



# ENLACES NEWS

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*A publication of Enlaces América, the International Program of Heartland Alliance*

## Corn, Commerce, & Community Conference

*“Food security and labor security are the fundamental priorities for Mesoamerica; without dignified work, families don’t have enough income, and without income, we have hunger, hopelessness, and migration. We must reinvigorate and reorient small and medium scale production in the countryside if we are to break the cycle of hunger and exodus from the region.”*

With this call to action, Armando Bartra, Director of Instituto Maya, opened the first plenary of the Corn, Commerce, and Community conference held on Chicago’s west side on June 17 and 18, 2002. Bartra and other participants went on to suggest that recent patterns of migration have made “Mesoamerica” stretch all the way from Panama to Canada and that we must find ways to work together to make it a healthy region where the rights of all citizens are respected. Participants in the meeting included leaders from Mexican Hometown Associations in Chicago; farmers’ organizations from Mexico, Honduras, El Salvador, and the U.S.; academics, and representatives of international, national, and local non-governmental organizations. Speakers addressed a variety of issues, including immigrants’ rights, human rights, nutrition, trade policy, sustainable agriculture, and the environment.

Although discussions covered a wide range of topics, the theme of corn created a unifying thread which helped participants focus on concrete ideas for what Frank Sharry, Director of the National Immigration Forum, termed “regionalization from below, by the people.” Current patterns of regional development have increased poverty in many parts of Mexico and Central America and have dramatically increased migration flows towards the U.S. At this conference, participants signaled the urgent need for integrated solutions that will support a dignified way of life for all citizens in the “new Mesoamerica.” (*cont. on p.2*)

## US Farm Policy Is Everybody’s Business

*By George Naylor* □

Farmers in the United States will plant approximately 79 million acres of corn and produce almost 10 billion bushels, or 560 billion pounds this year. Most of this corn is not like that used in Mexico for tortillas or tomas. Corn in the US is regarded simply as carbohydrates, protein, and oil and generally is used for livestock feed, corn sweeteners, and other industrial uses. Nevertheless, because the corporate processing giants like Cargill and ADM can ship this bounty to all corners of the globe, the cheap corn in the US creates a domino effect for farmer’s corn prices from Botswana to Zacatecas, Mexico. Farmers in most countries, in fact, gauge fluctuations in corn prices by monitoring prices at the Chicago Board of Trade. While the United States exports only about one-fifth of its production, over 70% of corn in international trade comes from the US.

*(cont. on p.3)*

### **In This Edition:**

This second edition of Enlaces News offers broad coverage of our inaugural event, the *Corn, Commerce, and Community* conference. We also report on other Enlaces activities on pages 7-11, and on citizen organizing and other themes of interest on pages 12-15.

#### **I. Corn, Commerce, and Community Conference Articles...p.1-6**

Oaxacan Migrant Community Organizing - p.4  
Itanoni, Flor del Maíz p.6

#### **II. Enlaces América activities**

Enlaces planning.....p.7  
Community Forums...p.8  
Religious Border Strategizing .....p.9  
RNCOM Meeting.....p.10

#### **III. Special Themes**

Central American TPS Extended.....p.12  
Third Mesoamerican Forum.....p.13  
Segundo Encuentro Campesino.....15

**Heartland Alliance for Human Needs & Human Rights**

208 S. LaSalle Street, Suite 1818; Chicago, IL; 60604; Tel. (312) 660-1347; Fax: (312) 660-1500

Conference participants listened to and participated in panel discussions in which speakers explored the linkages between corn and a range of issues facing communities throughout the region. Several of the major themes that emerged in these panel discussions included:

1. National realities in the United States, Mexico, and Central America are increasingly intertwined. National policies can have economic, cultural, and social impacts throughout the region. Understanding and addressing these connections requires regional approaches. We need better ways to strengthen and learn from each other. We need to make existing networks more effective and take advantage of opportunities for collaboration.
2. We need to work together to promote trade and investment that is just and equitable BUT we must also appreciate that economic gains are not the only important goals. The cultural and spiritual elements of our lives (including autonomy and respect for diversity) are also important.
3. Migrant populations are social groups with knowledge and expertise that should be a part of redefining our regional dynamics. Immigrant communities should be enabled in order for them to play a greater leadership role on these regional issues.
4. If transnational communities are to take increased leadership on regional integration processes, reform “from below” must be linked to broader participation in political decision-making at all levels in both the U.S. and in countries of origin.
5. Urban residents are more and more disconnected from rural life. We need to make the connections between rural and urban communities more apparent.
6. Consumers could be key allies in promoting a sustainable future in the region. We must look for ways to “vote with our dollars” and demand products that are more nutritious and are produced in ways that support farmers and don’t damage the environment.

The panel on innovative transboundary solutions sparked some of the most lively discussion of the conference. Representatives of three alliances of Mexican immigrant communities from the states of Michoacán, Zacatecas, and Oaxaca spoke of their initiatives to build transborder cooperation between immigrant communities in the U.S. and their places of origin. There was strong consensus that immigrant communities must be supported in their efforts to exercise greater leadership roles in efforts to create sustainable solutions for the region. The discussions around the transformation of small, family farms to agro-industry also generated strong reactions. Farmers from places as diverse as El Salvador, Iowa, and Chihuahua found common ground in decrying the pressures for large-scale export-oriented agriculture that results in ever-increasing uses of chemical inputs and drives people out of the countryside. (*cont. on p.3*)

### **About Us**

The Heartland Alliance is an anti-poverty, human rights organization that provides housing, health care and human services to improve the lives of impoverished Chicagoans. Once known as Travelers & Immigrants Aid, Heartland has been helping the most marginalized men, women and children through services and advocacy since 1888.

With support from the Ford Foundation, the John D. & Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, the General Service Foundation, and the Rockefeller Foundation, Enlaces America facilitates the empowerment of transnational communities in their commitment to building an equitable, sustainable, and dignified way of life for peoples in the Americas.

