



# BORDERS: WALLS OR BRIDGES?

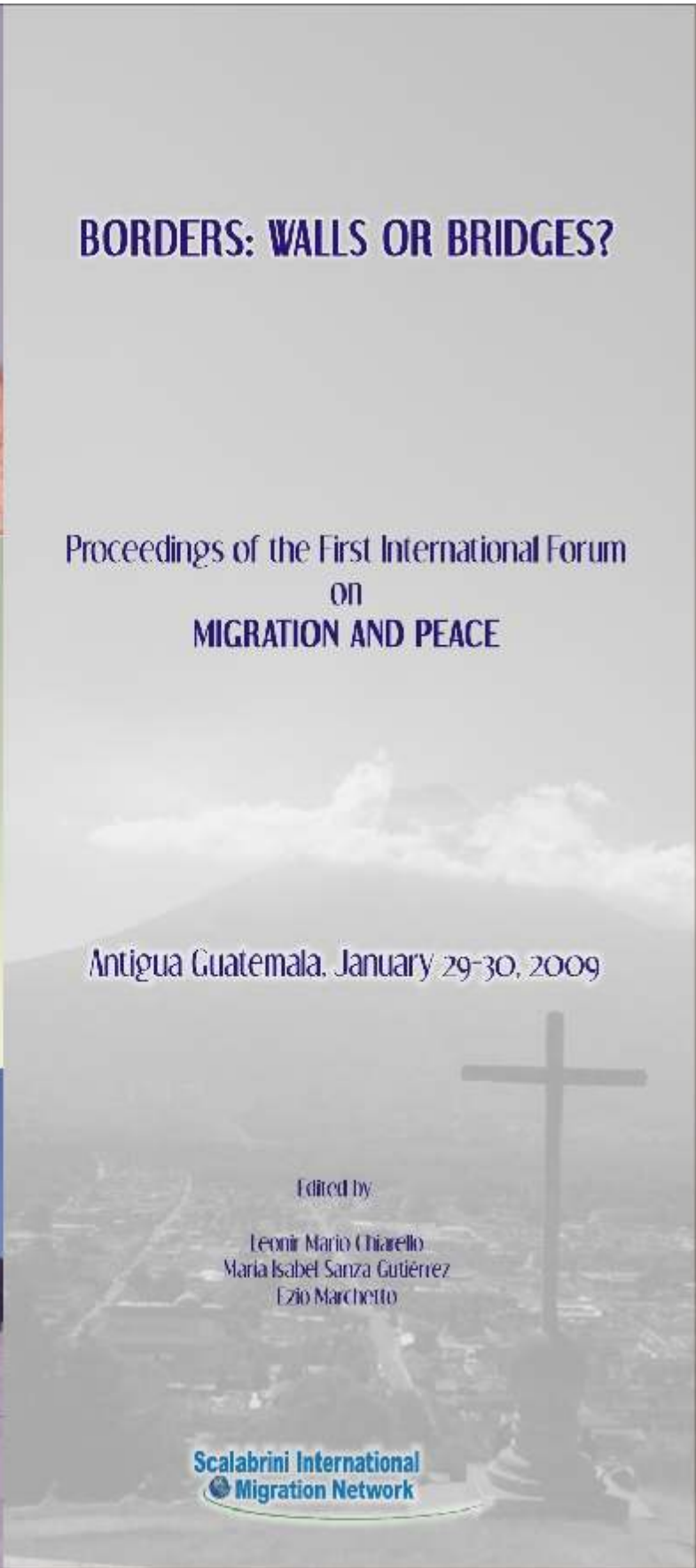
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ON  
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Edited by

