

**United Nations, Executive Office of the Secretary General  
General Assembly Resolution A/RES/71/280, Global Compact on Migration  
Fourth Thematic Session, New York, 24-25 July 2017**

Thank you for this opportunity to speak on behalf of Alianza Americas, a member of the [Global Coalition on Migration](#) and the [Women in Migration Network](#). Alianza Americas is a network of migrant led organizations and individual members throughout the United States, representing more than 100,000 families in 15 U.S. states. Deeply rooted in Latino immigrant communities, Alianza Americas works transnationally to create an inclusive, equitable and sustainable way of life for families across the Americas.

We take up this global conversation on the contributions of human mobility at a critical juncture. Despite ample evidence of the contributions of migrants on many levels, national-level policies continue to be driven by frameworks of restriction and deterrence of migration. This framing contributes to rights violations, and it drags down the ability of migrants to fully participate economically and socially. The path forward toward a global compact must move away from that destructive premise. Rather, the Global Compact should live up to its promise of Safe, Regular, and Orderly migration, with clear commitments to regularization, integration (including financial inclusion), and the reduction of inequalities within and between countries and the reduction of inequalities between men and women. The Compact must incorporate migrants, specially the voices of organized communities, as stakeholders in the construction of new models for migration that can serve the needs of origin and destination countries, as they protect rights and support the aspirations of migrants themselves. The Compact must disavow the growing tendency to criminalize migration and normalize deportation and detention, two practices that make it even harder for migrants to make contributions to their home countries.

I am often asked whether Alianza Americas is an “immigration” organization. I reply that we are an organization of immigrants, for whom immigration policy is one important issue, but our agenda is much broader. Immigrants cannot afford to sit on the sidelines while economic injustice, environmental problems, and social issues affect our families every single day. We have a stake in these issues through our economic activity, our families, our homes, and our roots in countries of origin. If given a chance, we can help solve the problems that we all face.

Yesterday, we heard about the diverse contributions migrants are making to countries of origin and destination. That is certainly true in the United States. Recent studies have put the tax contributions of the foreign born in the United States at \$106 billion, with \$86 billion coming from Latino immigrants. Around \$12 billion are paid in state and local taxes by workers who lack immigration authorization, not to mention the billions those undocumented workers contribute to shore up public benefits such as Medicaid and Social Security.<sup>1</sup> Above and beyond these contributions to our shared tax base, immigrants are contributing to the rich social fabric of our nation as students, teachers, caregivers, food producers, and innovators. Organized immigrants, such as the members of Alianza Americas, are hard at work every day lifting up the rights of the persecuted and building bridges in their communities.

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<sup>1</sup> [http://www.alianzaamericas.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/2\\_Impacts-Contributions-of-Immigrants-to-US-Federal-State-and-Local-Taxes.pdf](http://www.alianzaamericas.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/2_Impacts-Contributions-of-Immigrants-to-US-Federal-State-and-Local-Taxes.pdf)

As a network of Latino and Caribbean immigrants, we have our feet and hearts in two places. We cannot avoid seeing migration in its transnational context. While working for change in the US, we constantly remember how important it is to promote more stable, healthier, better educated, more democratic and safer conditions in the countries of origin. We want to make it possible for our families and friends to reach their full potential, wherever they may live.

Today, we turn to a conversation on remittances. The statistics on migrant remittances are well-documented, but nevertheless worth noting. In 2016, my home country of El Salvador received \$4.58 Billion in remittances, the largest amount ever, and especially startling when compared to a generously calculated total of \$2.6 Billion for all US formal economic activity, including foreign direct investment<sup>2</sup>. Yes, that is correct, the estimated 2 million Salvadorans living in the United States provided almost twice as much as total US FDI, plus US private sector activity in El Salvador combined, in 2016. Honduras received more than \$3.6 billion in remittances during the same period. Official statistics put this amount at more than 17% of total GDP for both countries. In 2008, a study conducted by Alianza Americas, then known as NALACC, along with FUNDE in El Salvador, and the Centro Regional de Investigaciones Multidisciplinarias at the UNAM<sup>3</sup> showed that remittances accounted for nearly 13% of total Value Added Tax collection in El Salvador. The sum contributed to VAT from remittances exceeded the total amount that El Salvador spent on anti-poverty programs that year by more than 600%. So let's be clear, migrant remittances are already contributing in meaningful ways to the social safety nets and the general treasuries of countries of origin. But given the hostile climate for immigrants, and the constant assault of raids, deportations and detentions, they are doing so under the worst and most challenging context imaginable.