#### Contact Information

Oscar Chacón, Director [ochacon@enlacesamerica.org](mailto:ochacon@enlacesamerica.org) (312) 660-1343

Amy Shannon, Associate Director [ashannon@enlacesamerica.org](mailto:ashannon@enlacesamerica.org) (312) 660-1327

Spring Miller, Program Coordinator [smiller@enlacesamerica.org](mailto:smiller@enlacesamerica.org) (312) 660-1347

On the second afternoon of the conference, participants divided into small groups to discuss follow-up strategies regarding the issues and ideas explored in the panels. The recommendations that emerged from these small group discussions ranged from the very concrete to broader and longer-term ideas. Participants emphasized the need to strengthen communication mechanisms among conference participants and communities affected by rural development issues throughout North and Central America.

They also suggested several ideas for coordinated cross-border actions that conference attendees and other interested people could take in response to some of the issues discussed at the conference, including a regional educational campaign regarding the environmental and social benefits of organic agriculture, cross-national media campaigns, and a sign-on letter regarding the perils of transgenic corn to Latin American presidents.

They emphasized the need for analysis of existing regional policy proposals impacting rural communities, and

especially urged the articulation of alternatives to these existing proposals. Finally, participants discussed several ways of using markets linking sustainable food production and consumption to promote viable alternatives to current models of trade and development in the hemisphere.

Enlaces América will report on the results of the meeting in a series of regional consultations in Oaxaca and Michoacán in Mexico and in Guatemala. These consultations will serve to gather additional input and to link more organizations into ongoing civil society efforts to develop regional proposals for economic development, improved protection of political, social, and economic rights, and environmental sustainability.

*Amy Shannon is the Associate Director and Spring Miller is the Program Coordinator of Enlaces America.*

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*(U.S. Farm Policy, cont. from p.1)*

The agricultural, technological, and environmental policies that have made the US a powerhouse in terms of volume of production and low prices have not been based on a regard for family farmers or the environment in the US or anywhere in the world. Cheap corn creates large profits for the corporate food processors and has been the overriding goal for many years. The result: fewer and fewer family farmers becoming deeper in debt along with the closing of schools, churches, and stores in rural communities. In recent years, cheap corn has allowed giant livestock factories (confined animal feeding operations or CAFO's) to expand, polluting water supplies and destroying independent diversified family farms with depressed livestock prices and vertically integrated contract production.

This year, US farm policy garnered more attention in the media than in any previous year. Unfortunately, the debate on the 2002 Farm Bill (a six-year bill) often

obscured or twisted the most important issues in ways that left the public feeling bewildered and helpless. Once again, it appears that the political clout of multinational corporate food processors guided deliberations and largely determined final legislative language.

The debate was intentionally framed in terms of "big farmers versus little farmers," misleading the public so as to obscure the stake of the agribusiness giants or the international implications for farmers in other countries. Fortunately, protests from other countries' political leaders and farm leaders may have made the point that the worldwide future of family farmers, the environment, and a safe and secure food supply for consumers was at stake. It must be made clear that US farm policy is everybody's business.

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The new 2002 farm bill continues a policy of cheap corn and fits neatly with the United State's free trade policy that has no regard for the importance of family farm agriculture or other nations' need for food sovereignty. Corn prices

will be very low (unless a severe drought occurs); farmers will have no alternative but plant fencerow to fencerow to produce as many bushels as possible; and there will be no government reserves, so every bushel will have to be dumped on the international market no matter how low prices go. With global weather changes, the lack of reserves also puts consumers at risk of food shortages and malnutrition.

How do US farmers keep producing with such low prices? Many don't. But thanks to from 20 to 30 billion dollars in direct government payments per year from US taxpayers, not all the farmers go broke at once. The 2002 Farm Bill will make sure cheap corn delivery system survives while many family farmers seek a livelihood elsewhere. Farmers that can temporarily survive will get off farm jobs or farm more land, losing their independence to lenders and vertically integrating corporations.

The National Family Farm Coalition is proposing an alternative that will be good for family farmers in the US and abroad, consumers, and the environment. We call it the Food From Family Farms Act. It will include a price support at full cost of production. The price support would be based on a minimum price ("Floor price") at which processors would purchase from consumers. Thus, the price support would be paid by processors, not the taxpayers. The price floor will be almost twice the current price of corn. The giant processors will no longer have

cheap corn to ship all over the world. The act will provide for grain reserves so a bountiful harvest can be stored for future disasters and not be a curse that drives down international prices. Likewise, bountiful harvests mean we can establish soil conservation programs to avoid wasteful and polluting over production. With this in place, livestock can again be raised profitably on family farms with crop rotations and soil conserving hay and pasture. Finally, the billions of dollars wasted in government payments can be used to help new family farmers to buy land and implements to recreate the family farm system that served our nation well.

Creating a democratic food system and recognizing other nations' need for food sovereignty will become the law of the land when we pass the Food From Family Farms Act. Cheap corn will no longer be allowed to destroy family farmers internationally while turning control of the food supply over to multinational corporations. That will take support from the voting public and the demands of farmers in other nations for a constructive US farm policy—a policy that can be admired and used as a model for family farm systems in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The National Family Farm Coalition looks forward to working with other groups to achieve these goals. *George Naylor raises corn and soybeans with his wife, Peggy, and two young sons. He represents Iowa Citizens for Community Improvement on the Board of the National Family Farm Coalition.*

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### OAXACAN IMMIGRANTS: *An Example of Trans-border Organization and Activism*

*By Leoncio Vasquez\**

Due to the poverty which has dominated in Oaxaca since the epoch of the Spanish conquest, Oaxacans have a long history of emigration. Initially, this emigration was directed towards the interior of Mexico, to states like Veracruz, Sinaloa, and Baja California. However, at the beginning of the 1960s, towards the end of the second *bracero* program, Oaxacans began to cross the northern border into the U.S. Today there are no reliable statistics on the Oaxacan population in the U.S., but based on our own organizing work, and on a study carried out by the Institute for Rural Studies, we estimate that there are more than 100,000 Oaxacans living in California.

Community organization is a major element of life in indigenous communities in Oaxaca. In our communities of origin, we organize to construct schools, churches, roads, etc., and each person has responsibility to cooperate with his *tequio* (collective work for the benefit of the entire community). They form various mayordomías which are responsible for organizing patron saint festivals and every adult man has to fulfill the duties the community assigns him. Additionally, some communities have formed small organizations to present their demands to the state and federal government.