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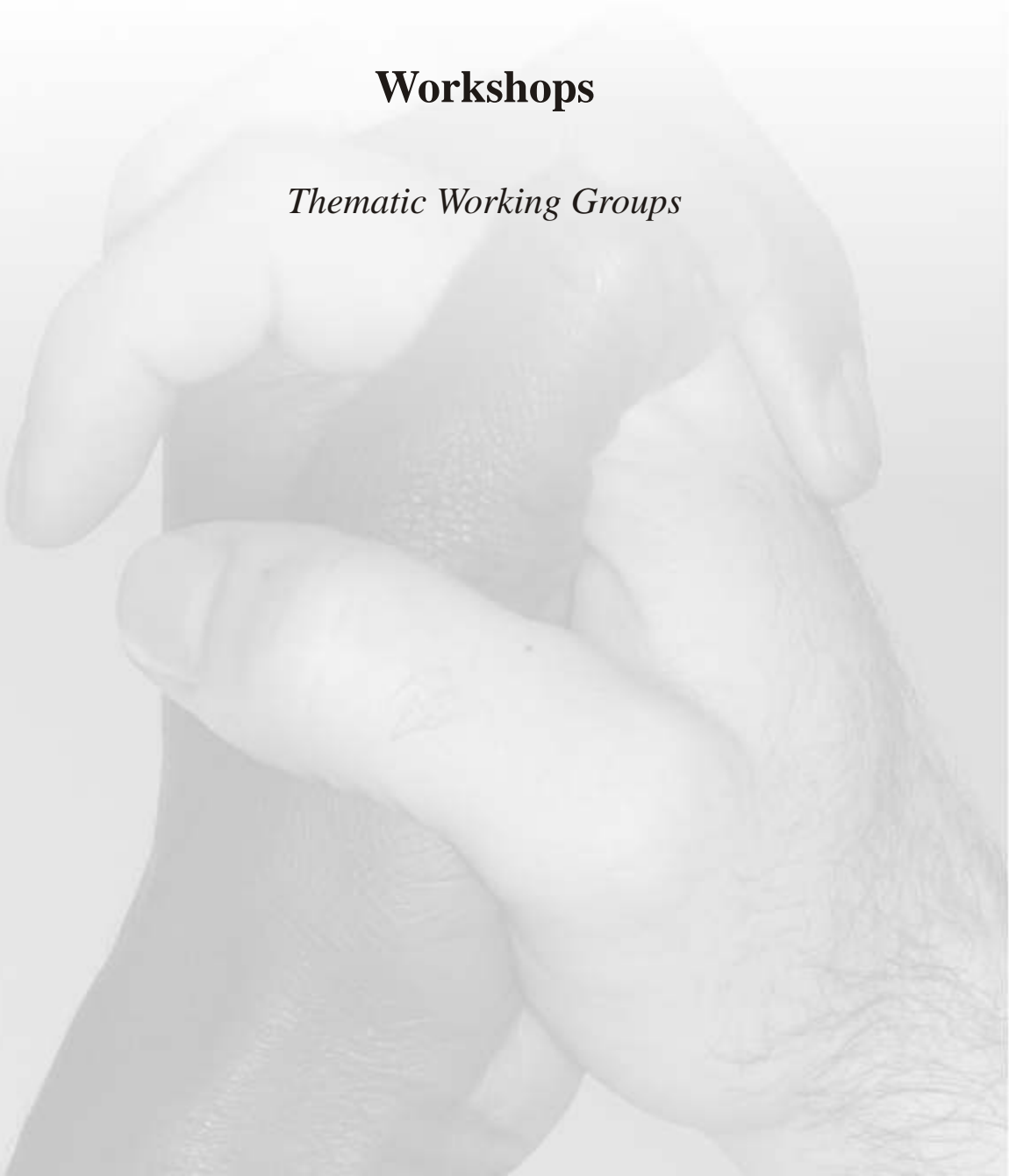
Scalabrini International  
Migration Network



BORDERS: WALLS OR BRIDGES?

## **Workshops**

*Thematic Working Groups*





## **Working Group 1: Migrants: Opportunity or Challenge for Peaceful Coexistence?**

### **Rev. Mario Santillo**

*Director of the Centro de Estudios Migratorios Latinoamericanos (CEMLA), Buenos Aires*

### **Rev. Ademar Barilli**

*Director of Casa del Migrante, Tecún Umán*

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The first workshop's theme was “*Migrants: Opportunity or Challenge for Peaceful Coexistence?*” Mario Santillo opened the discussion with a brief introduction on this topic and stressed the following points:

Very often, migrants are stigmatized by the media in the country of arrival as those who cause problems in society, using its services (like healthcare and education), competing with local workers by accepting underpaid and illegal employment. They bring illness and hold on to traditions and customs that are incompatible with those of the receiving countries.

Currently, many countries apply restrictive immigration policies often leading to a situation of irregularity, even for migrants who enter as tourists and then stay on. This may lead to violations of their fundamental rights. Living in fear, migrants are forced into a life of insecurity and hiding.

