



BORDERS: WALLS OR BRIDGES?

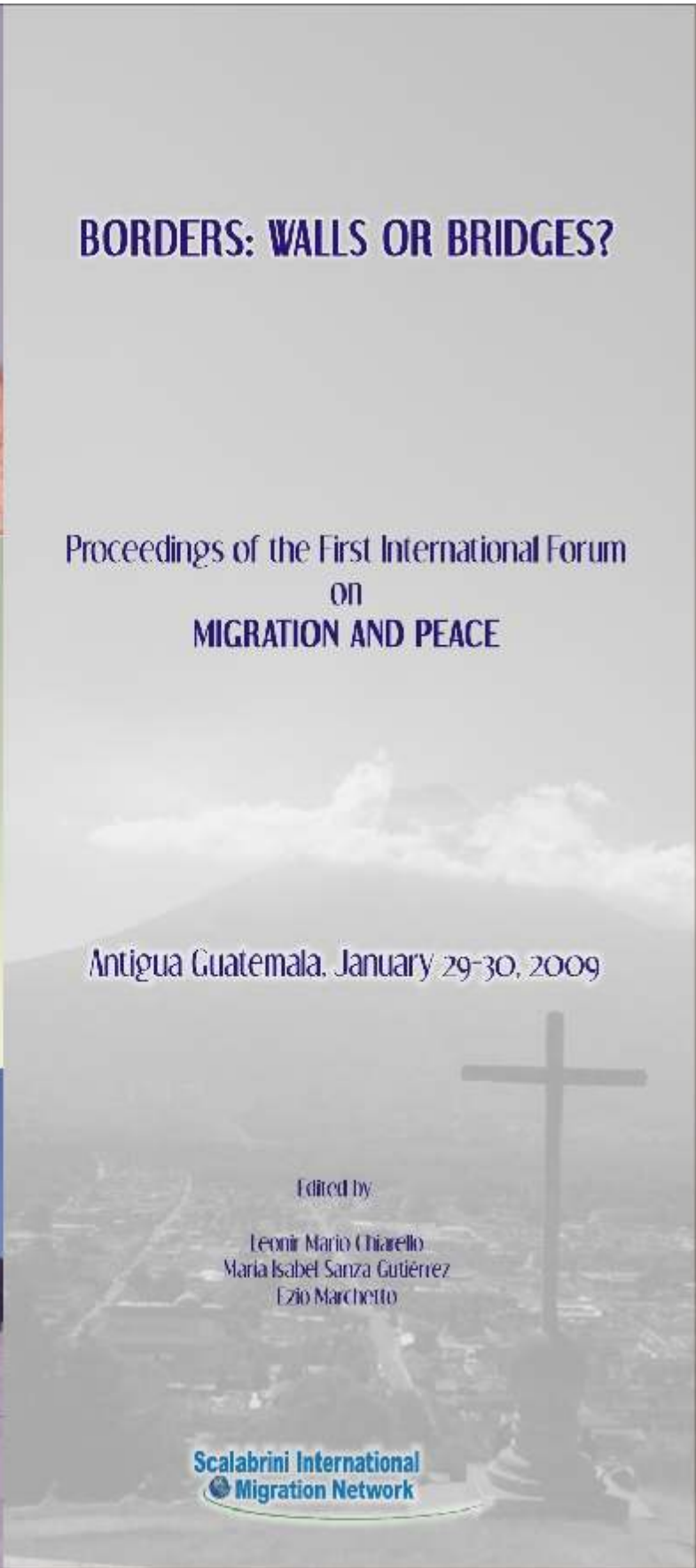
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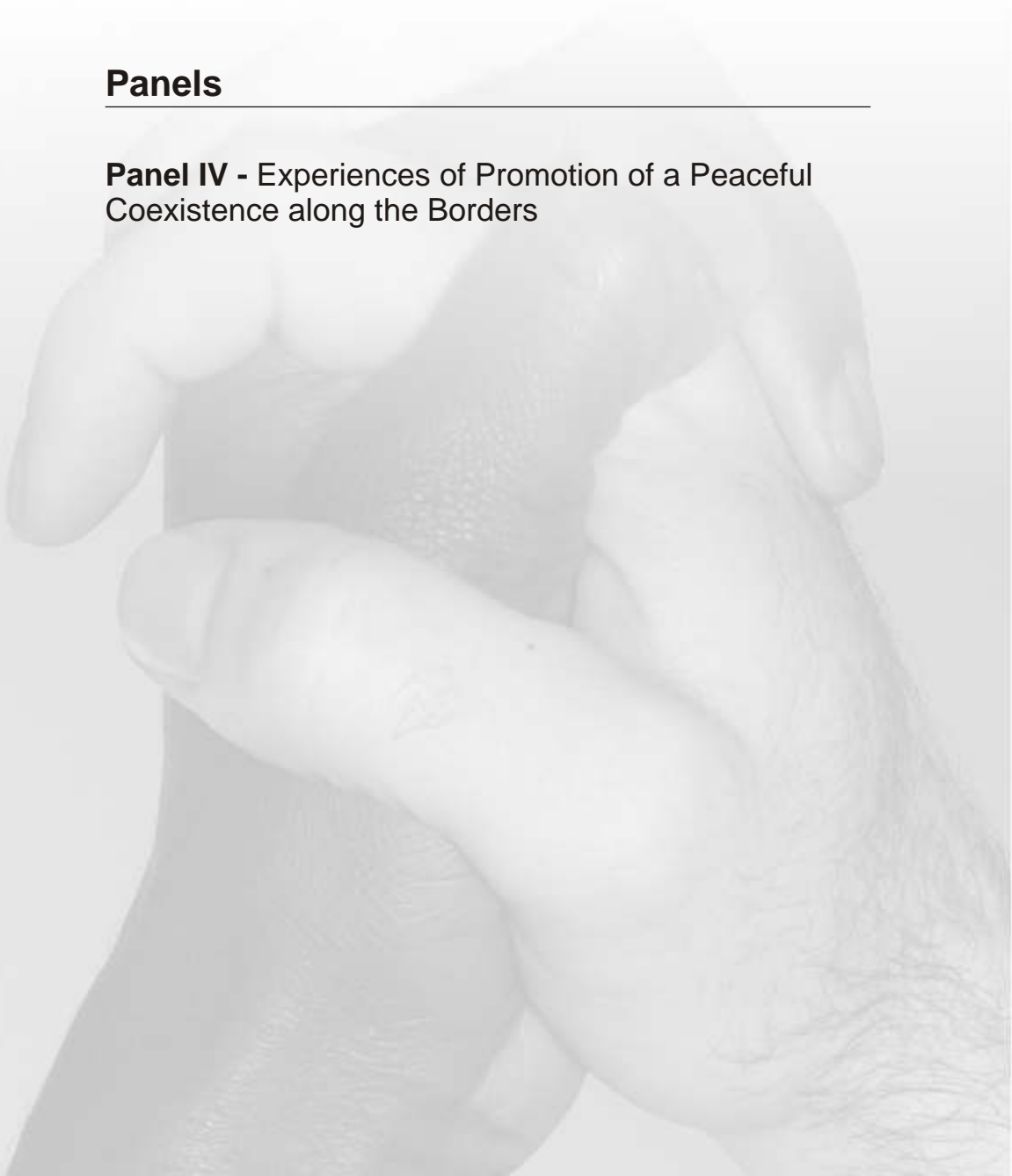
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Panels