As individuals and families migrate, they often bring with them the traditional community ways of life. Their organizing experiences continue and even intensify to respond to the abuses of employers and governments in their places of residence and work. Examples of these organizations include "Comité Cívico Popular Mixteco," the "Asociación Cívica Benito Juárez," and the "Unidad Oaxaqueña," among others. These small organizations were formed in communities of origin and

resumed their activities in places of immigration like Sinaloa, Baja California, and the U.S. Many of these smaller community groups unite to form new organizations like the Frente Indígena Oaxaqueño Binacional, the Coalición de Comunidades Indígenas Oaxaqueñas, the Organización Regional Oaxaqueña, and the Federación de Organizaciones y Comunidades Indígenas en California.

All these organizations emerged to respond to the different needs of Oaxacan transnational communities. Some of them focus on specific projects in their new communities, others concentrate on cultural activities and sports, while others come together to provide assistance to communities of origin.

The Frente Indígena Oaxaqueño Binacional was created in 1991, when Mixtec and Zapotec leaders came together to form the Mixtec-Zapotec Binational Front. At the 500th anniversary of the meeting of the two worlds, that is to say, when the Europeans discovered and invaded the American Continent, five small organizations united to protest the genocide that is currently being carried out in many Latin American countries against indigenous people and also the discrimination and abandonment that indigenous people have suffered for centuries. Indigenous people were celebrating 500 years of resistance to exploitation, oppression, and all kinds of abuse that we have suffered during this time. Even now we continue fighting to rescue everything that belongs to us, like our culture, language and our own vision of the world.

**As individuals and families migrate, they often bring with them the traditional community ways of life. Their organizing experiences continue and even intensify to respond to the abuses of employers and governments in their places of residence and work.**

Two years after the Binational Front, the representation of other Oaxacan origin who had specifically, the Triquis and composed of communities in California, was named

Binacional (FIOB). The FIOB emerged in the U.S., but it expanded its activities to Oaxaca in order to coordinate its work in a binational way and thereby be able to work with migrant sending communities as well as with immigrants themselves.

formation of the Mixtec-Zapotec organization expanded to include indigenous immigrants of begun to migrate more recently – Chatinos. The new organization, and individuals of Oaxacan origin the Frente Indígena Oaxaqueño

The specific activities of the FIOB include: making demands to the Mexican and U.S. government regarding the needs of indigenous communities, fighting against abuses that migrants suffer in the places where they come to work; defending the human rights in general of indigenous Oaxacans, promoting the autonomy of communities, the sustainable use of resources and cultural preservation. To achieve these goals, the FIOB has coordinated hundreds of mobilizations, press conferences, and meetings with different agencies of both the Mexican and U.S. government.

However, all these efforts have not been sufficient to address the immediate needs of communities. In order to resolve this challenge, the FIOB created the Binational Center for the Development of Indigenous Oaxacans, Inc (Centro). The Centro is a legally independent entity. Over the last five years, in close collaboration with the FIOB, the Centro has implemented a variety of community projects in Mexico and the U.S. These projects range from the Proyecto de los Pueblos Indígenas (Project of Indigenous Peoples), a labor rights education initiative for indigenous workers in California, to a bimonthly newsletter called *El Tequio: The Binational Voice of Oaxacans*, to an interpreting initiative where people trilingual in Spanish, English and indigenous languages staff courts, immigration offices, hospitals, etc. in certain areas of California, to the Proyecto de Ayuda a Damnificados por las Heladas (Support Project to Victims of the Frost), a campaign to help indigenous communities in the San Joaquin Valley who were affected by a devastating frost in winter 1998-1999.

Evaluating these experiences, one can say that we have been able to both attend to the immediate needs of communities and articulate a visible and public voice of indigenous peoples, who for years have lived invisible lives while suffering poverty and discrimination. We have made the experiences of migrant indigenous communities – who we are, where we come from, why we come, the challenges we face, and our struggle for the rights we deserve – more broadly known.

*\*This is a summarized and translated version of the presentation given by Leoncio Vasquez, Communications Coordinator for the Frente Indígena Oaxaqueño Binacional, during the Corn, Commerce, and Community conference.*

## ITANONÍ, FLOR DEL MAÍZ

*Participants at the Corn, Commerce, and Communities Conference were treated to a special tortilla-making demonstration and tasting prepared by staff of Itanoní, Flor del Maíz (Itanoní, Flower of Corn), a gourmet tortilla-making company based in Oaxaca, Mexico. Itanoní produces and markets authentically produced tortillas made of native corn species of Oaxaca, and defines itself as “a cultural movement aimed at the culinary rescue of corn and the tortilla.” Below is a summarized and translated version of a presentation prepared for the Corn, Commerce, and Community Conference by Itanoní founders and owners Amado Ramírez and Lea Gabriela Fernández regarding the origins and mission of their project. □*

The Itanoní, Flor del Maíz project integrates corn production and consumption chains. The project emerged as a structural approach to conservation of native corn species, and the preservation of the richness that native corn biodiversity represents in ecological, culinary, and cultural terms. Itanoní’s work consists of four major activities: identifying native corn species in Oaxaca; preserving the seeds of native corn species of high culinary value; promoting the cultivation of these native corn species, and promoting the consumption of tortillas made from native corn species.

The work of Itanoní is guided by the following concepts:

1. Studies and projects carried out by small farmers and agricultural researchers in Oaxaca and other southern Mexican states demonstrate the importance of small farmer stewardship in conserving corn genetic diversity. This biodiversity is a resource for the entire planet.
2. Each one of the different native species of corn gives tortillas unique flavors and consistencies. Understanding and disseminating these qualities are critical for educating both Mexican and international consumers.
3. The recent increase in the consumption of tortillas made with native corn species from Oaxaca can provide a stimulus for small farmers who are familiar with these various species and who know how to cultivate them. This is important for their household consumption as well as for selling what is left over at better prices. Native species can therefore become a real and meaningful alternative in the face of modified corn varieties, hybrids, and transgenic materials, all of which threaten biodiversity.
4. The best way of appreciating the culinary richness of native Oaxacan corn is to prepare tortillas in way that is as similar as possible to ancient practices.
5. We must work hard to publicize and make available these traditionally prepared tortillas using native corn species, so that the consumers who taste and eat them, the tortilla-makers who prepare them, and the farmers who grow the corn all benefit.