The integration of migrants in their receiving countries should reduce conflicts in normal daily life. In order to achieve this, however, local and national governments should promote programs to ensure that migrants will feel as rightful citizens and not as second-class people. Those countries that historically have received a great contribution from immigration, like Argentina, Uruguay, Brazil, Venezuela, United States, and Canada, have gained and have forged multicultural countries, respectful of cultural diversity.

Following Mario Santillo's introduction the workgroup members went on to exchange current experiences and to propose the following initiatives for the promotion of peaceful coexistence in the context of international migrations:

- **Encourage a positive perception of migrants**

In order to view migrants as an opportunity for peaceful coexistence, political and social entities could implement concrete programs and activities with the aim of promoting a positive perception of migrants, which would acknowledge the contribution of migrants to the receiving society. Migrants are bridges between different cultures, not obstacles.

- **Promote educational programs for the integration of migrants**

To guarantee peaceful coexistence between migrants and the receiving society, government agencies, in coordination with other social organizations, should promote educational programs against discrimination and for the integration of migrants into local society. This could be done by making use of an educational video produced by CEMLA, which is distributed in schools to help educate people in nondiscrimination and integration of migrants in the destination country. This video would be made available to political entities, the media, schools, churches, NGOs, and society at large.

- **Lobby for participation in international debates on migration and development**

Participation of social and political entities, together with migrants and migrant organizations, in the debate on the connection between migration and development, is another concrete initiative that could help in overcoming the negative perception of migration as a threat, and appreciate it as an opportunity for a model of development that is more open to the human and intercultural dimensions within the current international context. Migrants provide a growth factor for receiving societies and are also points of reference for their countries of origin.

## **Working Group 2: Public Policies and Human Rights: Legal and Ethical Implications**

### **Rev. Sr. Rosita Milesi**

*Director of the Instituto Migrações e Direitos Humanos (IMDH), Brasília*

### **Rev. Algacir Munhak**

*Vice-President of the Instituto Católico Chileno de Migración (INCAMI)*

*Santiago of Chile*

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The second workshop looked at the topic of “*Public Policies and Human Rights: Legal and Ethical Implications*,” and began its work by first defining the methodology and the agenda for the debate.

The group coordinators offered some words to stimulate the reflection: they stated that the manner in which the issue of international migrations is approached in the context of human rights is rather complex and is the object of debates. What is at stake in the displacement of millions of people is not only the question of the fundamental rights of migrants and refugees but also the rights of their family members, and of those who must deal with the presence of foreigners in their own territory. It is not uncommon to witness conflicts in dealing with diverse values or rights among the different social entities who are directly or indirectly involved in the dynamics of migration.

It should be noted that the issue of migrations *in relation to* public policies is part of a wider debate over the promotion of human rights at all levels of society, both nationally and internationally. In other words, the work on behalf of migrants and refugees, whether they are men or women, should grow in harmony with a larger project that includes the promotion of the rights of all people, especially those who are more vulnerable and are victims of all types of injustice. The goal is to build a more humane world.

These observations show that the approach to international migrations from a human rights perspective and the shaping of public policies are very broad and complex subjects, which first require the creation of spaces of participation, dialogue, and debate. There is nothing more contradictory to the logic of human rights than to formulate public policies regarding questions of high complexity without the effective

participation of major sectors of society.

Following the opening statements, the participants shared their concrete experiences and proposed as a conclusion some (non-exhaustive) principles and objectives for the promotion of migration public policies attentive to the human rights of migrants.

### **Principles**

- The centrality of the human person and his/her dignity.
- The perspective of integration and longer-term solutions.
- Different profiles and interpretations of the migration phenomenon.
- Demographic impact (what migrations mean for both receiving and sending countries).
- The impact on society (through the entities for the defense of human rights of migrants it is possible to arrive at a code of ethics based on solidarity and cooperation).
- Ethnic minorities among migrants (indigenous populations).
- The reunification of families.
- The humanitarian management of migration flows.
- The absence of discrimination.
- Taking into consideration the international tools related to migrations.
- The participation of immigrants in the political process (citizenship).
- Viable and legitimate policies.
- The priorities of the State must be compatible with those of the human person.

### **Objectives**

Following the dialogue and debate on the above principles, the panel went on to examine some objectives as possibilities for shared action at the international level.

