigrate as individuals or in groups.

There are different types of migration:

Interstate migration. Migrations where people emigrate from one community to another community, one neighborhood to another neighborhood, from one municipality to another municipality, or from one state to another state. Emigrants are those who are exported, those who go. Immigrants are those who are integrated.

Transnational migration is when Central Americans pass through Mexico to and reach the destination country of the United States.

The United States is a country of migrants, not just Mexicans, but from all over the world.

Currently there are migrations without physical movement: television, radio, the Internet. Communication is important and conveys ideas and knowledge of values, which are equally transcendent.

Every person of whatever race is human, and we adapt to circumstances and climates according to our great need and purpose, taking into account our values and customs, economics, ideology, ignorance, beliefs and, especially, the courage to cross that river or desert or, many times, to get a visa, to break away from the family core. Migrants deserve to be respected wherever they are. There are reasons to move up in society, but ultimately we share the will of everyone to live together, to share; this is what makes us different and important.

The migrant population in a society is a process of productive progress, with young capital, ability and creativity.

Communities are forged at geographical crossroads with highly mobile cultures, as in the different Mexican states.

I want to mention that we have different states in Mexico, like Zacatecas, Guanajuato, Puebla, Michoacán, San Luis Potosí, Oaxaca, Guerrero, Morelos and the Federal District to mention a few. Wealth also moves among them, as well as art, literature, culture, education, customs, virtues and, especially, beliefs. Values intersect where there is an adaptation of appreciation and prosperity. There is also a clash in the acceptance of the vices of others, and thus a new complementary culture is created; a young culture with its own characteristics.

American society in the United States, the "gringos", offers a positive impact. Americans assimilate and incorporate cultural elements, ideas and values from different peoples through the U.S.'s immigrants. I'm talking about different immigrants from around the world: Chinese, Japanese, brown people, as we are referred to there. Let me tell you that it's not just by using "coyotes" that one can migrate to the U.S. from Mexico. There are 23 opportunities, 23 types of visas to legally enter the United States. But people are often not informed, or the government does not communicate this, or we do not ask at the American

consulates how we can get a visa and what the requirements are. But there are 23 types of visas to enter the United States.

When host countries don't readily accept immigrants, the atmosphere can become very negative, violence can erupt and create problems of disintegration and discrimination, an unfavorable situation for the host society as well as for the immigrants and their families living there.

I believe, and have experienced, that mass migration in groups represents one of the fastest methods of social and democratic change, with growth in education and solidarity, which I think they should be considered as an economic evolution, social integration and acquisition of political rights.

Mexico is currently experiencing the cultural development of its people. The National Statistics Institute (INEGI) states that 20% of the population is migrant. 98% of that 20% is in the United States, and the other 2% in other countries.

The United States, our neighboring country, besides being a country that has many immigrants, provides a great motivation in the value of its currency, the dollar, for the individual person to emigrate there. The dollar is worth 13 times the peso, and that is motivation, because they pay by the hour. Whereas working here you would work 12 or even 14 hours, there you can work 6 or 8 hours and be well-paid.

Central Americans and all of us Mexicans will always have an interest in the United States, while the value of the dollar higher than the peso, In that population group of 98%, we're talking about 13 states of Mexico, but that 98% means about 20 million people.

20 million people is the population living here in the State of Mexico and Mexico City. The people living here in Mexico have the opportunity to request financial support from the federal government, perhaps an investment loan. Then there are scholarships, there is a health program. So why not even legal support? However, those 20 million people living in the U.S. only have the Mexican consulates, which are not enough for 20 million people distributed among 50 U.S. states.

Of the population which I am speaking about, we are the fourth generation of Mexican-Americans or, now, American-Mexicans. In my case I'm now bi-national, but my children are American-Mexican citizens with dual citizenship. So, we are a young culture, we are a young nation. I have been working with civic organizations for 18 years, with migrants, on the issue of immigration in the U.S., and let me tell you that we Mexicans over there are pretty well organized. There are the Guanajuato houses, the Puebla house, the Chihuahua houses, Nuevo León houses, Zacatecas federations, Durango clubs. So we are organized. What for? Because many times when there is a problem, when families live in one room, or just one house sometimes, and there's roast pork and drinking, there is an argument, the neighbor calls the police, the officer arrives, the immigrant is drunk, argues, struggles, and many times he is accused of abusing and assaulting the officer, and may be imprisoned for up to 3, 4 or 5 years. Often he is not visited by his family because they are undocumented, and neither is he visited by his mother, because she has no documents to go there, and neither does he have a lawyer to defend him; and so those people are forgotten by the government.

I can tell you that in these organizations there are people who donate their time, their skills and their experiences to those most in need. The migrant society and government must be united, from which can arise initiatives such as the 3 for 1 program, where a migrant contributes a dollar, and the state or local government contributes another dollar, to do public works. We launched this program in the Zacatecas federations, where I was one of the pioneers, where we were able to build highways, dams, roads and soccer fields. But with this experience we realized that we could also apply for investment and business projects. This is what I want to focus on. There is an organization of which I am president, called *Enlace Mexicano* (Mexico Link), whose purpose is to link government and migrant families.