Panel IV - Experiences of Promotion of a Peaceful Coexistence along the Borders



Introduction

Rev. Mauro Verzeletti

*Secretary of the Commission for the Pastoral Care of Migrants
Guatemala Conference of Catholic Bishops*

Distinguished friends, for the last panel of this first day of the Forum on Migration and Peace, we want to share the experiences of our migrant brothers and sisters and of persons who are working in promoting a peaceful coexistence along the border regions. The life experiences of these people will demonstrate to us the need to build bridges of humanity, which go beyond market borders. Their experiences and life stories are the contributions of these migrants, who have crossed borders and now are questioning the policies and immigration laws that have been implemented lately. These migrants crossing borders are revealing to us that we can globalize solidarity in order to guarantee a dignified and peaceful coexistence as a universal right.

In this panel, six persons will present their experiences and testimonies as migrants. First, we will hear Rev. Luiz Kindzierski, Scalabrinian missionary and director of Casa del Migrante in Tijuana, Mexico, who is here representing Rev. Flor María Rigoni, also a Scalabrinian missionary and director of Casa del Migrante in Tapachula, Mexico, who for personal reasons could not attend this Forum. Afterwards, we will hear the testimony of Rev. Claudio Holzer, Scalabrinian, parish priest of *Saint Charles Borromeo* and *Our Lady of Mount Carmel* in Chicago, and director of the Attention Center for Migrants and Refugees in Chicago.

Second, we will hear the testimonies of Rosa Mejía, Marvin Danilo Gómez and Mardoqueo Valle Callejas. Their stories are part of the history of the 28,000 Guatemalans who were deported from the United States in 2008 and thousands of others who have been deported from Mexico. These are stories that are repeated constantly in the lives of migrants, where there is no respect for international agreements and treaties or human rights. Their traumatic experiences reveal the pain and suffering of their detention, the long months of prison, uncertainty and deportation. They are part of the history of a doubly-forced migration, first from our Latin American

countries from which migrants are forced to flee in order to survive, and then their forced deportation back to their former situation of poverty. Their stories prompt us to question ourselves and to build bridges of solidarity, development, and peaceful coexistence on our continent and the world. Development is the new name for international peace without borders. A different world is possible when one globalizes solidarity.

Third, our friend Luis Argueta, internationally renowned movie director and journalist, will present a brief documentary on the May 12th, 2008 Postville raid in the United States. Luis Argueta proposes, in all his films, a reflection about the reality of our countries, from an ethical and realistic perspective. He proposes a reflection about the realities that our societies experience, and most importantly the realities of our migrants and their families, and the children who are abandoned in the streets, and then traded and sold. In his films, he also proposes a reflection on the need and possibilities to change this reality and to change history.

I give you the floor now so you can share your experiences as migrants and promoters of a world without borders.

Thank you very much.

Rev. Flor María Rigoni

Director of Casa del Migrante of Tapachula

Good afternoon. I am Father Luiz Kindzierski and I am going to lend my voice to Father Flor María Rigoni, who could not be here at the Forum to present his address, entitled:

The Migrant as Viator and Bridge: The Transversal Axis of History

“Therefore, you are no longer foreigners or strangers but fellow citizens of the saints and relatives of God” (Ef. 2, 19). This biblical vision from the New Testament summarizes the Christian perspective of the great Diaspora and can be considered a key to the reading of Peter's Gospel for all the homeless and landless, which we translate in our time, according to the Scalabrinian perspective, as the following proclamation: *Migration transforms the human being into a citizen of the world.*

This might seem a simple rhetorical phrase, a word game, a sound-bite. However, I refuse to consider this perspective a made-up reality, which too often is identified with tragedy, while at the same time with the vision for a future of hope.

Zygmund Bauman talks about *liquid societies* and, almost by way of a corollary, about *liquid love*, emphasizing within the framework of economic globalization, how also human relations and *attitudinal* parameters sail adrift on an unsteady board out in the open sea.