Along with having the greatest diversity of native corn species, Oaxaca is considered one of the oldest centers of

origin of corn cultivation in the world. Currently, native corn species, collected and cared for by small farmers, account for more than 90% of corn-cultivated area in Oaxaca. However, in the current epoch of globalization, there are a number of serious threats to this diversity. Mexican markets were opened up to world prices at a more rapid rate than was originally planned under the free trade agreements, bringing a massive supply of imported corn at lower prices. There is a danger that the use of native corn seeds will diminish because of the supply of high-production imported corn at a lower price. However, Itanoní also believes that the current era presents great opportunities, because globalization implies diversity and a search for identity, and Oaxaca has a tremendous amount of identity and diversity.

For years, consumers in Mexico have not had the opportunity to eat tortillas that have identity. For a tortilla to have “identity,” a consumer must know where it comes from (its biological heritage), what it contains (the characteristics of the materials involved as well as the people who develop and produce it), and how it was made (the processes of nixtamalización, grinding and cooking, in a traditional way). Consumers have been deprived little by little not just of the possibility of eating a good tortilla, but also of information regarding the production process, the great diversity of corn species, the varieties of the colors, tastes, smells, and elasticities of corn, and in general, all the characteristics that corn develops in its natural environment. Itanoní’s project is aimed at producing tortillas with identity, as a means of reviving Oaxaca’s local cultural and ecological diversity. The great challenge for Itanoní is to make the general population recognize the quality of native corn species and traditionally-produced tortillas, and to encourage consumers to pay the higher prices that this quality requires.

We have faith in the historical memory of the Mexican population, in the good taste of consumers who know how to recognize diversity, and in the willingness of well-intentioned people to support a movement for the culinary rescue of corn and the tortilla. And we are confident that there will be a very tasty, delicious way of doing this.

## REGIONAL LINKAGES (ENLACES REGIONALES) PLANNING PROCESS

*By Amy Shannon*

Enlaces América is building upon its experience with migrants' rights networks to develop a multi-issue regional civil society forum to address issues of economic inequalities and sustainable development in North and Central America. Over the past several months, we have conducted a broad process of consultation with partners in the region in order to refine the concept of this forum and to ensure that it constitutes a useful space for civil society advocates and communities throughout the U.S., Mexico, and Central America. Below is a brief update on this consultation process:

### Initial planning workshop: February, 2002

On February 19, we convened a small group of leading advocates and academics from throughout the U.S., Mexico, and Central America to brainstorm about how to develop a civil society initiative that would address the interrelated social, economic, and environmental repercussions of global and regional economic integration. The planning session was intentionally small and informal, and therefore could not be fully representative, but our intent was to gather a sample of immigrants' rights, human rights, environmental, and sustainable development organizations to explore the linkages between their interests and identify the gaps that keep them from working together effectively. In all, fifteen representatives of twelve organizations in Mexico, El Salvador, and the United States attended the meeting. The overall message that emerged from the meetings were:

1. There is a need for the kind of multi-disciplinary, multi-sectoral regional forum envisioned, and
2. More direct consultation with stakeholders is necessary to give the forum substance and direction.

Based on the early issues identified in February, we began a series of consultations in the region. The first took place in El Salvador in May. We also recently hosted an international conference on meeting on Corn, Commerce and Community, where representatives from a variety of civil society sectors from North and Central America met to explore rural development issues through the lens of corn, which has become a potent symbol of the challenges posed to rural communities by processes of regional economic integration. Three more consultations are

scheduled for Oaxaca, Mexico, Michoacán, Mexico and Guatemala over the next three months.

### Planning meeting in El Salvador

Representatives from 11 organizations attended a workshop in Las Palmas, Chalatenango in El Salvador on May 3rd and 4th, 2002. The participants represented organizations based in El Salvador working on rural development, consumers' rights, women's rights, human rights, alternative finance, public health, and migrants' rights.

The theme of migration permeated the discussions, as participants articulated the linkages between migration and the range of challenges facing El Salvador and the Central American region. There was a general concern about the lack of contact between organized groups of Salvadoran immigrants and their counterparts in El Salvador. This disconnect persists despite the fact that these groups should have many common concerns such as migration policy, regional free trade agreements and regional economic development. The group concurred that Enlaces América could play an important role in promoting these connections, not by creating a new network, but by creating spaces for discussion and articulation among existing networks.

The Salvadoran groups felt that they could be more effective at interacting with Salvadoran communities living in the United States if they understood more about migration policies and the political and social realities of migrant Salvadorans. Enlaces América committed to organizing a workshop on this topic, planned for the third week of August, 2002.

A major challenge echoed in many discussions throughout the two-day meeting is how to develop new leaders, both in El Salvador and within immigrant communities, who are capable of confronting the current challenges for the region in all their complexities.

After the three initial meetings, we have identified a preliminary list of priority areas for regional linkages. These priorities reflect the synthesis of many discussions in addition to the formal consultations, and they will be subject to additions and changes as we take them to the

remaining regional consultations. A more refined list of priorities with workplans will be developed by Fall, 2002.

Initial themes for regional linkages:

- Rural poverty and Food Security
- Migration in its regional and global contexts
- Effects of regionalization and globalization and alternative proposals for regional development

- Developing the role of US immigrant communities from Central America and Mexico in shaping alternatives
- Leadership development throughout the region
- Increasing communications among local, national and transboundary organizations around issues of regional and global impact.

*Amy Shannon is the Associate Director of Enlaces América.*

## ENLACES AMÉRICA: COMMUNITY FORUMS ON REGIONAL ISSUES

*By Spring Miller*

As part of its effort to strengthen the role of immigrant communities in regional discussions of development issues, Enlaces América has begun to work with Chicago immigrant groups to create spaces for communication with representatives of civil society organizations throughout the region. In April, Enlaces América hosted a talk by Victor Suárez, president of ANEC, entitled “Más Allá de la Limosna” (Beyond the Soup Kitchen) in the Rudy Lozano Library in Chicago’s Pilsen neighborhood. In early June, staff organized a workshop led Vince McElhinny, Program Manager of InterAction’s Central America work, and Enlaces América Director Oscar Chacón, on regional integration and trade proposals affecting Central America. That workshop took place at Centro Romero, a community-based service center for Mexican and Central American immigrants in Chicago.

