

“We’re all foreigners. Let’s build a more just society. No xenophobia.”

By Patricia Montes

As member of the National Alliance of Latin American and Caribbean Communities (NALACC), Centro Presente participated in the Second Hemispheric Conference on Migration Policies held on January 24 & 25th in Caracas, Venezuela, in conjunction with the 2nd Social Forum of the Americas and the 6th World Social Forum. Topics debated at the event included the migration policies adopted by governments within a context of State “security,” free trade agreements and their relation with irregular migration, and the rights of female and male migrants in situations of poverty, discrimination, and exclusion.

This meeting provided an opportunity to formulate proposals, exchange experiences, and build alliances among movements, networks, and nongovernmental organizations working in the construction of a more just society. It also formed part of the process of searching for and construction of alternatives in response to the application of migration policies that criminalize immigrants and at the same time consistently violate their rights in countries of destination, transit, and origin.

NALACC representation consisted of 14 community leaders originating from various countries and currently living in the United States, and ten representatives residing in other countries. This delegation was sponsored by Enlaces América (one of the organizers of the conference), which supports the development of organizations headed by Latino immigrants. According to Oscar Chacón, Director of Enlaces América, training of transnational communities is fundamental to develop skills and articulate a vision toward an equitable, sustainable, and dignified life for people throughout the Americas.

The various organizations participating in this 2nd Hemispheric Conference on Migration Policies feel that an adequate balance must be found between the rights of States to defend their internal security and their duty to guarantee migrants’ rights, in accordance with international human rights norms and respecting the principles of protection of refugees.

Migration was qualified by many as a factor of development and migrants as rights-holders who contribute culturally, socially, and economically to both their places of origin and of destination. The conference also emphasized the need to integrally address migration issues, recognizing the imposition of neoliberal policies, free trade agreements, and militarization — factors which violate the rights of the excluded peoples — as structural origins of migration.

Patricia Montes is a member of the Board of Directors of Centro Presente, Boston, Massachusetts. Centro Presente was established in 1981 as a member-driven, statewide, Latin American immigrant organization dedicated to the self-determination and self-sufficiency of the Latin American immigrant community of Massachusetts. Operated and led primarily by Central American immigrants, Centro Presente struggles for immigrant rights and for economic and social justice. Through the integration of community organizing, leadership development, and basic services, Centro Presente strives to give our members voice and build community power. >> <http://www.cpresente.org/>