

Keynote Address:

“MEXICO AS A MIGRATORY PLATFORM”.

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Introduction

We would all hope that the decision to emigrate was a decision freely taken by the migrant, but in many cases the decision is imposed on by necessity. It thus violates the person's free will and seriously affects the fate of thousands of people, sometimes entire families are torn apart.

Being aware of this fact implies consistent effort to consider migration from a human point of view and justifies the efforts of the National Migration Institute to mitigate the pain migrants are avoidably subject to. This has led us to undertake various protection programs about which I would like to mention not only as they exist in the manuals but also as real life experiences. If we say that migration has torn families apart and ruined lives, we have to do our utmost to avoid aggravating the situation.

Esther¹, a 64 year old woman, was eventually left alone with no family in her native Sonora. Gradually, her children and grandchildren had crossed the border, until she was the only one left ... and she was determined to go as well. She failed. She paid a "guide" to take her, but because of her age, she began to slow the group down, and they simply abandoned her in the desert. The others, younger than her, went on ahead. She tried to catch up, but then, realizing that she was not going to make it, tried to make her way back to. Desperate and exhausted, she was found by agents of our Beta groups for the protection of migrants who took her to safety.

¹ The names are different from real life to protect privacy.

Esther's case is like that of many others who, with the face of a woman, child or old man, are trying to get into the United States to finally join their loved ones. This case is symbolic of the powerful magnet of family and love.

The National Migration Institute strives to maintain human dignity on a daily basis through its groups for the protection of migrants.

By protection, we refer not only to the physical protection provided by our Beta Groups in the desert, rivers, railroad tracks or jungle, but also to the defense of human rights that we exercise through lawsuits against individuals involved in human trafficking.

We also seek to protect the right to family unity enshrined in various international and regional human rights instruments. Family unity is a guiding principle behind the activity of The National Migration Institute in dealing with people seeking refuge, or those simply migrating to our country and then trying to bring over their families. This is relevant as well in the case of Mexicans who have lost touch with family members who have emigrated to the United States and whom we seek to contact through our Consulates and the General Directorate of Consular Protection.

Beta Groups

In the same way, our Migrant Protection Groups (Beta Groups), the Human Repatriation Program and the Officers for the Protection of Infants (OPIS) are specific institutional actions orientated at supporting people in particularly vulnerable situations.

The Migrant Protection Groups, founded in 1990, are aimed at protecting and defending human rights, physical integrity and property. We currently have 16 Beta Groups located in the border states and on migrant routes. Each group makes patrol trips looking for people who need their assistance. They have specialized training, and have all terrain vehicles, communications and location systems as well as SOS towers with water and shade where migrants can take refuge until the Beta Groups arrive.

In many cases their work allows families to be reunited. This was the case of Abigail, a woman from Sonora who waited to hear from her son Marco who had decided to cross the border into the United States. After some time with no news, Abigail began asking border residents if they had seen her son. Nobody could give her any news, until a group of youths told her that they had seen a man, similar to the picture that Abigail had shown them, in bad shape in the desert. When they had seen him some hours earlier, they themselves were in a bad way, but they had shared some water and a sweatshirt with Marco.

Abigail, desperate, went to the Beta Group in Sonoyta, gave a picture of her son and the references that group of boys had given her. They immediately mobilized their forces and after an intensive search, they managed to rescue Marco in the desert. They gave him first aid and returned him to his mother. One of the Beta agents, who had participated in the rescue, said literally, "It was a great satisfaction for us – as a Beta Group – to see the face of a desperate mother change completely on seeing her son alive. At that moment I understood the importance of our work, when I saw the mother's and son's reaction, it gave me goosebumps, as they say. I believe that our work is humanitarian because for us there is no difference between nationalities, you only see the person for what he is, a human being. "

Repatriation Program

In addition, the National Institute of Migration has recently been developing a Repatriation Program. This program was announced by President Felipe Calderon on December 18th, 2007 and currently operates at three border points in Tijuana, Baja California, Ciudad Juarez, Chihuahua, and Nogales, Sonora.

The aim of the program is to create conditions whereby Mexicans deported by the U.S. authorities receive immediate support and, if they wish, the opportunity to reintegrate successfully into the Mexican labor force. Since the program began, 442,439 Mexicans have been repatriated, and 121,887 have made use of the program.

With this program, the repatriated migrants are given food, shelter, and medical care in case of emergencies, job opportunities, training and certification of job skills, as

well as travel discounts to their home states. They are also helped in establishing contact with their family, as we believe that the process of repatriation is a concern for both the migrant and his family, and this allows the family to know the person is well and puts an end to the anguish of not knowing his whereabouts.

Migrant children and OPIS

We cannot talk about family and human development without mentioning the case of migrant children, often unaccompanied minors, trying to reach their parents who migrated without them.

