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CONTENTS

- THE MEXICAN NATIONAL COMMISSION FOR HUMAN RIGHTS OPENED ITS FIRST BORDER OFFICE IN TAPACHULA, CHIAPAS
 - DOMESTIC RELATIONS
 - The designation of two new Members of the Board of the CND
 - Collaboration Agreement between the Mexican National Commission for Human Rights and the Mexican Federal Attorney General's Office
 - CNDH Campaign against Racial Discrimination
 - Annual Cycle of Conferences and Round Tables: Democratic Transition and Human Rights Protection
 - Training Courses
 - INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS
 - The CNDH attended the Reunion of National Institutions, preparatory for the World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Forms of Intolerance
 - PUBLICATION
-

THE MEXICAN NATIONAL COMMISSION FOR HUMAN RIGHTS OPENED ITS FIRST BORDER OFFICE IN TAPACHULA, CHIAPAS

On August 23, 2001, the Mexican National Commission for Human Rights (CNDH) opened its first border office in Tapachula, Chiapas, with the purpose of receiving complaints and attending to possible violations of rights, committed against migrants who enter our territory in search of a better life.

The first task of the CNDH's office in Tapachula will be to: receive and attend to complaints related to probable violations of Human Rights or violations of constitutional guarantees committed by federal authorities against foreign migrants upon crossing the border.

During the inauguration of the office, the President of the Mexican National Commission for Human Rights, doctor José Luis Soberanes Fernández, highlighted the fact that the institution he heads will oversee the compliance of the constitutional mandates on the Human Rights of migrants and the protection of their basic constitutional guarantees.

The head of the CNDH indicated that the Tapachula office will have to give immediate attention to the complaints of migrant workers from Central America, and give an answer to all their requests for information: "We cannot ask in the North (to United States authorities dealing with Mexican migrants) to do what we ourselves are not willing to do in the South," asserted the National Ombudsman. He also pointed out that the Tapachula office, will initiate an ambitious program of information, training and protection of the human rights of migrants in that geographical region.

The migration towards the United States which originates in Chiapas and transits mainly through Tabasco, Campeche and Quintana Roo, generates a strong impact in the field of Human Rights, due to frequent violations to the basic guarantees of persons entering Mexico without documents. Among them: the abuse of authority, discrimination, extortion and lack of information about their rights and obligations.

The violation of the human rights of Central American migrants takes place along 1,138 kilometers of our southern frontier, of which 962 km border with Guatemala and 176 km with Belize. In Chiapas, the main points of entry of illegal workers are Comalapa, Suchiate and Tuxtla Chico, and the main dangers they face are robbery, rape, extortion and abuse of authority.

The migrant route originating mostly from Guatemala, El Salvador and Honduras, begins with the crossing of the Suchiate river - whether by boat or on foot when the waters are low- and entering the cities of Talisman or Ciudad Hidalgo, from where they go forward by train until they reach Tapachula in order to begin their journey to the North of the country, usually also by train.

According to several studies, each migrant, upon entering through the aid of middlemen or "polleros", must pay between three and five thousand dollars in order to get to the border in Northern Mexico.

The new offices of the CNDH in Tapachula are located at: 4a Avenida Sur No. 20 esquina 2a Calle Poniente, Colonia Centro, C.P. 30700, Tapachula, Chiapas. Telephone: 01 962 66882 and Fax: 01 962 66889.

DOMESTIC RELATIONS

The designation of two new Members of the Board of the CNDH

On August 8, 2001, the Permanent Commission of the Mexican Congress met in Plenary Session and approved two new members of the Board of the CNDH: Juliana González Valenzuela and Luis Villoro Toranzo, who will replace Rodolfo Stavenhagen and Carlos Fuentes, whose term had come to an end.

Juliana González Valenzuela, professor emeritus and member of the Board of Mexico's National Autonomous University (UNAM), she holds a PhD in Philosophy from said university and is a specialist in the field of ethics. She has presided the Mexican Philosophy Association and is co-founder of the International Platonic Society.