Even a cursory analysis of the moment we presently live in throws upon us the background of an unstable society, surrounded by an undefined mist, which seems rather a shattered puzzle thrown into aimless space. Karl Marx, along with Engels, defined the human being as a *digestive tube*. Today, personally I dare to correct that definition calling the human being an *emotional tube*. Neither that definition, nor mine today, is accurate, and much less exhaustive, about a human being that, according to Blaise Pascal, continues to be a pendulum oscillating between nothingness and infiniteness; in other words, as capable of destroying everything as of gestating the impossible. In my daring definition of *emotional tube* I express

an attitude already codified at the subconscious level, as well as in the public mindset (media, movie and soap opera fodder, an object of marketing, etc.), according to which everything is emotional and is reduced to epidermal perception. When we talk about digitalization and virtual reality, our intention is simply to refer to a technological field, to a domain of scientific development. Here, I think, lies the permanent illusion of this era: the virtual and the digital are lived no longer as fictional, but as the only reality. It is a little as if, suddenly, we were to live the dreams of the night, transmigrating continuously to visions and sensations, to the point of erasing the day and walking by night as though it were day. This premise allows me to situate migration in a deep contrast with the political, economic, and social tendencies of our today, in order to consider it a sign of a different dawn.

Contradiction between Social Weltanschauung and Migration

Retaking Bauman's concept of "liquid societies" or Slotterijk's "foamy society," everything that is related to stability, regulations, definitions, institutions, etc. falls into the void. Furthermore, it is a language for the deaf, because volatility, oblivion, and affective uprooting are presented as conditions for success and as the new code of conduct for our day. The individualism that marks our relationships turns them precarious, temporary, and volatile. Modern liquidity is a figure of change and transience: "solids preserve their form and persist over time, while liquids are formless and they are constantly morphing. They flow like deregulation, suppleness, or market liberalization." Financial transactions, stock market volatility, where stocks rise and fall without a defined face or name, are at once the cause and the effect of our daily conduct, until minding that unstableness becomes the new frontier of humankind. In this daily living of fluctuation there is a common denominator, firm and solid: the rejection of migration, of the *other*, the different, the foreigner, as the unknown. In my reading of reality, after years in the midst of migration on many latitudes, I have come to denounce the socio-cultural and, in part, religious suicide of the industrial and so-called developed world. Fiercely defended is the culture and identity of a country or a group that identifies with the nation-state in a renewed *melting pot* that looks more like a new Babel, where we now live in uncertainty, and where the future is enveloped by fog and doubts. Culture has become the new omnipotent idol, hailed

before the masses generally devoid of any critical spirit toward those who make and manipulate culture, because they own the lobbies of political and economical power.

We have linked together certain patterns, precisely because everything has become restless and we have blinded ourselves, like ostriches, with our heads in the sand. In this context, there is a common stubbornness towards migration, a shared fear regarding the other, which unites us in building walls and borders, to reject whoever knocks on our doors, convinced of having built a fortified castle, when in reality we are sitting on a raft.

If we venture to psychoanalyze our society, we might arrive at the hypothesis that we perceive the migrant as a free man who, by virtue of severing his roots, is willing and able to redefine his culture, his *Weltanschauung*, his future as a subject “*in between*”, as Peter Phan defines the migrant: by severing his roots, the migrant cuts off his deepest ties to his self and his identity, and opens himself to a new gestation of his future. Here rests, I believe, the psycho-sociological conflict between the labor-importing society and the migrants it attracts.

Host countries defend their culture nail and tooth as if it were a monolithic block, when we all know so well that culture is a dynamic reality, very liquid, like our society, with contradictions and deep ruptures. For instance, let's ask ourselves how to define American culture or Italian culture, with two *Italies*, North and South; a still-divided Germany in its historic memory, and then reunited after two generations indoctrinated by communist ideology and state bureaucracy. On the other hand, the migrant, open to the future, has, at least, a more stable point of reference in his past. It is the cultural identity of work, of a poverty lived out with dignity, with certain values that have not yet been eroded. Besides, proceeding with this sociological psychoanalysis, the migrant has nothing to defend. His adventure is open to the four points of the compass; he is ready for change; that is why he flees his land and his condition and bursts into the receiving society as someone who is betting on an imagined future, creating it day by day. In this sense, the migrant is the deck's joker who adapts and inserts himself in the empty spaces of our societies, negotiating instabilities and imbalances. I can state that the migrant is perceived as an agent of rupture, because he is perceived in the subconscious as a novelty factor, a challenge to change, an invitation to embark on an adventure that our society, in its

resignation, has already discarded. He bursts into our today with a vision of tomorrow.

From a Crossroads of Conflicts to the Bonding of Bridges

In my experience on the borders between Mexico and the United States, Mexico and Guatemala, and endless missions in Honduras during the Contra war, and in El Salvador during the civil war, as well as in border wars in Africa (Mozambique, Angola, Congo) I was snatched by waves of confrontation and violence and, at the same time, purified and liberated in stillness by gestures of gratitude, by that stretched-out hand that never fails even amid the slaughters. Ideology, race, ethnicity, culture have been, and continue to be, the arenas where modern-day gladiators do battle. It is useless to remember here that all civil wars provoke an avalanche of refugees and marginalized, displaced, exiled people. Migration, in this sense, becomes the tip of the iceberg that shows and refers us to its depths.

When I arrived in Tijuana in early 1985, the political slogan in the mass media was: *We have to stop the Brown tide...!* It was also the peak year for deportations by the *Border Patrol* in the Tijuana-Mexicali area: 687,000 persons in a border stretch of 200 kilometers. My response to such biblical exodus was to open a *Casa* for those children of no one. It was a *Casa* that very quickly a migrant defined as a *mother along the road*. This concept soon became a social concept, a sacrament of solidarity, an issue in the controversy of those years between Washington and Mexico: to create an open house that could recreate the Bible's sanctuary city. That became my school of humanity.

I remember how in the first few days after opening, I saw a migrant from Michoacán who was saying farewell, with a brand new blanket under his arm, a blanket snatched from the bed where he had slept. I allowed myself to tell him: "*friend, you are taking a blanket.*" And he responded: "*No, dear father, I am taking of piece of my country with me.*" It was the concept of the motherland that accompanies migrants almost like the *litterae comunionis* of the first Christians: I, land of Mexico, or of Latin America, am sending you as my son to the land of North America. Thus, in the peasant's worldview, land is a big family without borders, where there is room for everyone and where one becomes a brother to others sheltered by the same mother.