- To work for a minimum platform (a common denominator) on human rights to lobby governments in a coordinated fashion and educate society about rights.
- In talking about the human rights of migrants, prioritize the following:

the right to freedom, the right to work, the right to hold on to one's culture, and the right to the integrity of the family.

- Guarantee at the intra-national and supra-national levels the international and national means for the protection and defense of the human rights of migrants.
- To consider regional spaces of integration in order to define forms and establish mechanisms of joint operation for the protection and defense of the human rights of migrants.
- Engage in networking for a stronger voice to achieve better results and be more effective in defending and protecting the human rights of migrants.

The group emphasized that it is essential to work with the various sectors of society, social organizations, directly with the migrants and refugees, with national authorities and international organizations, for the protection and promotion of human rights. This process is necessary to help shape public policies. In addition to dealing with the principles that underwrite concrete initiatives, these policies also reinforce ethical values of tolerance, respect for human dignity, a culture of peace, and the removal of real and imaginary obstacles to advancing the right to universal citizenship. In this regard, it was pointed out that the creation of “networks” is a path and a mechanism that allows for greater inclusion and encourages participation from both organizations and migrants themselves, in the task of building peace.

Finally, after a brief evaluation of the positive aspects the debate, the above summary of principles and objectives was presented by way of a conclusion at the plenary session of the Forum.

## **Working Group 3: Migrants as Builders and Messengers of Peace through Work, Culture, Values, and Family Relationships**

### **Rev. Fabio Baggio**

*Director of Scalabrini Migration Center (SMC), Manila*

### **Rev. Francisco Pelizzari**

*Director of Casa del Migrante, Nuevo Laredo*

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The third workshop dealt with the topic of “*Migrants as Builders and Messengers of Peace through Work, Culture, Values, and Family Relationships*.” The session began with a brief introduction on the given topic by Fabio Baggio, Director of the Scalabrini Migration Center, in Quezon City, the Philippines.

Rev. Baggio began his presentation by stressing the fact that many receiving societies perceive migrants as “destroyers” of peace within their tranquil communities. In reality, migrants are builders of peace with their humble work, because they contribute to the growth of their families and communities, often impacting the country's development policies. In the country of arrival, migrants face “false democracies,” where human rights and the right to work are “universal” only for some. Migrants are also messengers and builders of peace with their culture, values, and family relationships, contributing to build societies more open to diversity. The migrants' determination in achieving their goals, their commitment and work ethic, their spirit of sacrifice, their great capacity for solidarity, their faith and their ethical values are helping receiving societies to rediscover the founding values of their own history and identity.

The migration experience brings the migrant to experience the “loss” of culture and values, and forces him to rely on the essentials of human dignity, love for family, and the presence of God, by valuing family relationships, communication among family members, a love that justifies even risking one's life for the welfare of the other members. All of these qualities can help us rediscover the concept of family, which continues to be at the base of modern societies.

At the end of his presentation, Rev. Baggio opened the debate with

the following questions:

- From your personal experience, what positive examples and models of migrants can we propose as messengers/builders of peace?
- Which are the factors that impede or delay the process by which migrants can develop their potential as builders of peace?
- What can be done concretely so that migrants become more conscious protagonists in the building of peaceful societies?

All the participants in this workshop had the opportunity to present their concrete experiences and suggested the following initiatives to ensure the participation of migrants as agents of peaceful coexistence on an international level:

- Governments and social organizations must devise and implement programs to prepare migrants and make them more aware of their role as builders of peace, empowering them by using elements taken from their journey to and from the country of origin, and through the country of transit. In a special way, these programs must offer migrants a specific preparation before their arrival in the country of destination, so that they are able to facilitate the process of intercultural dialogue and become mediators of peaceful coexistence. A concrete example of this type of program is the Network of Scalabrinian “*Casas del Migrante*” on the borders between Mexico and the United States and between Guatemala and Mexico.
- The creation and the implementation of the above-mentioned programs must involve the migrants and the returnees, considering that they have direct experience and are more efficient communicators in the use of a language that is much more understandable to new migrants.
- Governments and social organizations are bound to promote the strengthening of migrant communities and associations in the country of arrival, keeping in mind that migrants can be more effective in their role as builders of peace both as a group and as individuals.

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