The new member of the Board of the CNDH, is presently Director of the "Eduardo Nicol" Ethics Seminar, at the Faculty of Philosophy and Letters at UNAM. She has published several specialized articles and books, such as "La Metafísica Dialéctica de Eduardo Nicol" (Dialectical Metaphysics of Eduard Nicol), and "El malestar en la moral" (The Malaise in Moral), among others.

The other new member, Luis Villoro Toranzo, holds a PhD in Philosophy from UNAM, has been a researcher at the Institute for Philosophical Studies of said university since 1971, and is a member of El Colegio Nacional since 1978.

Luis Villoro was Ambassador of Mexico to the United Nations Education, Science, and Culture Organization (UNESCO), and has received several awards, among which the National Award of Social Sciences, History and Philosophy stands out.

He has published many articles in newspapers and specialized journals, both in Mexico and abroad, and is author, among others, of the following books: "Los linderos de la ética" (The Borders of Ethics), "Creer, saber, conocer" (Believe, Know, Know about) and "Estado plural, pluralidad de culturas" (Plural State, Plurality of Cultures).

At present, the members of the Board of the CNDH are:

Griselda Álvarez Ponce de León
Héctor Fix-Zamudio
Juan Casillas García de León
Sergio García Ramírez
Clementina Díaz y de Ovando
Ricardo Pozas Horcasitas
Guillermo Espinoza Velasco
Federico Reyes Heróles
Luis Villoro
Juliana González Valenzuela

Collaboration Agreement between the Mexican National Commission for Human Rights and the Mexican Federal Attorney General's Office

On August 12, the Mexican National Commission for Human Rights (CNDH) and the Federal Attorney General's Office (PGR) signed a Collaboration Agreement, having as one of its main purposes that of designing actions to prevent and punish torture.

In order to reach this objective, the PGR will give to the CNDH, among other things:

Information from their data-base about the follow-up of cases regarding public officers or ex government officials suspected of the crime of torture; statistics about the incidence of violations to Human Rights that have taken place in the different units and offices, and follow-up statistics about amicable reconciliation's and Recommendations.

Access to bibliographical material and research that the CNDH might be able to use to know the environment in which the PGR's public officers do their work in order to attain expedient and rapid justice, with an unrestricted respect for Human Rights.

The preparation of essays or research studies requested by the CNDH, on subjects in which they have expertise related to the administration of justice.

This Agreement also contemplates the design of preventive strategies to help avoid the violation of Human Rights in the field of Federal Justice, and the improvement of procedures related to the attention given to complaints, amicable reconciliation and Recommendations given out by the CNDH.

After the signature of this Agreement, the National Ombudsman, doctor José Luis Soberanes Fernández, pointed out that "without distinction, we will protect all those citizens who have had their rights violated by any authority. And, for this reason, the CNDH must not be seen as an uncomfortable institution that halts the application of the law, but rather as the opposite: we will act every time an authority infringes upon the rights and fundamental guarantees of persons".

"We expect the PGR to develop a strong training program in Human Rights for all its employees. We will be watching to make sure that the contents of this Agreement are carried out in the best manner for the benefit of justice, legality and the Mexican society", concluded, doctor Soberanes.

CNDH Campaign against Racial Discrimination

As part of the organization for the World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related forms of Intolerance, the CNDH initiated a campaign against racism. The campaign included the elaboration and dissemination of posters and diptychs with visual impact, that were designed by experts in the field of mass media communications. This campaign was financed by the Rockefeller Foundation. With the help of Mexican Non Governmental Organizations it was possible to design, print and elaborate said materials with a vast and well structured content. Annual Cycle of Conferences and Round Tables: "Democratic Transition and the Protection of Human Rights"

The Mexican National Commission for Human Rights, together with the Faculty of Law of the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM), organized three round tables in August.

The first one took place on August 16, addressing the theme: "Mexico and the Inter-American System of Human Rights". The participants were Sergio García Ramírez, PhD., Researcher at the Institute for Juridical Research at UNAM; Jorge Ulises Carmona Tinoco, Director for Individual Cases in the area of Human Rights, at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (SRE); and M. D. in Law, Ulises Canchola, General Director for International Affairs at the Executive Secretariat of the CNDH.