In his presentation on rural development and food security in Mexico, Victor Suárez emphasized the concrete example of corn as a way of explaining the social and environmental repercussions of current model of regional agricultural and trade policies. He explained that Mexico produces 18 tons of corn per year, more than enough to feed its population, but the massive corn imports that have arrived from the U.S. since the implementation of NAFTA have disrupted the traditional production-consumption cycle in that country. Corn imported from the U.S. is often intended for animal consumption and is sometimes transgenic. Mexicans do not only eat these imported, altered corn species (many of which require the use of pesticides) but often plant them as well – and in so doing, they endanger the genetic diversity of Mexican corn. Due to heavy government subsidies, the prices of U.S. imported corn are very low, and Mexican farmers cannot compete with them. Many small farmers who depend on income generated from selling the corn that they do not consume themselves are thereby being forced off their land. Suarez noted that family remittances directed towards rural communities in Mexico have been one of the factors that has slowed the inevitable abandonment of the countryside and farming livelihood in the face of these challenges.

Representatives of Mexican Hometown Federations shared some of their concerns about Mexican rural development issues following the presentation. A representative of the Michoacan Federation noted the problem of abandoned land in his state, which he linked to the government’s abandonment of rural development programs like PROCAMPO and CONASUPO. A representative of the Zacatecas Federation expressed his concerns regarding the three-for-one program, in which the government commits three dollars to local development projects for every one sent by migrants abroad. He noted that as the program is expanding beyond the state of Zacatecas, accountability for the expenditure of the money is increasingly an area of concern, and that residents of communities of origin are increasingly distrustful of it.

At a community seminar held at Centro Romero, Vince McElhinny and Oscar Chacón presented an overview of proposed regional policies – specifically, the U.S.-Central America Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA) and Plan Puebla Panamá – that could impact Central American communities in upcoming years. McElhinny emphasized that in evaluating the possible repercussions of a possible CAFTA, it was instructive to look at the case of NAFTA and Mexico. Looking back at eight years of NAFTA, he noted, we can see that some sectors – notably, large and foreign-owned businesses – have benefited, while other sectors – notably, small farmers and rural residents – have struggled. While many have debated the merits of

NAFTA, one impact of its implementation is clear: rural displacement has increased, thereby generating internal and international migration flows. There is little doubt, he asserted, that a free trade agreement with Central American will have much the same impact on populations there. The fact that NAFTA includes no provisions addressing international low-skilled labor flows in North America has proven to be one of the most glaring and troublesome omissions of the accord.

Oscar Chacón engaged participants in a discussion regarding the role of migration in the economies of Central America. Participants, the majority of whom were immigrants from Central America, noted that people – labor – constitute the biggest export of their respective countries. Therefore, a free trade agreement that does not address the rising numbers of Central American emigrants – whose remittances are, in percentage terms, far more important to their home countries than are remittances to the much larger Mexican economy – will be at best very incomplete. Participants suggested that Enlaces América, in conjunction with immigrant organizations, continue to sponsor forums and workshops for community members regarding issues of economic development and migration policy that impact them. *Spring Miller is the Program Coordinator of Enlaces América.*

## RELIGIOUS COMMUNITY BORDER STRATEGIZING MEETING IN EL PASO

*By Spring Miller*

On May 15-18, 2002, representatives of a variety of nationally and locally-based religious organizations gathered in El Paso, TX to develop a strategy for a faith community response to U.S.-Mexico border issues. Many participants and the institutions they represent were involved in the Central American sanctuary movement of the 1980s, and feel compelled to address the human tragedies brought on by rising migration flows and increasingly

restrictive migration law enforcement strategies in the region. According to Mexico's Foreign Ministry, 70 migrants died in June 2002 alone in their attempts to reach the U.S. Meeting participants were also very concerned about living conditions in communities along both sides of the 2,000 mile border.

After listening to presentations from experts on a variety of border-related themes, including one from a Ciudad Juárez community organization on the relationship between the explosion of the maquila industry and social disintegration in that city, participants divided into small groups to identify themes and develop goals and strategies to guide a broad-based faith community movement to

address US/Mexico border issues and the regional economic relationships which shape them.

The fundamental theme that emerged from these discussions is that lives and deaths on the border provide a compelling window onto global economic systems which value the flow of capital over the well-being of people, and that people of faith across the U.S. and the region are

**In bringing attention to the deaths of migrants who have been forced into perilous desert areas in order to enter the U.S., as well as to the living conditions of other border residents, religious communities will put a human face on a complex – and often devastating - web of economic, migration, and border policies that impact the entire North and Central American region.**

called to respond both to the immediate tragedies lived out daily on the border and to root economic causes of these tragedies. In bringing attention to the deaths of migrants who have been forced into perilous desert areas in order to enter the U.S., as well as to the living conditions of migrants, maquila workers, colonia inhabitants, and other border residents, religious communities will put a human face on a complex –

and often devastating - web of border, migration, and economic policies that impact the entire North and Central American region. Participants termed deaths on the border a consequence of “globalization without conscience.”

Participants identified the theological basis of their work as follows: “[We need to] enable communities of faith to see the migrant as the divine presence among us. That divine presence is being violated by the way in which the

migrant is being treated; therefore we want to welcome the migrant as the divine presence – in faith and not fear.” They resolved to create an actively engaged faith community committed to the defending the dignity of economic migrants, to focusing on lives and deaths of people at the border, and, most fundamentally, to promoting “people-centered globalization.”

In order to develop this broad-based faith constituency engaged with migration and economic policy issues, participants decided to organize a major faith community pilgrimage along the border in fall 2003. The pilgrimage will be composed of two groups, one beginning in San Diego/Tijuana, and the other in Brownsville/Matamoros, who will meet in El Paso/Juárez on November 2, the Day of the Dead. National religious organizations and institutions will be invited to co-sponsor the pilgrimage,

and it will be an opportunity to develop a constituency throughout the U.S. Building support for this will include outreach to former sanctuary communities. Gathering participants will also lend support to a Salvadoran-American National Network (SANN)-organized speaking tour of migrants who will share their stories in several cities throughout the U.S. The tour will also help build support for the 2003 pilgrimage. Finally, participants decided to develop a resource packet for this campaign, which will be sent along with letter soliciting support to the networks/contacts of all meeting participants.