Returning to the slogan of the first years of my migratory adventure

between Mexico and the United States, if we had changed that slogan from: “*We have to stop the Brown tide*” and said instead: “*We have to stop the human tide*,” perhaps today's politics and sociology would be different. No one can stop the human being in his quest for freedom and in his pilgrim's challenge. Man is born a *viator* because he is born yearning for freedom.

My experience tells me that cutting the wings of humankind, or of one of its expressions, which is migration, is like trying to imprison the wind. Thus, in our *Casas* we mold the theology of the road, a present day application of the Samaritan's parable that transcends all religious borders, to talk and embody the language of man and his history. For me this kindness has become an open Bible that everyone can read, even the Islamic world, which has passed through some of our houses, where it has found the space and the times to celebrate its Ramadan.

In this migration Calvary that starts in Central America and runs through all of Mexico to reach the border with the United States, undocumented migrants are the target of all kinds of abuse, from their own country, going through the filters of those uniformed Mexican vultures, as migrants call the Mexican police, to organized crime, because it is profitable to strip the poor. A hunting license has been established, and it pains me to have to denounce its existence, against those who bet on the future or on the daily bread. Moreover, Mexico is on the list, a very small one, of those countries that persecute undocumented migrants throughout their territory. Professor Rodolfo Casillas, has prepared a map of Mexico with red dots, pointing out the places where there are migratory stations and fixed police posts; it looks like a patient ill with measles: a dangerous territory with red lights.

Against this background, the idea of creating a network of *Casas*, a path of inns like oases, although it is better to call them shelters, and even *bunkers*, where migrants could protect themselves from the hunters, seeks to become an alternative, a social and political message in order to transform migration into a meeting and a dialogue among peoples, ethnic groups, and religious creeds. It is a historic meeting place full of novelty. It is intellectual or racist blindness, pure and simple, to refuse to recognize that when migration moves, history moves, and with it our humanity and our culture. Walls fall quietly, even if we denied it. How can we eat a pizza, a taco or a *pupusa* in the United States or anywhere and reject the country that

people the truth of possessing something new to share with others.

The mission of turning around the crossroads of conflicts begins with us, supporters of the Casas del Migrante and of all those hostels where the undocumented person knocks, asking for a hand. We are a sign of contradiction amid the people in the streets, who are quick to raise a shield or look for scapegoats and choose the foreigner for one. A bitter story has taken shape inside me many times when I reflect on the fate of the undocumented. The rejection of a category of defenseless people will soon lead us to the rejection, and even the elimination of other similar categories, such as indigenous peoples, the elderly, terminal patients, etc. Whereas Plautus and later Hobbes argued that *homo homini lupus*, today we have to accept the historical challenge and dare to dream that *homo homini frater aut amicus*.

On this same line of thought, whoever chooses the migrant and undocumented for a fellow man or as an object of his or her Christian ministry, or simple humanitarianism, sits on top of a barricade that many want to tear down. The same happens with the builders of peace and justice, the defenders of human rights and of minorities in general. Peace and human coexistence have their price, a bit of death to the protagonists. To accept and defend the undocumented is to take their side, to become a sign of contradiction. We come out smelling of migrants, foreigners and undocumented, renewing on our skin the biblical passage from Exodus 23, 9: *You smell as foreigners because you were foreigners in Egypt*.

Facing the rejection that society could throw at us because of our option, I want to remember the blessing that the Bible entrusted to the people of Israel, and that constitutes until today in my experience the basis for peace, the Biblical Shalom: *May Yahweh bless you and shelter you; and show you his face and grant you peace* (Num. 6, 22).

Retaking the starting concept of liquid societies, the migration challenge can today constitute a basis from which to begin to rebuild solid points. The migrant bets on the future, believes in a positive development, accepts risks, and in the end, he is the one who bets on the receiving country, considering it, in the end, a good one. Rejecting the migrant is, fundamentally, in my experience, a signal of fear and uncertainty, by an old society that feels its life and its dreams are slipping between its fingers. What has renewed me, in any border, has been the creativity of the migrant to invent, day by day anew, the reasons for his hope. This is the magic word, dead long time ago in the language and the conscience of many workforce

receiving nations. When the concept of hope disappears, the future has also disappeared.

To transform migration into a historic, social, economic, and political meeting of minds is to reinvent the feast of life, of coexistence, of the event that turned Babel into Pentecost. Here a denunciation and a condemnation are raised against all types of cloning perpetrated by dominant cultures through fashion, advertising, or economic and political models. If it is true that we have transformed the world of migration into a huge eBay where we buy and sell and transfer the cheapest and most convenient source of labor, we must also accept the risk of entering an eBay marketplace where different values, other cultures, and diverse worldviews will challenge ours.

The other university in my life has been the border, a meeting place where I have gone beyond the limits of my defenses, letting them down, and opening myself to the richness of others.

Please allow me to highlight this fact: In erecting walls and borders we fool ourselves into believing we are defending our identity and our wealth, and we don't realize that we are shutting ourselves inside our limitations. We delude ourselves into thinking we have everything because we have enclosed our world inside a nutshell.

I do not mean by this to overlook the many adventurers, bandits, and swindlers who get mixed along with the honest migrants. This is not a new phenomenon. Italy exported, along with its workforce and its people, mafia and fraud. Migrants, as we know, are of above-average IQ; so it should come as no surprise if at any given moment someone realizes our so-called developed world's weaknesses, our dependency on drugs, alcohol, easy money... and throws us the bait.

I would like to finish with a poem that perhaps will say more than all of these reflections.

BORDERS

Man was born a *viator*,
a pilgrim without land,
treading as a foreigner
on expanses without owners.

