



“Free to choose whether to migrate or to stay”

Annual Assembly - October 2023

The 32 organizations of the **Jesuit Network with Migrants Central America - North America** gathered at the 2023 Assembly express our concern and reaffirm our commitment to those forced to migrate and the conditions they face in Central America, Mexico, the United States and Canada.

In our work of direct accompaniment, research and advocacy, we have been witness to the worsening conditions of vulnerability and insecurity of people on the move. The different forms of violence that force people to flee have changed the composition of migrant populations, translating to a greater presence of families, women, and children along migrant routes. In addition, we have observed new nationalities join historical migrant flows, making the accompaniment needs increasingly more complex.

Despite the fact that migration is a phenomenon intrinsic to the history of humanity, and that our societies are increasingly more interconnected, we find ourselves in a time of absolutization of sovereignty, which is evident in the policy of border externalization promoted by the U.S. with the collaboration of other countries in the region. We see a growth of contradictory and intentionally confusing policies that trap migrants at different stages of the migration process and prolong their trajectories, pushing them down a dead-end path. The bilateral and regional agreements made behind closed doors since the 2022 Los Angeles Declaration have increasingly hardened and militarized national borders, under the false and hypocritical discourse of addressing root causes and promoting orderly, safe and regular migration.

These policies have created major obstacles to asylum, especially for the most vulnerable, a fundamental right that has existed since the 1951 Geneva Convention, and for Latin America, the 1984 Cartagena Declaration. Containment policies have serious consequences for the integrity, dignity, freedom, and lives of people, and expose them to organized crime that often acts in collusion with state authorities, profiting from the suffering and desperation of our migrant sisters and brothers. Because of the above, civil society organizations have had to address the challenges posed by the lack of protection for families, children, and adults in the face of states that do not comply with their obligation to guarantee the rights of migrants in these circumstances of confusion, uncertainty and misinformation.

In the face of this complex and challenging reality, we call for a respect of human dignity and a recognition of the rights of migrants and refugees.

We call on states and governing bodies to:

- Guarantee each person's right to a dignified life in their homeland by adequately addressing the political and socio-environmental crises that create the violence that forces many people to flee.
- Take on the responsibility of safeguarding the rights of migrants and refugees, with special attention given to the most vulnerable, such as women, children, LGBTQ+, those with disabilities and indigenous populations.
- Eliminate unnecessarily dangerous obstacles to asylum and promote accessible alternatives for safe and regular migration.

- Never use migrants as a bargaining chip in future elections in the region, nor sacrifice safe migration policies in the name of economic or political gains in regional agreements.
- Implement public policies that promote informed, accompanied and protected migration.
- Guarantee the protection of life, security, integrity and non-criminalization of those who defend and accompany migrants.

We call on the media to:

- Elevate narratives that focus on rights and solidarity, echoing the call of Pope Francis to welcome, protect and integrate our migrant siblings.

We call on the Catholic Church and society in general to:

- Promote actions of solidarity, hospitality and reconciliation to eradicate racism, discrimination and xenophobia, recognizing the contribution of migrants to the construction of more diverse and multicultural societies.
- Go out and encounter migrants on the margins and in vulnerable situations.

We join our voice with the message of Pope Francis on the [World Day of Migrants and Refugees 2023](#), and reaffirm our commitment to “work to ensure that in every case migration is the fruit of a free decision,” addressing root causes and advocating for humane policies that respond to the reality and needs of migrants, so that they are free to choose whether to migrate or stay.

San Salvador, October 19, 2023