



enlacesAmérica

Immigrant Leaders at Social Forum of the Americas, Caracas Venezuela

By Marilu Quintanilla-Aguayo

“It’s important for those of us from Latin America to come back and recharge our batteries, exchange ideas, and organize with the incredibly brilliant, inspired, committed people here. Having these immigrant leaders away from their daily work, together for a week here, is invaluable for future work,” said Oscar Chacón, director of Enlaces América. He refers to the 22 immigrant leaders comprising the delegation that Enlaces América organized to go to the World Social Forum in Caracas Venezuela this past January.

Immigrant leaders in this year’s delegation represented Bolivian, Ecuadorian, Mexican, Salvadoran, Guatemalan, Honduran, Garifuna (Black Central American), and Nicaraguan communities around the world. For the second year in a row Enlaces América, with the generous support of the Netherlands Organization for International Cooperation (NOVIB, a sister organization of OXFAM International), included in its delegation migrant leaders residing outside of the United States. This group included Nicaraguan immigrants in Costa Rica, Bolivian immigrants in Argentina, an Ecuadorian immigrant in Spain, and a Chilean immigrant in Italy. Another important and often overlooked community, added for the first time this year to the Enlaces América’s delegation, were second-generation immigrants (children of immigrants born in the countries of destination or brought to these countries at a very early age) who maintain strong ties to their parents’ countries of origin, representing Mexico/US, El Salvador/US, Chile/Italy, and Bolivia/Argentina.

Many of the delegation members had never attended a Social Forum before, and their enthusiasm enriched the experience for all the participants. As Patricia Sobalvarro of Agencia Alpha commented, “Aside from the fond memories of meeting and sharing with great people, I also bring back new ideas and a strong desire to strengthen the work of our local organizations. This experience has strengthened my vision and reenergized my commitment to work on behalf of my community.” This energetic and passionate group of migrant leaders presented a series of workshops at this year’s Social Forum:

“Migration Poverty and Natural Disasters: How Do We Break the Vicious Cycles” explored the links between these topics and ways to articulate a more promising and hopeful future.

“CAFTA, Monitoring and Impact” provided a space for organizations wanting to monitor the Central American Free Trade Agreement between the US, Central America, and the Dominican Republic, to exchange ideas and experiences.

“Planning for Hemispheric Meeting of Transnational Migrant Communities,” allowed organized Latin-American and Caribbean immigrant groups to deliberate and plan for a hemispheric gathering that will take place within the next year to 18 months.

“Political Participation in Two Countries,” migrants from Mexico, El Salvador, Ecuador, and Honduras shared their perspectives on transnational political participation.

“Integration: Immigrants Making a Home in a New Country,” second generation immigrants shared their testimonies on the impact of a transnational upbringing.

In addition to the knowledge and experiences shared with the attendees of these workshops, this space at the World Social Forum gave this delegation of immigrant leaders the opportunity to interact with one another and exchange their newly acquired knowledge in informal peer-to-peer learning sessions in a social setting at the end of each day. “As a human being, I felt this was a very enriching experience,” said Gloria Jimenez of Rumiñahui Association. “It enabled us to be key players in debates, where generally immigrant voices do not get heard.”

Following up on this delegation’s participation at the World Social Forum, Enlaces América will also sponsor a similar delegation of about 10-12 immigrant leaders residing in the US, Central and South America, and Europe, to the 2nd World Social Forum on Migration taking place in Madrid, Spain from June 22-24, 2006. The World Social Forum on Migrations is a space for exchanging experiences, ideas, reflection, and the formulation of proposals. It is also a space for building alliances and networks among individuals and organizations working on civil, political, economic, and cultural rights.

Enlaces América continues to send delegations to the social forums because they provide a platform where migrant leaders can share their experiences with other migrant groups and with civil society organizations around the globe.