He once learned to open pathways
like the rivers,
seeking heights after the birds,
sleeping under shelter of the sky.

One day he learned of fear,
that faceless, nameless ghost:
fear of the other,
fear of aloneness,
fear of himself.

He thus invented fences,
wire nettings, barricades.
He repainted the world map
as a harlequin of patches;
divided people, north and south,
patricians and plebeians,
and even classified the color of their skin.

Castles and fortresses,
with their fences, motes, and trenches
became borders,
with a seat at the UN.

A Babel of languages returned:
the passing of goods is smuggling;
the transit of people, trafficking; and to be different today
can sometimes be a form of terrorism.

The tragedy of our journey...
We have traded freedom for a web of bunkers
where we bury ourselves along with our Fear.

Egypt fell. So did Rome
and Jerusalem with its temple,
and war monsters...

The day that borders fall,
will man still stand, thirsting for freedom?

Rev. Claudio Holzer

Director of the Welcome Center for Migrants, Chicago

I want to share with you my experience as priest in the parishes of Our Lady of Mt. Carmel and St. Charles Borromeo in Melrose Park, Illinois, and as a member of the board of the Illinois Coalition for the Rights of the Migrant and the Refugee. This morning, in this Forum, somebody said that the human being is the center of our attention. In this brief presentation I want to share a very specific project that can serve us to see a definite way of “not fearing the other, not fearing the diverse,” as mentioned earlier. I also want to explain what we are doing in a specific place, the suburb of Melrose Park in Chicago, Illinois. We are giving a local, specific answer to a global problem. This presentation is an example, a specific way to help the most needed human being: the migrant.

I consider the religious dimension to walk with the human and social aspects of our lives. As a priest, my parishioners not only hear me talk about God's love, but they also see me carrying out this love with specific actions. The project that we are promoting is a way of helping the immigrant, is a way of building bridges: first, a bridge with God's people, and second, a bridge with authorities, with politicians, with civil society institutions and with all, for the good of all. In this sense, I remember a phrase of the founder of the Congregation of the Missionaries of St. Charles, Scalabrinians, Blessed Juan Bautista Scalabrini: “Where God's people are suffering, there is the Church.” How are we going to promote a peaceful coexistence between borders?

When I answer this question, I'm not talking about geographical borders between two nations, but the borders that also exist in our social groups, in our workplaces, in our cities, and also in our parish communities. In my parish community, we have people who speak Italian, English, Portuguese, and a Spanish-speaking majority, all of them intertwined by sharing the same space. How do we help the different groups?

First, I am going to talk about the Illinois Welcome Center, a government office which is the first and so far the only one in the United States. For profit and nonprofit organizations, the community alliance, the church and its community center, community outreach programs, the

government, and the local authority all of these entities collaborate with [The Welcome] Center or they are associated with it; in sum Casa Jalisco is an example of interaction between two countries, one in United States and the other in Mexico.

I begin with the words of the former governor of Illinois, Rod Blagojevich, on the role of the immigrants: *“Immigrants bring desire to work, strong family values, and desire to improve. The state of Illinois is a leader in adopting new laws to help the immigrant integrate to our society. Together we can take this to the next level, and ensure that the immigrants continue to play an important role in Illinois.”*

Statistics show that 13 percent of the resident population of Illinois is made up of immigrants. Immigrants and children of immigrants are 26 percent. Their participation as voters made the difference in the last elections of our new president. Seventeen percent of Illinois' workforce is made up of immigrants, and 46 percent of new homeowners in the state of Illinois, are immigrants.

Illinois Welcome Center

The Illinois Welcome Center is a group of interrelated agencies. The purpose of the center is to facilitate the integration of immigrants and refugees into their new lives in Illinois. We recognize the cultural, social and economical richness that the immigrants bring to the state and we try to take advantage of this potential.

The purpose of the welcome center is to provide an array of state services in one place, to provide correct information and refer them to state services, offer seminars and sessions with a variety of themes, and to be a safe, open place where classes can be held. There is also a mobile unit that provides state services to different communities.

Why a welcome center in Melrose Park? The great majority of the immigrant population now lives in the suburbs. Since there is no space to live in the city, and the nonprofit agencies continue to be concentrated in the center of the city, this suburb became a good home for the Welcome Center because of the absence of services for immigrants. It is also a good place to collaborate with both religious institutions and state agencies, but the main reason is the great need for services in the immigrant community, which represents 70-75 percent of the suburban population. In the past, services

were far from the immigrants and it was hard for them to seek help or for the agencies to come to them. The Welcome Center intends to create a simple, fundamental concept for success: to create a single point for immigrants to access all the services needed for them to integrate with American society, either through direct assistance or referral to other specialized agencies.

The benefits of serving the community are the following: immigrants can participate in their communities, find jobs, receive job training, advance their own educations, share in the education of their children, find housing, learn English, request social services for their families, ensure healthcare, and obtain citizenship information. These are specific answers to the needs of immigrants, a collective service with a common goal: to better the lives of the members of the community. We have a state that cares about its residents and is responding to their needs.

The Community Alliance

The second part of this model was to locate all the agencies that did not have an office in Melrose Park. Currently there are more than 40 agencies that work with us, the majority of which are nonprofit. We also work with the school district, hospitals, and other institutions that serve the needs of the immigrants. This is the purpose of the Community Alliance: all working to better the situation of the immigrant population in Melrose Park and the suburbs. We are in the process of creating a general directory with all the immigrant services.

The Fundamental Role of the Church

The role of the church is fundamental to this model. The community, in this specific context, in this model, has some important features, such as the trust among church leaders. In Melrose Park, more than 50 percent of the population is undocumented. That is why immigrants don't go to government offices. They don't go to hospitals, because they don't have health insurance. The church is the fundamental means of obtaining information and services. As a church, we also have direct and immediate communication. Every Sunday, we can talk directly to approximately 10,000 people. The church is a place to pray, share, grow, learn, celebrate and meet with family. The church is seen as a unifying vehicle, as a bridge, what we were talking about today.

