

**World Student Christian Federation
Inter-regional Migration Program**

Mexico City, Lutheran Center,
12th to the 21st of September 2007



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Every year, the World Student Christian Federation (WSCF) brings together students and leaders from churches around the globe, with the purpose of reflecting and learning together about different social issues. This year, the conference took place from the 12th to the 21st of September in the Lutheran Center in Mexico City (Mexico), and its topic was *migration*.

The participants came from Mexico, Uruguay, Ecuador, Bolivia, Philippines, South Korea, Finland, Norway, Egypt, D.R. Congo, Lebanon, Canada and the United States.

The program included the participation of lecturers and regional presentations. There was always the opportunity to discuss and interchange different points of view about the presentations.

LECTURERS

In his presentation, the director of the International Organization for Migration (IOM) in Mexico, Juan Artola, highlighted the following points:

- Over the last decades, the migratory flow from South to North has increased; the main cause of this tendency is poverty in the developing countries.
- Immigrants in developed countries only get jobs that are poorly paid, more dangerous and generally not wanted by other people.
- Remittances don't have a real impact on the economic development of the countries that get them, because remittances are private transactions.
- There is no real commitment from developed countries to respond adequately to the migration issue. As a matter of fact, migration doesn't have a relevant place on the UN's international agenda.
- The sending countries of work force are losing human capital and the invested education in their citizens.

The Guatemalan intern of Frontier Internship in Mission (FIM), Luis Flores, presented his work experience with Central American immigrants. Luis works near by the Guatemalan border in Mexico. His task is to help to identify and rescue girls and women who are forced by criminal organizations to prostitute themselves. Luis and his team provide legal assistance and health and psychological care for the rescued women. He pointed out that churches in Mexico and abroad can play an important roll in migration issues. Luis said, for instance, that "there is the necessity of spiritual support to the victims."

PARTICIPANTS



Participants presented and discussed in separate groups topics around migration that are specific in their regions.

Latin America:

- Latin American societies discriminate against immigrants coming from poorer countries.
- The Mexican Government demands a fair and good treatment of the Mexican immigrants in the United States, but it doesn't provide a fair and good treatment to the Central American immigrants.
- The MERCOSUR agreement has improved people's mobility between the South American countries that are members of the agreement (Brazil, Argentina, Paraguay, Uruguay, Chile, Bolivia, and Venezuela). However, there is not enough protection for the migrants.

Maria Eusebia, a Bolivian theology student in Argentina remarked: "Argentinean people isolate Bolivian immigrants, they don't give them an opportunity to work, and the state doesn't provide any service for them. I don't understand when Argentineans complain about Bolivians not being productive when they just never have the chance."

Europe:

- Schengen Visa is a measure for migrant control in 15 European countries. Generally, if the visa is refused by one of the member countries, it will be refused in the other Schengen countries as well.
- There is a paradox feeling towards immigrants in Europe. On the one hand there is interest in other cultures and on the other hand there is discrimination.

- Migrants' integration in the European societies is quite a challenge; there are a lot of prejudices and cultural differences.
- There is the thought that Muslim people are fanatics and terrorists.
- Very conservative churches support the anti-migrant policies of the governments.

Torbjøn, a theology student from Norway, remarked: "People say that foreigners are threatening the values of our societies; I wonder: what values are they talking about? Our societies are not willing to help those who are in need."

North America (United States and Canada):

- The seasonal work programs in the U.S. and Canada degrade the human condition of the workers. Because they allow the exploitation and abuse of people.
- Women from Eastern Europe and the Philippines are hired to take care of elderly people and as babysitters in Canada. They usually work every day of the week and they have to live in the house of the families that hire them. There are frequent cases of sexual harassment and women can't really protect themselves.
- The current rebuilding of the city centers in many cities of the U.S. and Canada has the hidden purpose of separating the white people from other races.

Africa:

- Global Warming is affecting many African regions. There are places where temperatures are over 50 °C. The desert is extending and every day that passes by it is more difficult to cultivate and to raise livestock. That is another cause why people need to emigrate.
- African people don't have enough resources to invest in the development of their countries. Usually, foreign corporations and foreign wealthy people are exploiting African riches such as diamonds.
- Debt cancellation has helped some African countries to get rid of their debts, but this help won't have a lasting effect if the system that makes the countries get indebted doesn't change.

CURRENT MIGRATION CAUSES

The participants agreed that migration is a normal phenomenon that has existed since very old times and that migration causes vary and are related with historic events such as colonization. The group highlighted the difference between the people who emigrate safely and with privileges and those who emigrate unsafely, forced by a situation, or

obliged by somebody else. In accordance with the presentations the main causes for the current forced and involuntary migration are:

- Poverty
- Civil wars
- Climate change and natural disasters
- Trafficking of human beings (especially women for sexual exploitation)

It is also necessary to comment that poverty causes were also mentioned as direct reasons for emigration. Such causes are, for instance, economic globalization (including free trade agreements), bad and corrupted administrations and the policies of the International Finance Institutions.

CONCLUSIONS

1. The main victims of the current migration process are poor people, men, women and children. Family separation has increased among the poor.
2. The current economic system is one of the main causes of poverty and migration.
3. There is not a responsible response from governments and international bodies about migration issues.
4. The increase in the number of people emigrating from the Southern countries is generating discriminatory policies, more restrictions and sophisticated ways to control and stop immigrants who are going to the Northern countries.
5. The current migrant processes are creating xenophobic and racist reactions.
6. Labor and sexual exploitation, discrimination and any kind of violation of human rights of immigrants are global issues.
7. The brain drain benefits the developed countries but impoverishes the developing countries.
8. Criminal networks are taking advantage of the migrant situation in the world. For instance through selling fake documents, trafficking people, etc.
9. The ecumenical movement can reflect and provide support to the immigrant situations.
10. There is the need to continue interchanging experiences and sharing knowledge in order to do a more effective analysis on migration issues.

WSCF CONFERENCE RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CHURCHES AND PARTNER ORGANIZATIONS

- Share theological reflections about the migration issues
- Strengthen south-south and south-north relations in order to share experiences and provide mutual support
- Cooperate with networks that are already working on migration issues