

OPENING SPEECH

Margarita Zavala Gomez del Campo
First Lady of Mexico

I would like to thank you for inviting me here to inaugurate this International Colloquium, “The Family of the Migrant Worker”, convened by the *National Institute of Migration, Familias y Sociedad, and the Doha Institute for Family Studies and Development*. Cecilia, thank you very much, Vero, thank you. Richard Wilkins, Maria Elena, Jose Luis, Jesús and Marie-Claire, thank you very much; and, of course, Sergio Raúl Arroyo, Director of this Cultural Center, thank you. I know there are also representatives from the Embassies, Vice Consuls from Cuba, Nicaragua, Uruguay, and Venezuela, many, many thanks. Many thanks, also, to the Episcopal Commission, thank you, Monsignor, also to Flor María, to the Members of Parliament, thank you very much and to the many organizations who have worked with migrants in Mexico whom I see are represented here today.

The idea of a National Migration Week is precisely to bring together people who have specialized in working on the subject of migration and to initiate a dialogue which I am sure will bring more and better results, allowing us to work in a much more coordinated manner.

For me, this National Week of Migration is also an opportunity to consider amongst ourselves how our country must take into account the phenomenon of migration in our midst, as is also true of Latin America.

Just a few days ago, we were thinking how we were all taught that the first peoples were nomads. They were migrants. So before there were any settled people, the most ancient group of humans was precisely the migrant nomads and this has also been a reason why humans, women and men, move. Both for physical and spiritual satisfaction, in human nature, we also carry a spirit of migration, while at the same time, in apparent contrast, we also want to settle.

All Mexican families, moreover, are familiar with migration. We all have a very close relative, a very close friend who has emigrated to the United States. We all know someone who does not have the papers to be in another country, and indeed, in a nation like ours that has seen thousands and thousands, then hundreds of thousands of young people, and then thousands of families, and now thousands of children cross the border, we are all familiar with the subject of migration.

Not only have we seen people emigrating from here to another country, but we have also seen hundreds of thousands of families migrating from other places, and some of them even staying here in our country, so Mexico is not only a country of origin, but also of transit and destination. This is how we must understand our country.

The vulnerability to which families of migrants are exposed is an issue that requires a responsible response on our behalf, and special attention.

This forum provides an excellent opportunity to share these experiences from a global point of view, from the point of view of different nations.

The themes of this Colloquium are priorities for an international agenda, especially when it comes to a country like ours, because topics like family reunification, as well as the loneliness and the helplessness felt by members of the migrant family will be touched on.

I hope that the findings of these intense days of work result in improved public policies, improved strategies among civil organizations and other institutions, and that the meeting of Mexican and foreign experts will doubtless provide valuable elements to better understand migration and to improve our work in this field.

A fractured family and social disintegration are often the heaviest costs of migration. Unfortunately, the subject of children has been forgotten, the issue of women has been neglected, and the debate has been centered on the theme of migration in general, totally putting aside the issue of the families of migrants.

The truth is that behind every person, behind the thousands of people who for years have crossed our borders, there are children, little boys and girls, women, fathers, mothers, that is to say, men and women with a personal history and thus a family.

When the family or a family member migrates in search of new horizons, research has shown that in all respects, migration is one of the most stressful events a family can face.

Often the children become the main actors for the family, as they learn to speak the language of the country where they settle, and become the sole interlocutors between society and their parents, grandparents or aunts and uncles.

In-depth solutions require cooperation between government, civil society, and the private sector to articulate public policy actions.

I have just inaugurated another event where there is an exhibition of all those working with migrant children, so they are also connected to the migrant family. It is worth working together to see what the best strategies for understanding migration are.

I am convinced that migration, which need not be a problem, must be seen differently in the world, and that will happen when we dare to look at this through the eyes of the children searching to be reunited with their family.

Migration needs to be seen and solved in a very different way when we consider it from the angle of the family and not solely of the economy. I am sure of the success of this Colloquium because there are many speakers here who work with families, not only those with social organizations, but people who have dedicated their lives, or who belong to congregations, organizations devoted especially to migrants, who also work with the family. I am of course very pleased to see the presence of the OPIS, the officers for the protection of migrant children. This is a new figure, I think an almost entirely new concept that has arisen in Mexico for the world, whereby there are officials in immigration who specialize in children's issues, who are fully qualified to protect children; one of the fundamental rights any child has, is the right to a family.

With full confidence in the success of this event, I would ask you to stand to officially inaugurate the International Colloquium "*The Family of the Migrant Worker*" on this day, Wednesday, October 21st, 2009 at 11:10am.

Thank you, and congratulations.