*For more information about this initiative, please contact Susan Thompson of the Columban Fathers Justice and Peace Office at [susanstarrsthompson@juno.com](mailto:susanstarrsthompson@juno.com) or 202-529-5115.*

## Members of the Regional Network of Civil Organizations on Migration (RNCOM) Meet in Guatemala

On May 27-31, 2002, representatives of the non-governmental Regional Network of Civil Organizations on Migration (RNCOM) met in a parallel fashion to the VII Vice-Ministerial Regional Conference on Migration (RCM) in Antigua, Guatemala. The RCM includes representation of all Central American governments, the Dominican Republic, Mexico, the U.S., and Canada, and convenes several times a year for technical meetings and seminars to discuss regional migration issues and policy concerns. From May 28-29, governmental representatives convened for the 2002 Vice-Ministerial meeting, the highest-level RCM gathering which occurs on an annual basis.

The primary item on the RNCOM's agenda was the promotion of the Regional Guidelines for the Treatment of Migrants in Situations of Arrest, Detention, Deportation, and Reception, which were first formally presented as a RNCOM initiative at the VI RCM Vice-Ministerial meeting in March 2001. Since last March, the RNCOM has engaged in a rigorous process of internal consultation and edition to produce a draft document of these Guidelines, which are a compilation of international and regional human rights instruments applicable to migrants in the four above-mentioned situations. In January 2002, a draft version of the Guidelines was circulated to all RCM member governments for their comments and suggestions. RNCOM representatives in each country then followed up by arranging meetings with relevant governmental officials over the winter and spring of 2002. Governmental

responses to the Guidelines varied throughout the region; some countries prepared extensive written comments and suggested that they would be disposed to adopt them eventually, while other governments expressed deeper concerns about the document.

RNCOM members had two opportunities to make formal presentations to the RCM in plenary sessions. In addition to calling upon RCM governments to adopt the Guidelines, the RNCOM also highlighted other areas of concern, including the need to address migration issues in the framework of regional free trade and integration agreements, the treatment of Colombian refugees, and the disturbing post-September 11 regional tendency to subordinate migration policy to issues of national security.

During its own meetings, RNCOM members took the opportunity to share information regarding the current migration situation throughout the region, to give updates regarding regional monitoring projects and the Regional Human Rights Initiative, to evaluate the status of the Guidelines adoption campaign, to focus on specific themes of particular importance to the network, and to discuss the future of the RNCOM itself. Below is a brief summary of those discussions.

Participants convened the meeting by sharing information regarding the migratory situations in each of their countries. The predominant theme in these presentations was that migration laws and administrative measures have

tightened significantly in the region over the past year, particularly since September 11, and that national security has become the preeminent concern in the formulation of migration policies. Meanwhile, new migratory flows have emerged in the region, and at the same time numbers of migrants continue to rise. In this context, there has been a notable increase in the violation of migrants' human rights, making the need for the Regional Guidelines all the more urgent.

As part of the Regional Human Rights Campaign, the center of which is the promotion of the Guidelines, several RNCOM member organizations and national forums have carried out human rights monitoring projects at national and regional levels. In Central America and the Dominican Republic, FLACSO-Guatemala and five other RNCOM organizations conducted a monitoring effort to evaluate regional migratory tendencies and to analyze human rights abuses (see article in March 2002 *Enlaces News*). The results of this study should be ready in September. The Mexican Migration Forum conducted a series of interviews and compiled a database regarding the conditions in detention centers throughout the country. The results from that monitoring effort should be ready by the end of this summer.

Participants also discussed specific themes of concern throughout the region. They noted that the role of the International Organization for Migration (IOM), a global institution dedicated primarily to the transport of migrants and refugees to their countries of origin, varies significantly throughout the region. The IOM functions as the technical secretariat of the RCM, and is actively involved in migration issues throughout the region. In March 2001, RNCOM representatives protested a proposal put forth by IOM to RCM member governments that it contract with each of them to carry out the deportations extra-regional migrants. In some countries, the relationship between the IOM and civil society is characterized by high levels of trust and cooperation, but in others there have been rising levels of tension between the IOM and civil organizations, primarily due to confusion over its role in the definition and implementation of regional migration policies.

Participants reviewed the status of U.S. –Canada border security agreements and the state of the stalled Mexico-U.S. migration and border negotiations. They also shared updates on regional campaigns for the ratification of the 1991 U.N. Convention on the Protection of Migrant Workers and their Families. Two countries in the region – Belize and Mexico – have already signed the convention, and there are active campaigns in favor of the convention in several others (Guatemala, Costa Rica). Finally, they also discussed the issue of South-South migration, and the need for the RNCOM to address that phenomenon with greater energy.

**In addition to calling on all RCM member governments to adopt the Regional Guidelines, the RNCOM also highlighted the need to address migration in the context of regional trade and integration agreements, and its concern about the disturbing post-September 11 tendency to subordinate migration policy to issues of national security.**

Finally, RNCOM members discussed the future of the Guidelines initiative given the challenges presented by the current global and regional political climate with regard to migration. They decided to resubmit the draft

Guidelines document to all RCM member governments, and to request specifically of those countries who have not yet presented written comments that they do so by August 1, 2002. August 1 will also be the deadline for RNCOM members and other outside experts to submit comments to the current draft of the Guidelines. They agreed that regardless of whether or not the Guidelines are adopted by all RCM member country governments, the document will serve as a useful tool in regional monitoring and advocacy campaigns. RNCOM members in Mexico and Honduras have already provided examples of how to make effective use of the Guidelines document; the Mexican Migration Forum used it in its monitoring project of immigration detention centers, while the Honduran Migration Table used the Guidelines in the human rights training they provide to immigration agents in that country. Several meeting participants suggested using the Guidelines as a reference in the development of alternative drafts of new migration legislation, which are being developed in several countries in the region. *Spring Miller is the Program Coordinator of Enlaces América.*

## Temporary Protected Status: *Relief for Central American nationals in the U.S.*

By Oscar Chacón

On May 1, 2002, Attorney General John Ashcroft announced the third extension of Temporary Protected Status (TPS) for Honduran and Nicaraguan nationals for an additional 12-month period beginning July 5. On July 9, he announced a 12-month extension of the separate TPS program for Salvadorans beginning September 9. These announcements by Mr. Ashcroft followed an active advocacy campaign led by Central American community based organizations, particularly those affiliated with the Salvadoran American National Network. Central American governments also pushed the Bush administration for the extension of these programs.