The Community Center

The community center is a welcoming home for all. At the community center, we do not ask for a baptismal certificate, or passport, or visa. All are welcome. We provide direct services, groceries, immigration legal assistance, formation and information, personalized advice and work sessions. The center also provides indirect services, helping people to find solutions to their problems, using all existing resources in the area, including the community alliance and beyond, because we work with many agencies.

The local government plays an important role in this task. I will explain it with a simple example. Everybody thought: What happened in cases of domestic violence at the homes of people without papers? No one calls the police because they are scared. Yet, they can, even those without documents. We began with workshops and seminars with the police, so they would learn to properly respond to these situations. We also did seminars with immigrants, from which two groups emerged to advise and support victims of domestic violence. There is also financial aid and help with integration issues.

The Example of Casa Jalisco

For the first time, a state in Mexico, in this case Jalisco, assisted by providing millions of dollars, which represents three one-hundredths of what Jalisco receives in immigrant remittances, to build a cultural center that can serve their community not only as cultural venue, but also help with migration issues and other social problems. It is an example of the success that can be attained with the collaboration of all.

The key to all of it is that it does not matter if you are a Republican or Democrat, Catholic or non-Catholic; the important thing is that everyone can work together to improve the integration process for immigrants.

Thank you.

Mrs. Rosana Mejía

Migrant, Guatemala

Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen. My name is María Rosana Mejía Marroquín, and my daughter is here with me. I migrated to the United States looking for a better future for myself and my family. I arrived in Postville, Iowa in July 2005. I worked for some time, and there I met the father of my child; later I got pregnant, and I stopped working for a while. After delivering, I took care of my baby girl for no more than two months. My husband's salary was not enough to cover expenses in the United States, and I had to return to work. I worked nearly one year and five months, until May 12th, 2008, the day of the raid.

That day, May 12th, was a tragic one for me, as well as for my colleagues who were there, because we had dreams, hopes, and because we were certain that in the United States we could reach whatever dream we wanted. That day, we were quietly working, when suddenly everybody started yelling and running. I was very scared. I did not know what was happening. I was lost, I don't know how to explain it to you; I was in shock. Later I heard that it was immigration agents that were arriving. I ran and I tried to hide because of my baby girl, as the father of my daughter was in another state. My brother and my father-in-law were also working at the plant. I hid, but it was impossible to hide with so many eyes from so many immigration agents. They found me and threatened me with a gun and told me not to move. I felt so scared, I felt like a little animal in the hunters' hands. Even though afterwards they told me that they were releasing me due to humanitarian reasons, I spent about three and a half months having to wear an ankle bracelet. And, when I would ask what was going to happen with my baby girl, they told me: "That's not our problem, we don't know." Finally they allowed me to come back to my country with my little daughter.

Thank God, she is with me and... [*Editor's note: while Rosana was talking her daughter began to cry.*] I no longer have words to express myself.

Thanks.

Mr. Marvin Danilo Pérez Gómez

Migrant, Guatemala

Good afternoon to everyone. My name is Marvin Pérez and I describe myself as a victim of the raid in Postville, Iowa, on May 12th and deportation on October 11th of last year. There are many reasons why we emigrate, and the main reason is poverty, lack of opportunities and the discrimination that many of us who live in Guatemala suffer because we don't have an elementary education. That and many other things are the ones that make us emigrate, mainly need and poverty.

I want to state that all that pushed me to travel illegally to the United States was discrimination, because I found out about an opportunity to travel legally to the United States. I found out that there was an opportunity to plant pine trees in the state of Mississippi, earning \$30 for each 1,000 pine trees planted. I repeat: I attempted to emigrate legally. But the day we met with the supposed recruiter, he informed us that he would charge \$2,000 to take us to work legally to the United States. Thus, I committed myself to this \$2,000 debt so he would get us the interview at the U.S. Embassy.

On the day of the interview, what we obtained was nothing, because the moment we walked into the Embassy of the United States, we realized the consular officials were making fun of us, perhaps because of our physical appearance. Each of us went to the corresponding official for the interview. We assumed that what we were looking for, the fifty of us who went, was an opportunity to legally work in the United States, but the first thing they asked us was if we had bank accounts, credit cards, if we owned properties, despite them knowing full well that what we were applying for was a visa. At that time it was an H-2B visa, a work visa, and they denied us, but by their gestures we knew they were making fun of us. They laughed at us and said: "What, do they think... it's so easy to get into the United States?"

Already having incurred my debt with the supposed recruiter, I had no choice but to get more money to pay a "coyote" to take me, so I could repay the first debt. I paid 40,000 quetzals to a "coyote" to take me to the United States.

In Postville, there were many friends that had immigrated earlier

and were working there at the meat processing plant where we were arrested. I got there, thank God I arrived, after much suffering on the road. At that company, they were exploiting us to the maximum. They made us work many hours and they did not pay us for all the time we worked. They exploited us, yelled at us, and they knew we could not complain to anybody because we had no papers, because those people knew we were immigrants.

There are many things to tell you about what it was like inside that company; however, because of lack of time, I will not be able to tell all. The day of the raid, that was a horrible day! I knew that I was illegal in the United States; I knew I had violated the law by crossing the border illegally, and I knew that at the moment of my arrest, my deportation was inevitable and something imminent. I was certain of that.

When they got there and they arrested us, I thought it was going to be a quick deportation, perhaps, at most, one month in jail, and afterwards I was going to be deported. But it was not to be. They arrested us; they mistreated us, yelled at us, and insulted us in Spanish. And the saddest part is that the people who yelled at us and insulted us were people of our same color. People who, because of the time spent there, had obtained their residencies and taken those jobs, and those people were the ones abusing us the most. Afterwards, they put us inside some cages. We looked like dogs, like chickens inside cages, suffering cold and suffering hunger. Chained and shackled, they wouldn't even free our hands to eat; with our hands chained around our waists, they gave us food and they placed it in front of us, and we did not have anything to grab it with. We had to bow our heads, with our hands stuck to our waists, chained, all while they mocked us and humiliated us. They would not allow us to go to sleep, and the worst came afterwards.

