

**UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues**  
**Statement of**  
**Pueblos Sin Fronteras and La Red Xicana Indigena**  
Special Session on Migration of Urban and Indigenous Peoples  
**May 21, 2007**

Madame Chair, UN Permanent Forum Members and Indigenous Sisters and brothers of the world

My name is Flor Crisostomo and I submit the following statement on behalf of Pueblo Sin Fronteras and La Red Xicana Indigena.

I am a 28 year old Zapotec woman living in the US in diaspora. I am a 2<sup>nd</sup> generation Indigenous woman in economic exile. The first generation of displacement affected my parents whose right to self sufficiency was destroyed through the loss of land and rights to traditional crafting. I am a single mother of 3 children and have not seen them for 7 years since I arrived to the US. The only choice for being united with my children is witnessing our extreme poverty without any means of improving their circumstances. So, I'm forced to be separated from them in order to provide for their most basic needs—food, shelter and education.

The indigenous peoples of the Americas and their descendents suffer from inhumane treatment in the US. The cruelest form of this denial of our humanity persists in our acceptance as workers without the rights to raise our families. The unity and sanctity of the family is the single most important factor in the continuance of a people. However, since the arrival of Europeans, indigenous peoples of this hemisphere have never been allowed the so called “sanctity and unity” of family. We have always been subjected to forced separation from our families for the purpose of exploited labor (i.e., the cases of the Apache, Yaqui and O’Pata in Northern Mexico).

The colonial practice of dispossession of land, territories and natural resources has served to ensure a vulnerable migrant population and accessible labor pool for Mexico and the United States, without codifying any rights to migrant indigenous peoples. The practice of cultural genocide, through labor policies, has been historic and cyclical, continuously reappearing in international law and transnational economic policies of this hemisphere. The present immigration situation I am living is not an accident, nor is it a contemporary matter. The legacy of colonial doctrines, such as the Papal Bulls and the Encomienda System, continue to be the foundation for today’s labor and migration laws of this country.

In the US today we face a system of undocumented labor that separates families. This is a system that annihilates our ancestral traditions by destroying the family.

The present proposal for comprehensive immigration reform put forward by the President of the US does not fix this crisis. In fact, it institutionalizes this genocidal practice, which started with the Repatriation act of the 1930s, Operation Wetback 1950s and the Dixon Arnett Law of the 1970s. The Bush proposal aims to keep the workers who are now working without documents in the United States, but purposely does not provide for the legalization and reunification of their families. In fact, it would make the need for our labor the sole criteria for immigration and virtually eliminate family based immigration.

[In the context of the system of undocumented indigenous peoples labor we see that there are millions of mixed status families now threatened with separation. In fact, today, there are over 4 million U.S. citizen

children with one or more parent who is undocumented. Many of these families have already been separated.]

Recommendations:

- 1) I ask that the Permanent Forum condemn and intervene in the attack on our gender and human rights as migrant indigenous peoples in the US. We are migrant indigenous peoples who are workers and we must work to survive, however, we are not mules. For this reason we urge the UN Member states to adopt the Declaration, without any addendums.
- 2) We invite the Special Rapporteur on Migration, Rapporteur on Indigenous Peoples and Human Rights and Rapporteur on Women to look into the abuse of migrant indigenous peoples rights residing in the US, especial the rights of children who are separated from their mothers/fathers.
- 3) Amnesty International, UNICEF and UNIFEM to include urban and migrant indigenous women and their children in their studies of Violence against Women.
- 4) We endorse the Women's Caucus Statement and South Central Farmers Statement on Human Rights (UNPF 2007), specifically the statement and recommendations relevant to Indigenous Women and Migration, which urges UN Member states to address the issue of large number of indigenous migrants within and beyond national borders and the particular vulnerability of indigenous women migrants.
- 5) We endorse the Caucus of Abya Ayala (Latin American Caucus) Statement, specifically item #6 and 7, which recommend's that UN Agencies (such as UNESCO, UNIFEM, UNICEF, CHR-Council on Human Rights, Special Rapporteur's) work to influence and/or develop appropriate mechanisms, instruments and indicators that would allow for the collection of disaggregated data that would identify the specific conditions of migrant indigenous peoples in the United States.
- 6) UN Agency Resources (UNIFEM, UNICEF, UNESCO) should be allocated to facilitate communication between separated families and to advocate for their reunification. This task requires that a network of participating centers be established throughout the Americas. These centers would serve to support cultural continuity as well as familial bonds.
- 7) UN Agencies (UNIFEM, UNICEF, UNESCO) should support "reunion" gatherings of separated families in highly publicized conferences to bring this issue to light.

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