



# Enlaces News #3

Volume 3, November 2002

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

## CLINIC Conference on U.S. Immigration Governmental Policies and Practices since 9/11

On October 21<sup>st</sup>, the Catholic Legal Immigration Network, Inc. (CLINIC) hosted a day-long conference on U.S. governmental policies and practices relating to immigrants since September 11, 2001. The conference brought together leading U.S. advocates and governmental officials to explore the implications of legislative changes, anti-terrorism initiatives and new enforcement efforts for immigrant communities and the nation as a whole.

Some of the major issues of concern regarding post 9/11 policies and practices highlighted by conference panelists included:

- **Massive post 9/11 detention of Arab and Muslim men**
- **Dramatic reduction in refugee admissions**
- **State-level policy changes making it more difficult for immigrants to obtain licenses**
- **Increase in numbers of Social Security “no-match” letters**
- **Department of Justice proposal shift to encourage cooperation between local police, INS**
- **Heightened immigration law enforcement activities on Mexico-U.S. border**

Taken together, these federal, state, and local initiatives have contributed to a feeling of siege in immigrant communities across the country. Immigrants feel under attack in a way they haven't since a wave of anti-immigrant sentiment gripped the U.S. in the mid-1990s and culminated in the passage of the harsh Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act of 1996.

In a concluding discussion panelists explored how immigrants' advocates could effectively advance policies that respect migrants rights and respond to national and global economic realities in the current political climate. They spoke of the need to highlight the important national values – the U.S.'s tradition as a “nation of immigrants,” basic constitutional principles like the right to due process, and the notion of rewarding hard work – which are at play in debates about how to deal with migrants and migration. They also pointed to the national economic and demographic realities that policy-makers and ultimately our society must confront, particularly the U.S. economy's structural need for immigrant labor.

Several panelists went even further to point to the global social and economic forces that generate international migration flows. Frank Sharry of the National Immigration Forum spoke of the need for “intelligent regulation” of migration flows in North and Central America within the framework of a migration accord that reflects the deepening economic integration in the region. He pointed out that during the second half of the 1990s, which saw one of the largest buildups of undocumented immigrants in the history of the U.S., the federal government enacted the most ambitious and expensive border and interior immigration law enforcement effort in our nation's

history. The real problem is the fundamental disconnect between the “rigid and contradictory patchwork of U.S. immigration laws” and global and national economic realities. As the international coffee crisis deepens, rural economies in Central America and Mexico continue to disintegrate, and the U.S. pursues a NAFTA-style free trade agreement with five countries of Central America, the need for a new policy framework to regulate the movement of people in the region is as pressing as ever. The existing disconnect between our immigration policies and practices and the forces that drive people north in search of a better life will continue go unaddressed at great cost to our nation, our neighbors, and millions of human beings throughout the region.