The TPS program for Hondurans and Nicaraguans was created on January 5, 1999, after Hurricane Mitch devastated Central America in the fall of 1998. Until the most recent expansion was granted, the deadline for qualifying Honduran and Nicaraguan nationals to re-register for this protection was July 2, 2001 following the two earthquakes that struck El Salvador on January 13 and February 13, 2001. It was set to expire on September 13, 2002.

**The situation of different national groups that have been granted TPS since the program's inception in 1990 will eventually have to be reviewed anew. The return by these groups of foreign nationals to their respective countries of origin is highly unlikely. In practice, they quickly become part of the U.S. social and economic fabric, at the same time that they play a key financial support role in relationship to their countries of origin.**

TPS is a unique immigration law which establishes a temporary period during which undocumented immigrants from countries recognized by the U.S. government as experiencing particular turmoil may remain in the U.S. without fear of deportation. Individuals from TPS-designated countries are not automatically granted this temporary relief; they must register and show proof that they were already in the U.S. when the TPS designation for their country was established (for Hondurans and Nicaraguans, this date is December 30, 1998; for Salvadorans, this date is February 13, 2001). The TPS program grants its participants the right to be legally employed in the U.S. by enabling them to receive an Employment Authorization Document (popularly known as work permit). Possession of an employment authorization document allows foreign nationals to apply for a social security card.

However, TPS does not qualify its recipients to access any form of public assistance, in spite of the fact that they are officially recognized taxpayers. TPS does not grant its recipients the right to travel back and forth to their countries of origin, although under extraordinary circumstances, TPS recipients can apply for a special travel permit known as Advance Parole. Such applications are approved at the discretion of the Immigration and Naturalization Service.

The U.S. Congress first enacted Temporary Protected Status in 1990. It was created as a way to accommodate the presence of foreign nationals in the U.S. who, according to the U.S. government, did not qualify for political asylum or other forms of humanitarian protection available at the time, and who did not have access to any other avenue to legalize their immigration status in the U.S. However, TPS is not designed to allow recipients of this form of protection to evolve into a permanent immigration status. TPS law emphasizes very strongly its nature as a temporary program only.

In order to receive TPS protection under the extensions granted by the Department of Justice, immigrants must have received protection under all previous registration periods. If TPS beneficiary fails to register during a re-registration period, that person will lose his or her temporary protection. Because of these complex requirements, the number of Honduran and Nicaraguan nationals protected under TPS has been decreasing. Under the original registration period, 110,000 Hondurans and Nicaraguans received TPS. During the most recent extension period, only 28,000 of those original 111,000 immigrants re-registered for protection. By the end of June 2002, over 250,000 Salvadoran nationals had applied for protection under TPS. Community groups are already planning to wage an active campaign to encourage these immigrants to re-register after September 9, 2002.

There is no doubt that the renewal of TPS status for these national groups, whose countries are still struggling to overcome deeply-rooted poverty, to recover from bloody civil wars, and to rebuild after recent natural disasters, is a victory from a humanitarian perspective. However, the decision to extend TPS for Hondurans, Nicaraguans, and Salvadorans also serves to advance the economic and political interests of both the U.S. and these countries of origin. The TPS recipient population represents a large pool of workers who fulfill jobs in crucial low-wage sectors of the U.S. economy. In addition, TPS recipients sent significant portions of their earnings in the U.S. to impoverished relatives in their countries of origin. The total amount of remittances sent home by nationals abroad greatly exceeds the amount of foreign aid that the U.S. sends to Central American countries. Remittances buffer these countries from absolute economic collapse, and thus serve to alleviate social and political pressures that generate unrest and provoke even more emigration.

The situation of different national groups that have been granted TPS since the program's inception in 1990 will eventually have to be reviewed anew. The return by these groups of foreign nationals to their respective countries of origin is highly unlikely. In practice, they quickly become part of the U.S. social and economic fabric, at the same time that they play a key financial support role in relationship to their countries of origin. Therefore, the best solution to this situation from the perspective of U.S. interests, as well as those of the affected communities, would be to reform U.S. immigration law in a way that allows for a full legalization of these foreign nationals. *Oscar Chacón is the Director of Enlaces América.*

Editor's note: For further information about TPS, please review the U.S. INS web site at [www.ins.gov](http://www.ins.gov).

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## Mesoamerican Forum in Managua: *Against Plan Puebla Panamá and in favor of community-based regional integration in Mesoamerica*

*By Amy Shannon*

As governments throughout North and Central America continue to advance a trade-oriented model of economic integration for the region, civil society groups have begun to create spaces where organizations from different sectors can come together to discuss alternatives for equitable regional development. A group of representatives of a variety of civil society organizations from Mexico and Central America have gathered three times in the past eight months (in Tapachula, Chiapas, Mexico, in Xelaju, Guatemala and most recently, in Managua, Nicaragua) largely in response to the proposed Plan Puebla-Panamá "megaproject" that many fear will contribute to increased poverty, environmental destruction and migration in the region. (See article in Mexico-U.S. Advocates Network News, November 2001 describing the Plan Puebla Panamá.)

These Mesoamerican Forums fall within the framework of a strategy outlined at the First World Social Forum, held in Porto Alegre in January-February 2001, where participants resolved to establish regional alliances throughout the world to debate issues of economic development and integration. The forums are designed as inclusive gatherings aimed at creating alliances among different civil society sectors within Central America and Mexico around a common vision for a just, equitable and sustainable Mesoamerica.

