



# Enlaces News #3

Volume 3, November 2002

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

## U.S. Meeting on Regional and Hemispheric Migration Policy Forums

On October 7, representatives of U.S.-based organizations interested in regional and hemispheric processes related to migration policy met in Washington, DC to learn about the status of the inter-governmental Regional Conference on Migration (RCM), the parallel civil society network Regional Network of Civil Organizations on Migration (RNCOM), and plans for a November 2002 Hemispheric Summit on the Human Rights of Migrants and Human Trafficking to be held in Santiago Chile.

The RCM inter-governmental forum was established in 1996 at a gathering in Puebla, Mexico of foreign policy and migration officials from all Central and North American countries, as well as the Dominican Republic. Civil society representatives from the U.S. and Mexico met the governmental officials there, and have worked to promote the human rights of migrants in the context of the RCM forum ever since. Since 1996, the RNCOM has become a proactive coalition with an agenda of its own. After a long process of consultation, the RNCOM developed a set of Regional Guidelines for the Treatment of Migrants in Situations of Arrest, Detention, Deportation, and Reception. These Guidelines are a non-binding document based on international and regional human rights law intended to establish minimum standards for the treatment of migrants in the region. In 2001, there was great hope that the governments of the region might adopt this document.

However, Department of State and INS representatives have affirmed that the U.S. government has no interest in committing itself to regional standards of human rights protection for migrants, not even ones that would only include rights specifically afforded by the U.S. Constitution. The U.S.' blanket rejection of the Human Rights Guidelines has effectively ended plans for the RNCOM human rights campaign as originally conceived, with the goal of Guidelines adoption by all RCM member governments.

There are several options now for moving forward with the Guidelines document:

1. Implement a process of adoption amongst civil society organizations in the region; NGOs themselves can decide to adopt them and use them in advocacy, lobbying, and monitoring efforts.
2. Move the process to the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights and press for adoption there.

### **Hemispheric Summit on the Human Rights of Migrants**

Oscar Chacón gave an overview of what is known about plans for the Hemispheric Summit on Human Rights of Migrants and Human Trafficking in the Americas. This conference, which will

take place November 20-22, 2002 in Santiago, Chile, is being organized by the International Organization on Migration (IOM) and by the United Nations Economic Commission on Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC). It is sponsored by the governments of the hemisphere as well as the Inter-American Development Bank, UNICEF, UNHCHR, the UN Population Fund and the International Labor Organization.

The conference's objectives include:

- Advancing the understanding of the multiple causes and consequences of international migration;
- Helping to bring together the multiple sub-regional processes currently underway with regard to migration, as well as the various international organizations addressing the issue;
- Identifying possible initiatives regarding international migration, with an eye towards bringing them to the next Summit of the Americas;
- Sharing information regarding a proposed OAS office on the rights of migrants and their families, and
- Deliberating on a possible workplan to combat the trafficking of migrants in the Americas.

The RNCOM is organizing a parallel hemispheric civil society meeting to the inter-governmental gathering. Groups at the meeting were encouraged to consider participating in the Hemispheric Summit.

### **Next Steps**

Participants in the meeting were in general agreement that they would like to be kept abreast of the progress of civil society and inter-governmental discussions regarding migration policy, and most stated that they would be interested in being involved in these processes – via participation in Chile, or by promoting the Human Rights Guidelines at community or legislative forums. Because a wide variety of organizations – including immigrant advocacy, immigrant-led, and international development groups - were represented at the gathering, there were a number of different perspectives on what form future U.S. participation in the regional network might take. Listed below are some of the issues highlighted in the conversation of next steps:

- Acknowledgement of tensions between grassroots organizing and policy advocacy, but strong sense is that grassroots political pressure will be critical at this stage;
- Emphasis on need to incorporate more perspectives of migrant organizations in the U.S. in this process. Discussion of how regional migration should be presented to make it relevant to migrant-led organizations;
- Debate of the merits of “parallel” processes versus direct pressure on governments. Need for civil society groups to be careful in how they play the role of “interlocutor”;
- Debate about the importance of situating the regional migration guidelines in the broader context of regional integration, trade agreements, and other regional political debates;
- Need for advocates to monitor bilateral agreements that U.S. government is pursuing with other countries in region – ie, MOU with Canada.

For more information on the work of the RNCOM or other regional or hemispheric migration forums, please contact us at [info@enlacesamerica.org](mailto:info@enlacesamerica.org).