The desire to provide better living conditions creates circumstances that put children at risk. In many cases both parents have emigrated to the United States, have achieved a certain degree of stability and then decide to bring the family. In other cases, the children decide to go and look for their parents. This is how thousands of children, from both Mexico and Central America, travel the road to the United States, sometimes alone, sometimes with a relative, sometimes with an illegal guide known as “pollero” to smuggle them across the border.

To better understand the reality of child migration, I would like to share some facts with you. Last year, the Institute carried out the repatriation of 6,412 foreign minors to their country of origin.

Of these 4,969 were male and 1,443 female.

20%, that is 1,282 minors, were under 12 years old at the time of repatriation.

4,553 were traveling alone and 1,859 were traveling with a relative.

In the same period, from January to December 2008, 32,151 Mexican children were repatriated from the United States.

Of these, 24,484 were male and 7,667 female.

3,574 were under 12 years old and 28,577 over 12 years old.

18,192 traveled alone and 13,959 with someone.

From January to September this year, 21,220 Mexican children have been repatriated from the United States, and we, in turn, have repatriated 3,777 foreign children to their country of origin.

The vulnerability of children and adolescent migrants is very high. On their journey they often become victims of abuse and atrocities that we need to protect them from at all costs.

Among children, there are groups that are particularly vulnerable, such as the under 12's years, especially when they travel alone. There are even cases, more than we might imagine, of babies only months old, sent to the United States through "Coyotes", (illegal border smugglers). The babies are sometimes abandoned or left as pledge payment, and are rescued by the authorities on either side of the border.

The truth of child migration is a dramatic situation that requires special attention and cooperation between authorities.

With this in mind, since 2008 the Institute has created the post of Officers for the Protection of Infants (OPIS), who are immigration officers with specific skills, attitudes and training that enable them to provide the best possible care of minors under the responsibility of the Institute. The OPIS have received comprehensive training offered by child specialist institutions such as the DIF, (Institute of Integral Family Development). They have training in child psychology, human rights, trafficking and gender perspective, among others.

There are currently 170 OPIS employed in 32 regional offices who care for the children regardless of their nationality. If they are repatriated Mexicans, they quickly pass the responsibility on to the local government authority for children. If they are foreign, the children are accompanied throughout the repatriation process. The Institute contacts the relevant authorities in their country. The OPIS then ensure that the children's rights are protected, and that they are safely returned to their family in

their country of origin, avoiding their falling into the hands of people-trafficking networks.

I want to share another story with you about a situation that unfortunately still takes place every day, that of missing children. A few weeks ago, during an inspection of a passenger bus, federal immigration agents found a Guatemalan woman, with a four year old girl who was asleep. In the absence of papers, the agents asked the woman to accompany them to the Institute's delegation office where it turned out that the woman was not the mother of the little girl. In the subsequent investigation by the authorities, it turned out that this woman was involved in the trafficking of children who were then sold in the U.S. and Canada to couples who could not have babies. The little girl was cared for by the OPIS in the delegation, who contacted the Guatemalan authorities and in a joint effort, the little girl's parents were found and she was returned home in perfect condition.

As part of this strategy regarding the care of unaccompanied migrant children, the Institute, in conjunction with UNICEF, signed an agreement with Nextel, the telecommunications company to install free phone lines in 21 immigration detention centers so that these children can phone their families in their country of origin. More than 3,000 calls have been made from these lines, which mean that more than 3,000 times, a mother or father has been able to rest assured that their child is safe and will soon return home.

New rules for immigration detention centers.

As part of this strategy, last October 7th the rules for the operation of immigration detention centers, where undocumented migrants stay while awaiting repatriation, were published in the Official Journal of the Federation. These rules pay special attention to the subject of family by establishing the right of children to be able to stay with their family, or to be reunited with them, the right of children to participate in education, sports, recreational and culture activities, and to have contact and time with other children. It also establishes the obligation of the Institute to advise foreigners on how to locate family members or friends, and it must provide separate areas for men and women, while at the same time ensuring family unity.

FMTF Migration Forms

I would also like to mention the relevance of having introduced the Migration Form for Border Workers (FMTF) in March 2008. With this, we provide legal status to Guatemalan and Belizean workers and their families who come to work in various activities in the states of the southern border of Mexico.

This immigration document allows foreigners to bring their close relatives to live in Mexico, thus achieving the union of families and allowing them to enroll their children in schools and health services. So far this year, 17,017 FMTF have been issued, mainly in Chiapas.

Conclusion

I conclude by recalling that the principle of family unity is crucial to individual, community and social development. As John Paul II said, "The future of humanity is forged in the family", for which reason any measures aimed at their protection will never be enough.