At the first two Forums, participants agreed on a number of issues, including:

- A complete rejection of the Plan-Puebla Panamá as a model for regional integration;
- The Mesoamerican Forums should create and expand networks of Mesoamerican people and organizations

who are aware of the potential risks of globalization and the PPP;

- Civil society organizations must develop a plan for coordinated mobilizations on local, national, and regional levels to promote an alternative vision for regional integration.

The Third Mesoamerican Forum took place in Managua, Nicaragua from July 16-18, 2002. The Managua Forum was designed as a participatory space, where attendees were asked to share their experiences of resistance and alliance-building. After a morning of reports from the region and panels that explained

the linkages between the Plan Puebla Panama and other regional agreements such as the proposed Free Trade Area of the Americas, participants divided into groups to discuss themes identified as priorities in the previous Forums. Working groups on Social, Economic and Cultural Rights, Food Security, Local Development, and Impacts of

Megaprojects spent the next day identifying issues of common concern and defining next steps. On July 18, after a long day of negotiation and discussion, the Forum reconvened in plenary session to share the results of the working groups. The full richness of those discussions cannot be distilled into a short article, so the following is an attempt to signal some of the important themes that were reflected in the final declaration of the forum.

The Managua Forum declaration reaffirmed the rejection of the Plan Puebla Panama, which emphasizes investment in infrastructure and maquila-style industrial development. Instead, participants called for development strategies that place local communities at the center as both protagonists and beneficiaries. Food security emerged as a central theme of the meeting. Many participants were concerned about the influx of genetically modified organisms and agribusiness interests in the region. The final declaration called for a re-focusing on campesino agriculture and local markets. There was also a strong concern about patents on life and the dangers of opening up the biological richness of the region to exploitation. Another central theme of the meeting was autonomy and the territorial rights of indigenous peoples.

Participants emphasized that creating mechanisms for local control of resources and political processes is a necessity for strengthening democracy in the region. Consumers' rights, particularly with respect to privatization of basic services such as water and electricity, were another important theme of discussion.

The final declaration of the Forum called for a regional day of action on October 12 to call attention to campaigns against the Plan Puebla Panama and against the Free Trade Area of the Americas. It also called for educational campaigns to publicize negative impacts of the PPP and to

call attention to the plight of

particularly vulnerable

populations such as migrants, young people, women, children, and the elderly.

The declaration also called upon civil society organizations to

document and analyze experiences of community and regional

development

initiatives based on principles of with equity, justice, and sustainability.

More than 1,000 people attended the event, more than double the size of the Xelajú Forum and three or four times bigger than the Forum in Tapachula. Participants represented campesino organizations, students groups, development organizations, indigenous communities, youth organizations, consumers' movements, womens' groups, and other civil society interests. The large increase in participation made for a bit of chaos, as some participants were learning about the PPP for the first time. In some instances, working group leaders struggled to accommodate the diversity of experiences and perspectives. Still, most participants were pleased and surprised to see so many people who had made the effort to attend the Forum from all countries in the region.

\*This article draws on a translated summary of the reports from the first two Mesoamerican Social Forums published on the webpage of CIEPAC, [www.ciepac.org](http://www.ciepac.org) and the declarations of the Third Mesoamerican Forums and the Second Mesoamerican Campesino Forum held in Managua, Nicaragua, July 14-18). The full text of these declarations is available at [www.foromanagua.com.ni](http://www.foromanagua.com.ni).

**The Mesoamerican Forums fall within the framework of a strategy outlined at the First World Social Forum, where participants resolved to establish regional alliances throughout the world to debate issues of economic development and integration. The forums are designed as inclusive gatherings aimed at creating alliances among different civil society sectors within Central America and Mexico around a common vision for a just, equitable and sustainable Mesoamerica.**

## Segundo Encuentro Campesino

On July 14-15, just prior to the Mesoamerican Forum, campesino organizations held a two-day conference to establish their own platform for regional integration. The Campesino forum was designed and managed entirely by organizations representing small agricultural producers throughout the region. The Campesino Forum declaration, which was subsequently incorporated into the final Forum declaration, set out positions on a variety of issues including:

**Food Security** The campesino forum rejected the intrusion of genetically modified organisms into food production chains and called instead for policies that would support domestic production and to reemphasize food production instead of just focusing on export agriculture.

**Land Reform and Land Tenure** In addition to calling for a comprehensive land reform that would prioritize the needs of small producers, the Campesino Forum called for "good land, the necessary resources to make it productive, credit, technical assistance and markets." The declaration also emphasized the need to respect regional autonomy.

**Natural Resources and Biodiversity** The declaration emphasized links between bio and cultural diversity, the need to revalue traditional knowledge, and a rejection of patents on life or genetic resources. In addition, the campesino groups pledged "to promote environmental conscience and culture, attempting to overcome anti-ecological practices in campesino agriculture."

**Migration** Campesino leaders called for an end to increasing militarization of borders, focusing specifically on Mexico's "policing of the southern border to stop central american migration to the US." The declaration clarified "that migration flows will diminish and cease to be conflictive only when conditions of dignity and hope for progress are restored to the countries and regions that are currently expelling migrants."

**Union and Labor Rights** The campesino declaration denounced the extremely bad conditions for rural laborers who are the most poor and disenfranchised sector in the region. It proposed a labor network for agricultural mesamerica that would defend the rights of migrant agricultural laborers beyond national frontiers.

**Rights of Rural Youth** The declaration called for a rural youth movement that could be a strategic investment in renewing leadership in the rural sector.

With respect to **Free Trade Agreements**, the Campesino Forum declared: "We fully reject free trade agreements in the region that do not count with the support of the population as a whole and which benefit exclusively the large transnational corporations that operate in alliance with large national investors." The declaration goes on to reject FTAA under those criteria.

As for **PPP**, the document declares "complete and full rejection of the imposition of the PPP because it is a government program that serves transnational corporations, without being sanctioned by congresses and national parliaments." It also rejects the establishment of biological corridors, considered to be fundamental element of the PPP. Finally, there is a call to NGOs not to be compromised by the process " We condemn any actions of civil society organizations who claim to represent the people in the promotion, partial participation or implementation of the PPP, due to the fact that we consider this plan an attack against the way of life of our populations.'