In the 1 to 1 program, which we launched in February of this year, I also worked with organizations so that the Ministry of Education (SEP) would recognize the experiences of migrants who are in the United States. Many migrants there worked 2, 4, 6 or 20 years on one thing, laying floors, installing roofs, working in kitchens and in hotels, and are experts. They aren't engineers and they don't have a degree, but they are experts. Then with CONALEP, thanks to the SEP, with Josefina Vázquez Mota, we were able to achieve the recognition of their experience and the

certification of the experience of these Mexicans. Now when they return, they will return with a certificate, and will return to a higher salary.

On the part of the government, there are federal programs to support productive projects. Apart from the experience I have as an organizer of civic associations in the United States, during the last legislature I was a Federal Representative, which was an opportunity to present the problems migrants have on the other side before the House.

We spoke with many Representatives about migration. I got the feeling there was not much interest. The issue of migration was secondary, and even though I tried to tell them that there was a young Mexico there, a productive Mexico, an economic Mexico, it remained a secondary issue, and was not a subject on the agenda of the Chamber of Deputies. Still, I fought and fought and was able to achieve an increase in the budget of the Mexican consulates. 160 million was increased to 800 million pesos for the consular service. This was an achievement that was obtained from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. It was hard because the Secretary of State said that the budget was already extended, and it could not be done. But thank goodness we did it. We also got a budget for the repatriated children's program, of which there are thousands. In the previous paper they said that 5,000 children were repatriated last month alone.

5,000 children who have no parents, no mothers nearby and who are often pretty confused. We were able to work on this problem; we were able to work on scholarships for child laborers here. We have 2 million undocumented Mexicans here in Mexico itself. How is this possible? We have 2 million undocumented Mexicans in Mexico, without birth certificates, without voters' cards, without vaccinations, unable to go to school, but we were able to achieve that they be given the certification of the National Institute of Migration. All of this has now been worked out.

We are now the fourth generation established in the United States, with small and medium Mexican businesses that have evolved and are looking for development opportunities. We need consulting and cooperation agreements between Mexican,

American and Mexican-American business groups, in the interest of their growth in both countries.

We Mexicans contribute to the U.S. economy, and to the Mexican economy as well with remittances. As a Federal Representative I was able to invite the various Ministries and we were able to participate on behalf of *Enlace Mexicano*. I invited several international directors, and we were visited by the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Agriculture (SAGARPA), the Ministry of Economy, the Ministry of Social Development (SEDESOL), the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Communication and Transport. No one had ever seen a gathering like this, but I think the issue of migration needs to be felt in the soul in order to fight constantly and donate many hours and, sometimes, even spend your own money to get the needs of Mexicans outside the country heard by the government.

The governments of Mexico and the United States are working together, and must work together, because they are neighbors and because they have one thing in common: the Mexican-American community, or the American-Mexican community. We live and carry out international policies together.

We should not view migration as a people distant from us, but as another door that is opened for development. Migration is an activity for the common good. We are generating much of the economy.

Migrants and government, that's my motto. We look at each other and the goal is to look together in the same direction: towards the creation of bi-national Mexican political and socio-economic policies.

Finally, let me say that the development of the economy is based on faith, hope, family values, traditional values, cultures and customs.

This forum has special significance, as it shows the challenges of Mexico and immigrants facing the challenge of competitiveness. We have the migrant community that requires conditions designed to improve their living standards, and we have the resources to carry out projects, and we give hope to all of Mexico and the Federal Government.

With Business Link and the Federal Government we were able to accomplish personal business projects.

In the Chamber of Deputies they said we had to take some of the remittances, but this is impractical. Remittances are 400 to 500 dollars per family per month, and that money goes to pay rent, electricity, water. Where are you going to take it from? They have to pay 16% tax, now increased to 19%. For migrants over there, let's say they earn \$100, send 50 home, spend 40 and save 10. They are good savers and many of them have savings of 10 thousand, 20 thousand, 30 thousand dollars, and want to return to Mexico to meet a 15 year old daughter with a wife he left 10 years ago, and he wants to come back, and he want to invest, but does not know how. Then, thanks to the presence of these institutions, we were able to accomplish the 1 to 1 program, and now, in this business program, if the migrant has 10 thousand dollars, the Federal Government, through SEDESOL, matches another 10 thousand or 20 thousand U.S. Dollars, and with this we have stimulated the economy with companies or firms such as a tortilla makers, butchers and even barbers, and why not even greenhouses, through SAGARPA? And so we have helped Mexico grow, with those returning here.

So we have achieved that breakthrough, and I am thankful for the perseverance and the help of many people who, like you, donate their time, because the association is not one person; we are many, we are several, and these associations are nationwide, we have representations in Austin, Texas, Laredo, Chicago and Los Angeles.

I believe that migration is an open door to the growth of equity and productivity, and unique in the law. To strengthen the growth of competitiveness in all sectors, we need to break with the old paradigm of our Mexico for this 21st century.