After all of this came the court proceeding. They charged us criminally. Supposedly, in the United States, we, the group of 270 detainees, are now criminals; we have a federal number in the United States, and the saddest part is that I hoped to reach an immigration detention center. However, on the third day after the raid I was inside a state prison, mixed with a whole bunch of criminals; I think this is not fair. I have always respected the laws, I have respected them here in my country, and I also respected them there, because the most I ever did was to work; going from work to my room, from my room to work, and that was all I did. What I want is for them to answer my questions: Why so much hate? Why so much

rancor against us, when all we had done was to look for the means to bring food home? If we didn't have persons depending on us, things would be different, but we were compelled by poverty. That is all we know. The only thing I returned with was the "why." Why do they hate us? Why so much rancor? Why did they violate our rights? What is immigration for them? Immigration is also a crime now, isn't it?

When I was there, with everything that they were doing to me, my only thought was my daughters. I felt that when they were humiliating me, despising me, they were doing it to my daughters. Now, the only thing I ask, and I am grateful to all of you who are interested in migrants, is: Don't simply come to see us to ask us: "Hey! What happened? How was it?" But come and help all of us that were deported home; especially those from the group of 270, those of us arrested in Postville, because for all I know, we are the first group that they have criminalized, to whom they have given criminal records and have imprisoned us for the longest time.

I want to thank the persons who brought us to this place, and to thank all of you for paying attention, and for supporting all the migrants that are there, and ask those who are working, for instance, at the Consulate in the United States to pay more attention to Guatemalans who are arrested, because, at the Consulate in Chicago, the only thing they told us was: "That's the way life is. I'm sorry, gentlemen, but we cannot do anything for you; all we can do is expedite your deportation." However, nothing happened in expediting our deportation, either. Thankfully, it was the Consulate in Miami that learned about our case, came to see us in jail, was concerned about us, and hired lawyers. The day we finished serving our sentence was October 11th, 2008.

The day before, they took us out of prison, and we spent only one night at the Krome Immigration Detention Center, and on Saturday, October 12th, we were deported. I thank the Consulate in Miami and Dr. Erik Camayd, who was present and visited us in prison.

The only thing I ask of the Guatemalan Government is: Pay more attention to the people who are in the United States, as well as those of us who are returning. And to all of you too, thank you for listening to us and supporting us and God bless you.

Thank you.

Mr. Mardoqueo Valle Callejas

Migrant, Guatemala

Good afternoon, everyone. I first want to thank God for giving me the opportunity to express and testify to the suffering each of us goes through when we flee our country for the United States. I also thank my friend, Luis Argueta, and our friend Erik Camayd. Because of them we are here today. For us it is a moment of joy to be able to share with each of you the suffering each one of us went through. Just like you heard the words from my colleague Marvin, so am I one of the persons deported from the state of Iowa. We who have been deported have been humiliated by the authorities of that country. The reason why we have been humiliated is for the bitter need each one of us has suffered in our home country.

I went to that place because I had a need. I have a wife and five children, and I knew that here in Guatemala I could no longer do anything for them. I needed to earn the means to support my children, my wife, including my mother, with whom I've lived since I was seven years old, when my father died. I started working when I was ten years old, earning 1 quetzal per day. Earning six quetzals a week, I gave my mother five for expenses and I kept one for Sundays. I grew up, got together with my wife, and we had our family.

When I felt propelled to flee to the United States, I did not have a way to travel to that place. The only thing I had was the inheritance that my poor mother had given me; I had to fall back on it. I mortgaged my inheritance and traveled abroad with a 60,000 quetzals debt. I arrived at that place without imagining all that was going to happen to me and all the suffering I would have to go through. We began to work, and thank God we had the opportunity to work in that company. But when the job was finally taking shape, the authorities raided it and did not allow us to remain there. Later, they transported us to several prisons. Personally, I went through five prisons in the United States. These were sad and painful moments because, as my colleague was saying, the suffering I experienced in those places, and that my children and my wife experienced here for five long months without the consolation of receiving any money for expenses or for everyday food. I was a prisoner for five months. All of that time, we could not communicate

with our families because we did not have any money to call and check with them about the situation we were in. The only thing we asked God is that God would bring us back to our country again, even with debts and the fear of finding my wife and children homeless, without the house I had left them, because I was unable to repay the accrued debt.

What I was afraid of when I was in prison is exactly what happened, because when I got here, my wife was no longer where I had left her. She was in another place; but now I pray God that He helps us and strengthens our faith to continue forward, so I can work again.

I know that we don't have anything. Since October 11th, when I arrived here, I have not worked a single day. I have not worked because I can't find a job. I don't have a job to earn the means to support my family, but I pray God that between tomorrow and the day after tomorrow, He gives me a job to earn the income to support my family. I am grateful to all of you for considering us, and we ask the authorities of this country, as well as those of the United States, to have a little bit more concern with all the migrants still there. They are there without their families; there is nobody to take care of them. I also ask that you think about us, the deported. We also need your collaboration, from each of the attendees here, and from the highest authorities.

Thank you for the privilege you have given us in allowing us to share with you. God bless you on this afternoon.

Thank you.

Mr. Luis Argueta

Movie Director, Guatemala

Introduction by Dr. Erik Camayd-Freixas

Professor, Florida International University (FIU) and Federal Interpreter

Good afternoon. My name is Erik Camayd. I would like to make a very brief introduction to the documentary trailer we are about to see, produced by filmmaker Luis Argueta, about the town of Postville, Iowa, and the immigration raid that took place there on May 12th, 2008.

