



NATIONAL ALLIANCE OF LATIN AMERICAN & CARIBBEAN COMMUNITIES
ALIANZA NACIONAL DE COMUNIDADES LATINO AMERICANAS Y CARIBEÑAS

A Transnational Vision, Rooted in Latin American and Caribbean Migrant Communities
Una Visión Transnacional, con Raíces en la Comunidad Migrante Latinoamericana y Caribeña

Backgrounder: NALACC Delegations to Central America Summer 2014 **“Myths and Realities of Child Migration and Migration Policy”**

September 16, 2014

Since its inception in 2004, the National Alliance of Latin American and Caribbean Communities has sought to build alliances between organized immigrant communities in the United States and counterpart civil society organizations in Central America and Mexico. Our goal is to bring about changes in public policy that will enable people to lead sustainable and dignified lives in their countries of origin, such that migration ceases to be seen as the best option for those seeking a better future.

In 2012 and 2013, based on visits to the region, NALACC, sounded the alarm about deepening patterns of desperation and violence driving emigration from Honduras, Guatemala and El Salvador. Over the past months, that trend has intensified even more. The numbers are staggering. The US Customs and Border Patrol reports that the numbers of minors apprehended at the border in Fiscal Year 2009 from Honduran, El Salvador and Guatemala were just under 3,500. However, in just eight months within FY 2014, nearly 48,000 children from these countries had been detained, with Honduran children representing 37% of the total. The Office of Refugee Resettlement predicted back in July that this year we could see as many as 90,000 unaccompanied children. Many thousands more are apprehended in Mexico before they reach the United States. The increase in children arriving at the US southern border has tested the systems for legal and humanitarian protections in the US. Regrettably, the result has been a humanitarian crisis in which children and families continue to suffer.

The causes of this exodus of Central Americans, including the unprecedented number of minor children, are multiple and complex. Some factors have emerged relatively recently. Others are the result of long-term structural patterns of inequality and exclusion. The children who have left the region in recent years, are fleeing a situation of such quotidian violence that they fear for their lives on a daily basis. This acute problem is exacerbated by the decline in democratic oversight in government, and the systemic lack of social and economic opportunity or wellbeing for large sectors of the population. Unfortunately, US-supported security policies that have emphasized militarized responses to public security challenges, has only deepened the cycle of violence. In addition, the failure by US policy makers to pass a sensible immigration policy reform that would permit families to be reunified, has compounded the overall framework of crisis.

NALACC believes that the responsibility for an immediate humanitarian response to this human exodus, particularly young people traveling without their parents, should be shared among the countries of origin and transit, as well as the United States. The guiding principle should be their protection and wellbeing. Sadly, US government officials have declared their intent to deport the majority of these children, along with the recent adult arrivals, as soon as possible, arguing that they have no legal recourse to protection. Organizations that work to protect children’s rights and human rights are working frantically to assert

the legal rights to humanitarian protection that must be provided to migrant children, and to anyone in similar conditions of imminent danger. NALACC continues to affirm our unequivocal support for immediate protection of people seeking refuge, especially children.

Moving beyond the immediate response, there is an urgent need for serious analysis of the confluence of factors that have made emigration, even under the current dangerous and precarious conditions, look like a better option for people from Honduras, Guatemala, El Salvador, and even Mexico, than remaining in their home countries. Violence and insecurity are severe and urgent problems, but they essentially lit the fuse under an already volatile powder keg of problems. If we do not address those underlying problems we should expect a repeat of this crisis in the near future.

Organized immigrant communities in the United States, along with civil society actors in countries of origin must coordinate our efforts to press the governments in Central America, Mexico and the US to guarantee the safety of people seeking refuge. We reaffirm the importance of keeping families together and will promote policies that prioritize and support family unity. We will also promote solutions to the serious problems of social exclusion and economic inequality. It is time to recognize that our current recipe for economic development has failed to generate opportunity and a sense of hope for the majority of people in our region. As long as the gap between the very rich and the poor keeps growing, the security and wellbeing of the entire region is threatened.

Central American Fact-Finding Delegations

Over the past three weeks, NALACC has sent three fact-finding delegations to Honduras, El Salvador, and Guatemala. The delegations were comprised of leaders of NALACC member organizations and carried out in collaboration with allies in the region.

Honduras (August 26-30, 2014):

- Mirtha Colón, Hondurans Against AIDS & Black Central American Org, Bronx, NY
- Jose Luis Gutierrez, NALACC's Associate Director for Transnational Affairs, Chicago, IL
- Patricia Montes, Centro Presente, Boston, MA
- Clelia Sabio, Organización Comunitaria para el Desarrollo de la Mujer Afro, Bronx, NY
- Isabel Vinent, Florida Immigrant Coalition, Miami, FL
- Lariza Dugan-Cuadra, Central American Resource Center of Northern California, San Francisco, CA

El Salvador (September 2-6, 2014):

- Oscar Chacón, NALACC Executive Director
- Lariza Dugan-Cuadra, Central American Resource Center of Northern California, San Francisco, CA
- Abel Nuñez, Central American Resource Center, Washington, DC
- Teodoro Aguiluz, Central American Resource Center (CRECEN), Houston, TX

Guatemala (September 7-10, 2014):

- Edgar Ayala, Bay Area Guatemalan Association, Oakland, CA
- Claudia Carias, Movimiento de Inmigrantes Guatemaltecos en los EEUU, New York, NY
- Jose Luis Gutierrez, NALACC Trans-national Director
- Sergio Sosa, Heartland Workers Center, Omaha, NE