Enabling the full benefits of remittances must go a lot farther than simply reducing cost—what we really need is to make it possible for people to live stable, productive lives, without constant fear of deportation, and with the basic rights of assembly, education and financial inclusion that all people should have.

Migration is not happening in a vacuum. Again, turning to the Mesoamerican-US migration corridor, the region I know best, it would be remiss to talk of migration without discussing economic inequality. We hear all the time that economic inequality is bad and getting worse in the United States. Recent statistics from the OECD put the US at the bottom of developed countries in terms of wealth and income inequality. This comes as no surprise to immigrant families, nor to the millions of low-wage workers who struggle to make ends meet on wages that have stagnated for decades. At the same time, the gap between the US and its closest neighbors remains enormous. With the minimum wage in Mexico hovering at just under \$US 120 PER MONTH, the promise of NAFTA for most Mexicans seems a hollow one indeed. Poverty in Mexico remains stubbornly over 50% and the wage gap between Mexico and the US is the same or higher than it was twenty years ago. El Salvador and Honduras vie for the most dangerous places in the hemisphere, if not the world, and Honduras remains at the bottom of nearly every measure of social and economic wellbeing in our hemisphere, including income inequality, education inequality and violence.

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<sup>2</sup> [http://bea.gov/international/direct\\_investment\\_multinational\\_companies\\_comprehensive\\_data.htm](http://bea.gov/international/direct_investment_multinational_companies_comprehensive_data.htm)  
<http://www.bcr.gob.sv/esp/>

<sup>3</sup> [http://www.alianzaamericas.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/Contribuyendo\\_con\\_Su\\_Parte.pdf](http://www.alianzaamericas.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/Contribuyendo_con_Su_Parte.pdf)

Let me give you a specific example of how bad policy can undermine the contributions of migrants, and damage the economies of both sending and receiving countries. Here in the United States, some 350,000 people from Haiti, El Salvador, and Honduras have lived here for decades under a subsidiary protection program called Temporary Protected Status. Temporary Protected Status (TPS) was established in 1990, as a compromise between those who opposed the discriminatory way in which political asylum claims by Salvadoran and Guatemalan nationals were decided throughout the 1980's, and those who believed that those political asylum applicants were treated appropriately. Despite its limited initial scope, a number of specific groups of foreign national have been granted protection under TPS in the ensuing decades. Currently, groups of nationals from Haiti, Nicaragua, Honduras, El Salvador, Nepal, Somalia, Sudan, South Sudan, Syria, and Yemen are protected under TPS, according to the [Department of Homeland Security](#). However, the largest numbers of current TPS beneficiaries are from Haiti, Honduras and El Salvador.

Over the years, TPS has served as a band-aid to cover the fact that US Immigration Law does not have adequate mechanisms to protect foreign nationals in the US whose countries of origin become impossible places for people to return. While the clear intent of TPS is for it to be temporary, and not a bridge by itself into an immigrant visa, the reality is that it became a quasi-immigration program. According to a recent study by the Center for Migration Studies<sup>4</sup>, more than 50% of Salvadorans and Hondurans holding TPS have been living in the US for more than two decades. The program has been renewed under both Democratic and Republican administrations.

Recently the Department of Homeland Security signaled its intent to end the program for Haiti, El Salvador and Honduras, in a political climate that would leave those 350,000 without any protection whatsoever. The human costs alone of this move should be enough to give us pause. We are talking about people who are working (80%) have learned English (87%), taken out mortgages (nearly half), have more than 270,000 US Citizen children, and many of whom have started businesses that employ US citizens. Even from an economic standpoint, this would clearly be a losing proposition. Uprooting hundreds of thousands of people, with jobs, homes, and children in the United States would be enormously damaging to this country (some estimates suggest it would cost US businesses nearly 2 billion dollars). But again, let's look at remittances. Those big numbers I mentioned at the beginning-- A lot of that money is coming from TPS holders. One study showed that every single Haitian TPS holder supports 5 people in Haiti. What these people need is not a cheaper wire transfer. What they need is a path to an immigrant visa, a regular migration path that will allow them to consolidate all they have achieved, both here and at home.

### **Concrete Steps Toward Recognizing the Contributions of Migrants and Enabling Human Mobility as a Net Benefit to Sending and Receiving Countries**

In the Global Compact, states should make good on their New York Declaration pledge to “consider reviewing our migration policies with a view to examining their possible unintended negative consequences,” because current deterrence, detention, criminalization and deportation policies are violating rights, separating families, and endangering migrants' lives and safety while also failing to

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<sup>4</sup> <http://cmsny.org/publications/jmhs-tps-elsalvador-honduras-haiti/>

address either the need for sustainable livelihood opportunities in countries of origin or the reality of labor demand in the US.