The story of Postville will open your eyes and shake your deepest human and patriotic convictions. It is at once an epic story of survival, hope, and humble aspirations, of triumph, defeat, and rebirth. You will see the profound personal sacrifice of dozens of simple parents, toiling to secure a dignified future for their children, tragically fall prey to a secular injustice, and yet rise as a living and enduring testament to the human spirit. This is the story of a Heartland town struggling to survive and keep together its multiethnic fabric against the arbitrary shredder in the blades of prejudice and globalization. It is the spectacle of the world's most powerful government crushing the lives of the most humble and destitute. But it is also the momentous history of a community and a nation rising together to reclaim its democratic values, its humanistic spirit, and its rightful place in the community of nations, as the last champion of liberty. At every corner of this moral saga was the unblinking lens of Guatemalan-American filmmaker Luis Argueta. Thanks to his vision the silenced masses now have a voice, and the epicenter in the most crucial social struggle of our generation, finally, has an all-too-human face.

Testimony by Mr. Luis Argueta

Movie Director, Guatemala

Ladies and gentlemen: good afternoon to everyone. I will try to be brief. I will give you a report on the situation in Postville, Iowa, and I will focus on four points: the situation of the women in shackles, the situation of the minors, their legal situation, and lastly the situation of the group of Guatemalans who were recalled as material witnesses in the legal

proceedings against the company that employed the undocumented immigrants, their managers and owners.

First: Today, eight months and 17 days after the most brutal immigration raid, the most costly, and one of the largest in the history of the United States, in Postville: 30 adults, 29 mothers and one father, await resolution of their situation. They wait while prohibited to travel outside the county; they wait while prohibited to work; they wait while wearing electronic shackles on their ankles, the same ones that during the past eight months and 17 days they have had to connect to a wall outlet for two hours every day. That electronic shackle that humiliates them, burns their skin, that produces pain in their bones and muscles, fear in their children, fear of watching their parents plugged in to a wall like an electric toaster and fearing that they will be electrocuted, the terror to think that when they return home from school their mother will no longer be there. Perhaps that is why these traumatized children refuse, now more than ever, to go to school, and they wet their pants at night and during the day without even realizing it.

Second: Today, eight months and 17 days after the most brutal immigration raid, the most costly, and one of the largest in the history of the United States, in Postville: 17 minors await the resolution of their situations. They wait without wanting to go to school, with the pressure that their families in Guatemala place on them to stop studying and find jobs, so as to start sending the money to survive, to go to the doctor, and to buy medications.

Third: Today, eight months and 17 days after the most brutal immigration raid, the most costly, and one of the largest in the history of the United States, in Postville: 30 parents, heads of households, 17 minors, and approximately 57 dependents, in total more than 100 immigrants directly affected by the raid, all with legal charges pending against them, have a roof, heat, food, and legal counseling, thanks to the ongoing ecumenical efforts centralized at St. Bridget's Church. I ask: Out of that charitable cost of \$80,000 per month, how much is the contribution of the Guatemalan government and/or the Guatemalan institutions that support and protect migrants? I believe it does not exceed zero.

Fourth: Today, eight months and 17 days after the most brutal immigration raid, the most costly, and one of the largest in the history of the United States, in Postville: 30 workers who already served their five-month sentences, 4,500 days in total, have been retained and returned to Iowa as

material witnesses against the meat processing plant, its managers and owners.

Let's remember that the sentences of those 30 workers, together with the other 202 who have already been deported to Guatemala, were the product of an illegal entrapment, which attorney David Wolfe Leopold, President of the American Immigration Lawyers Association, in his testimony before the United States Congress on July 24th, 2008, called a "travesty of justice." These 30 workers wait, shivering with cold in the implacable Iowa winter, to be used by the same government that, on May 12th, 2008, arrested them with premeditation and malice aforethought at a place for chopping meat, where they were abused and exploited daily. And during their exasperating wait, these 30 workers had to plug themselves into a wall for two hours every day to recharge the electronic shackles on their ankles. Those 30 workers were returned to Iowa penniless. "The government does not have any money," is what they told Byron López Lux, a native of Chimachoy, Itzapa, Chimaltenango, when he asked them if they would live on air. This same government that now says it does not have the money, spent \$5.2 million on the May 12th raid alone. Those 30 workers have work permits that took weeks to arrive, but they do not have jobs. Those 30 workers live with the anguish of not knowing for how long those permits will be valid. And, sooner or later, like the other 202 from Postville, and another 28,000 Guatemalans in 2008, they too will be deported to a country that, until now, has only offered them poverty, violence, and death. A country where Rosa Zamora, one of the shackled women from Postville, has a mother sick with Alzheimer's living in a shack, in Calderas, and waiting for death to arrive, because her daughter can no longer send money for medications. A country where José Asyool Gómez cannot sleep thinking about the 35,000 quetzals he borrowed at a 10 percent monthly interest, of which he has not paid one cent, because on May 12th, 2008, he had only worked for two months at the company. A country where Mercedes Gómez, single mother of two, was deported on October 11th, 2008, after serving her five-month prison term, and after she denied having children, was horrified that they would put them in prison with her. Mercedes Gómez today has been eight months and 17 days without seeing Dani, who remains in Postville under the care of her aunt, María Laura.

A Guatemalan legend tells how *La Llorona*, a Crying Woman driven mad by her attraction for a foreigner, drowned her children in the river.

Migrants, and I include myself, because we all are migrants, are the remaining children of the *La Llorona*. We are those who fled so as not to die like our siblings, drowned in the river by our mother country. Today, forced to return, *La Llorona's* other children anxiously ask themselves if the mother country will drown them like their brethren, or if she will help them rebuild their lives and become bridges of peace. Now we will see a short trailer, seven minutes long, from what will be a feature-length documentary, which my dearest friend and colleague Vivian Rivas and I are directing.

Thank you.

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CEB



FONDAZIONE CASSAMARCA
Noni, spazio per il dialogo e il well

