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World Peoples' Summit in Bolivia Condemns Xenophobia, Racism

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Delegates to the World Peoples Summit (WPS) harshly criticized the xenophobic, racist policies used against migrant populations by governments like those of US President Donald Trump and Argentine President Mauricio Macri.

The global meeting was held in the central Bolivian city of Tiquipaya on June 20-21 at the urging of Bolivian President Evo Morales. Nearly 3,000 delegates gathered from 43 countries, from civil and governmental organizations, and from every continent. The summit's slogan: "For a world without walls; moving toward universal citizenship." The delegates called for an end to the criminalization of migrants and for the creation of a global ombudsman to ensure the rights of migrants. Delegates also proposed that human trafficking and enslavement should be considered crimes against humanity ([NotiSur, Sept. 2, 2016](#)).

Speaking as an emissary for Pope Francis, Cardinal Pietro Parolin, the Vatican's secretary of state, encouraged delegates "to continue to seek suitable ways to promote the culture of the gathering and to prevent the devastating effects of climate change, which has become a new factor in the marginalization and expulsion of the most impoverished sectors."

Michele Manca di Nissa, the South American representative for the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), said the principles agreed to at the summit "should become a message in defense of families who leave their countries to flee war, discrimination, natural disasters, or violence" ([NotiSur, May 5, 2017](#)).

'Record levels of forced displacements'

The UNHCR's Global Tendencies report for 2016 became the main source of debate for the participants, who included former heads of government from Spain (José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero, 2004-2011), Ecuador (Rafael Correa, 2007-2017), and Uruguay (José Mujica, 2010-2015). According to the report, "the last 10 years have seen record levels of forced displacements and refugee movements on a global scale because of armed conflicts, violence, various human rights violations, crises, or the effects of climate change (people who had to leave their countries because of environmental degradation, drought, or floods, which mainly affect poor countries)." It estimated 65.5 million people were in that condition.

Of this total, according to the report, 51% are children who have been separated from their parents. The UNHCR denounced the existence of criminal organizations that take advantage of this reality, profiting from the transport of people. It cited the European Union's Border and Coast Guard Agency to show that, in 2015 alone, traffickers collected US\$4.7 billion. On June 3, The New York Times reported that traffickers charge undocumented Central Americans seeking to migrate to the US fees of US\$12,000.

In his opening address to the WPS, Morales argued that some developed countries have hardened their migration policies under the pretext of national security. In addition, he said,

some governments have implemented policies that criminalize migrants and result in measures limiting the free transit of human beings. These migration policies, he explained, feed xenophobia, discrimination, and separation between communities.

The summit's final declaration called for delegates to "demand the destruction of physical walls that separate peoples; invisible legal walls that persecute and criminalize; mental walls that use fear, discrimination, and xenophobia to separate us."

The declaration also spoke of "promoting alternatives and proposals that contribute to bridging borders, building integration bridges, and working on a plan of action to create a universal citizenry."

The responsibilities of receptor countries

Argentine delegate Javier Tolcachier spoke to the gathering about the need to consider the causes of migration that originate, not in the migrants' home countries, but rather in the receptor countries. He criticized economically powerful nations for "intentionally attracting immigrants to reduce their labor costs, to do jobs local workers consider beneath them, to make labor conditions more flexible, avoid taxes, or skirt security measures."

Tolcachier added that "in the case of formalized immigration, the motivation of the supposed benefactor countries includes the urgent need to rejuvenate the demographic composition," noting that young foreign workers help support those countries' social security coffers.

UN studies indicate that one out of seven people worldwide are migrants and that an estimated 50 million international migrants have crossed borders without proper documentation. At the end of 2016, there were 65.6 million displaced persons, 10% more than a year earlier. Of these, 21.3 million were refugees, 40.8 million were domestically displaced, and the rest were asylum seekers. The total number of internally displaced persons has nearly doubled since 2000, the report said, and it has increased significantly in the last five years. In 2016, there were 31.1 million new cases of internal displacement, equivalent to one person being displaced every second.

The WPC's convening document noted that "the rapid displacement of more and more large groups of people corresponds to the exponential expansion of the means of transportation, and the fact that new channels of communication raise awareness of possibilities available elsewhere." Everything indicates that these population flows, far from decreasing, will continue to grow, it said, and to stop this movement, "walls are being built to repel, repress, and exclude, as well as fences to block people's right to move freely on a planet where only capital is allowed move freely." The goal of the walls, it said, is to "protect the booty taken by colonial powers from those who now justly want to share in this stolen well-being."

Additionally, the final WPC declaration noted, "We have witnessed as the main causes of this crisis, war conflicts and military interventions, climate change and huge economic asymmetries between and within states. These destructive situations have their origin in the dominant world order, which in its voracity, overstated by profit and appropriation of the common goods, generates violence, promotes inequalities, and destroys Mother Earth."

Throughout the discussions, panelists repeatedly cited Sergio Arau's 2004 film *A Day Without a Mexican*, in which the Mexican director projects what might happen in the lives of the population if all Mexicans in California were to suddenly disappear. One sentence in the final declaration

summarizes this repeated reference: “Hegemonic discourses, fostered by transnational media corporations, promote a negative view of migrants, hiding the contributions they make to the receiving countries in economic, demographic, and socio-cultural terms.”

In the days following the June 20-21 meeting, a series of events validated the WPC convocation.

On June 30, Chile’s human rights agency, the Instituto Nacional de Derechos Humanos, filed a lawsuit against an international gang for the illicit trafficking of 200 migrants from the Dominican Republic who had been promised documents and good jobs in exchange for hundreds of thousands of dollars.

On July 3, The New York Times reported that the Trump administration’s xenophobic policies aimed at closing US borders were discouraging Central American migrants from going north. According to US Customs and Border Protection, between January and May of this year, the number of undocumented persons detained on the southern border dropped 60% from the previous year.

On July 6, the interior ministers of the European Union, meeting in Tallinn, Estonia, agreed to provide economic aid to Italy, where according to the International Organization for Migration, 85,000 migrants have entered so far this year.

At the Group of 20’s latest summit, held in Hamburg, Germany, on July 8, members agreed to keep borders open for the free transit of goods but reaffirmed the “sovereign right of the states to close, propose, and control their borders and adopt policies to defend national security in the face of the growing phenomenon of migration.”

Along with other points in the final declaration, the WPS rejected the criminalization of migration, “which conceals false approaches to security and control.” It also demanded the elimination of detention centers for migrants and called for the creation of an ombudsman to defend the rights of migrants, refugees, exiles, stateless persons, and victims of enslavement and trafficking, and urged governments to create or strengthen regional citizenships “that would allow intraregional mobility as a bridge toward a universal citizenship.”

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