States should start by committing in the Global Compact to eliminating national laws that criminalize migration, such as the 1996 IIRIRA law in the United States, and move toward a framework that recognizes migration—and the contributions of migrants-- as a net benefit for both the country of origin and destination.

Alianza Americas also challenges governments to genuinely put into practice their rhetoric about including the perspectives of organized migrant and refugee communities in the formulation of both the refugee and migration compacts. Migrants have already established that they are stakeholders, by taking a stake in destination countries and through their remittances to countries of origin. Now it remains to be seen if they are really going to be treated as the stakeholders they are.

Steps forward should include:

### **1. End Criminalization of Migration, create regular pathways.**

Current policy and the framework for managing migration in our region is rooted in the unfounded assumption that human mobility is a threat that must be contained or stopped. Research has shown human mobility to be a net benefit for all parties involved. Punitive approaches are doomed to fail in a region where the labor force is already highly integrated, and where regional trade agreements facilitate massive flows of goods and capital across borders.

### **2. Regulate regional labor markets and ensure the right to freedom of association and financial inclusion**

The US-Mexico-Central America region is already integrated for the flow of capital and goods. But the issue of labor migration has largely been left unattended, resulting in large numbers of migrant workers who lack work authorization and who are therefore vulnerable to all manner of exploitation. This region, due to its functionally transnational labor market, must have a framework for managing the movement of labor across borders in a way that is mutually beneficial for the countries, and rooted in respect for workers' rights and the rights of their family members. That framework should include the freedom to organize and collectively bargain to demand rights. Organized labor can play a key role in oversight of labor protections for both migrant workers and native-born workers. The principle of decent, dignified compensation should be a baseline for all forms of employment, including historically oppressed jobs such as domestic work, child care, elder care, and agricultural work. Full inclusion of migrants through regular pathways would both benefit the destination country, and provide the stability that allows migrants to support family members at home. Integration, including financial education and financial inclusion, would make it possible for migrants to avoid the worst sort of usurious financial transactions that lower the benefits of remittances to families.

### **3. Recognize Migrants, particularly organized migrant communities, as stakeholders in building and strengthening strong, stable democracies and thriving economies.**

Regrettably, democracy is often reduced to electoral exercises. There is a big gap between the shallow call to "get out the vote" and systems that allow ordinary people to influence the big political decisions that affect everyone. The great challenge is getting more people interested and engaged in the daily

work of building democracy. For the migrant populations that organize transnationally, building direct civic-democratic participation is even more complicated because the current participation mechanisms do not take into account that transnational reality. By recognizing migrants as stakeholders, the Global Compact can help create mechanisms for democratic participation. This is a space that requires creativity and innovation.

#### 4. Calling deportation “return and reintegration” will not lead to equitable development.

People return to their countries of origin for many reasons, but the word “return” has been used by the US government, and the governments of the region to obscure the dire circumstances facing tens of thousands of people being involuntarily sent back to Mexico from the US, and in the case of Central Americans, from both the US and Mexico. Many of the women, families and young people who seek protection in the United States or Mexico are fleeing specific instances of extreme violence, both from organized crime and corrupt state actors. It is absurd, and unconscionable, to speak of “re-integration” of people who have been forcibly returned to untenable conditions that drove migration in the first place. What’s more, efforts to respond to returnees’ needs can generate social conflicts with those who have not migrated, but who are facing the same oppressive conditions of violence, insecurity, and lack of economic opportunity. In all cases, states must affirm the rights of people who are forced to migrate to access humanitarian protections and must not return them to circumstances where there is no reasonable prospect of their being able to live in safety and security with access to a sustainable livelihood.

Alianza Americas urges governments to seize the opportunity to make good on the promise of migration as a benefit for origin and destination countries, and to take a stand against criminalization of migrants. Specific recommendations on labor migration, human rights, drivers of forced migration, detention, and returns can be found on the Global Coalition on Migration site at <http://gcmigration.org/category/global-compact/>.

For a Global Compact on Safe, Regular and Orderly migration to succeed, it must appropriately address the regional specificities in different migration corridors. Last year, Alianza Americas visited El Salvador, Honduras, Guatemala and the Mexican southern border. Recommendations from that fact-finding tour can be viewed here: <http://www.alianzaamericas.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/CAMEX-Delegation-Report-2016-FINAL.pdf>. Two areas that require urgent action are protection of people fleeing for their lives and the drive to criminalize and punish people who are forced to migrate without the benefit of adequate legal channels to do so.