

**Institute of Mexicans Abroad (IME)
Hope and Uncertainty**

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The relationship between Mexican migrants and their government has always been complex and full of ups and downs. Over time, migrants have learned that political promises are not always fulfilled and that most governmental initiatives have been developed without consulting us. In spite of having been historically overlooked by governmental agencies, Mexican Hometown Associations are increasingly promoting binational participation of migrants in their communities of origin. These organizations have helped evolve the attitudes of immigrant communities from being passive and indifferent toward the government to taking on more mature and protagontic roles. In aligning ourselves with our communities of origin we have demonstrated our commitment and our vocation to serve.

President Fox's creation of the Presidential Office for Mexicans Abroad (OPME) at the beginning of his term, his organization of the first public meeting with a delegation of representatives of Mexican organizations in the U.S., and his calling migrants "national heroes" has led us to believe that the time has come for a migrants' administration. The Institute of Mexicans Abroad (IME) and its Advisory Board (CCIME) represent the final opportunity for President Fox to comply with his campaign promise to govern for all 120 million Mexicans. We would like to believe that President Fox has a real intention of reformulating the relationship with Mexicans residing abroad; however, we must wait and see if rhetoric coincides with action. Only then will we be able to advance in the creation of inclusive policies that finally constitute a real Mexican state policy towards migrants.

On August 6, 2002, President Fox, declared that the OPME had completed its functions, and that it was time to initiate a new phase of work. He created the National Advisory for Mexican communities Abroad (CNCME), a new entity presided over by himself and nine Cabinet Ministers. Within that new entity, he also created the Institute of Mexicans Abroad (IME), and the Advisory Board of the IME, made up of Mexican migrants and Mexican-Americans. The creation of the IME seemed to be a very innovative idea, although the selection of the Mexican California resident Cándido Morales as director of the IME seemed hasty and lacked consultation. Additionally, the methods of electing the new Advisors (*Consejeros*) varied from consulate to consulate some of those processes have also been an object of criticism. The case of the election in Illinois merits special mention we were fortunate to have an exemplary electoral process. The newly formed Citizens' Electoral Advisory Board of Illinois issued an open call for candidates, yielding a field of 22, from which seven Advisors were elected, along with two alternates.

The personnel and membership changes in the agencies in charge of dealing with migrants has generated significant debate. Some speculate that the Fox government does not know what to do with us. Others say that the decision to create the IME was due to the very public friction between Juan Hernández (in charge of the OPME) and the ex-Foreign Minister Jorge Castañeda. Whatever its history, the important issue is that migrants were asked to participate and the majority of us decided to take up the challenge.

The future of the IME is very uncertain. There are many things to do and many questions to respond to. One of the biggest challenges will be to improve government-migrant relationships and for the advisors to act as independent and impartial representatives of the migrant population. It is worth noting that it is difficult to be 100% optimistic. Months after its creation, the CNCME has not yet met. The advisors elected to the IME continue to wait for the official date for the first meeting to be confirmed. The selection process to the IME was rushed, supposedly so that we could meet in early December, but later the date was changed to mid-January and now it is rumored to be scheduled for the end of February. With these actions it would seem that the Fox government is not giving more concrete signals to continue consolidating spaces for our participation.

Migrants' demands should be a priority of the Mexican political system today. Unfortunately, the facts show that once again, this is not the case. The struggle continues and the work of migrants to achieve better treatment in governmental policies cannot be stopped.