The second round table, on August 23, had as its main theme: "International Interference for Humanitarian Motives". The participants were: Minister Luis Alfonso de Alba, General Director for the United Nations System at SRE, and Daniel Goñi Díaz, Vice President of the Mexican Red Cross.

Finally, on the 30th of August, the round table on "Defenders of Human Rights" took place. The participants were: Special Ambassador for Human Rights and Democracy, Mariclaire Acosta Urquidí; Nifa Delia Domínguez de De los Santos, President of the Mexican Federation of Public Organisms for the Protection and Defense of Human Rights, and Adrián Ramírez López, President of the Mexican League of Human Rights Defenders.

The annual cycle of conferences and round tables are held in the auditorium Dr. Eduardo García Maynes of the Law Faculty of the National Autonomous University of México on Thursdays at 18:00 hrs.

Training Courses

The National Commission for Human Rights, during the month of August organized 57 activities, in accordance to the spirit promoted by the Ombudsman institution, giving wide diffusion to studies, teachings and publications about Human Rights.

Personnel from the Training Direction, in coordination with the National Indigenous Institute (INI), the International Labor Organization, the Bureau for the Representation of Indigenous Populations and the Office of the President of Mexico, organized "The National Seminar for the Promotion and Diffusion of the Content and Aims of Agreement 169 of ILO".

There were also meetings with different organizations, such as: representatives of the National Network Against Violence Towards Women and Young Men; The National Institute for Social Development; members of the Permanent Campaign for Religious Tolerance; Caritas Welfare for Elderly Adults Organization; members of the Campaign Committee Against Child Abuse in Central America and Mexico; and members of the Foundation for the Welfare of the Elderly Adult.

The CNDH also participated in work sessions with the Committee for the Special Session of the United Nations in Favor of Childhood; the Tecnológico of Monterrey; the Bureau of the High Commissioner of the United Nations for Refugees, and the Universidad Iberoamericana. It was also present at the inauguration of the Session on the Rights of Victims organized by the National Institute of Criminal Science.

The themes of the training courses were very varied, among them: "Formation of Human Rights Promoters", "The Rights of Vulnerable Groups", "Human Rights of Elderly Persons", "Human Rights and Family Values", "The Rights of Persons with some form of the Disabled", "Basic Aspects of Human Rights and the Rights of Women and Migrants", "The Human Rights of Victims of Family Violence", "Education for Multiculturalism", "The Complaint Procedure", and "The Armed Forces and Human Rights".

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

The CNDH attended the Reunion of National Institutions, preparatory for the World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Forms of Intolerance

The South African Commission for

Human Rights, with the help of the United Nations High Commissioner's Office for Human Rights, held from the 26 to the 28th of August, in the city of Johannesburg, South Africa, a preparatory meeting to the World Conference against Racism.

This reunion, which took place within the framework of the efforts of the International Coordinating Committee of National Institutions for the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights, had as its main objective the formulation of a Program addressed to said institutions in the fight against racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related forms of intolerance.

The Declaration that emerged from this reunion, to be presented to all the participating governments of the Durban Conference, contains the following elements:

To include in the mandates of the National Institutions the fight against racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related forms of intolerance.

To finance and help the High Commissioner's Office and, through it, the National Institutions.

The participation of the National Institutions in the drawing up and carrying out of National Programs against racism, racial discrimination and related forms of intolerance.

The establishment of a relationship with the media to implement public campaigns encouraging them to emphasize the value of cultural identity and gender perspective.

Alternative ways of solving controversies in search of remedies against racial discrimination.

The CNDH, together with its peer institutions in Canada, Denmark, France, Indonesia, Rwanda and South Africa, the African Commission for Human Rights and a representative from the United Nations High Commissioner's Office, participated in the Drafting Committee of the Declaration of National Institutions.

PUBLICATIONS

Gaceta: Official monthly publication of the National Commission for Human Rights, No 131, June, 2001.

Relatoría de la Reunión Nacional de Universidades Institucionales de Educación Superior. (Reportership of the National Reunion of Institutional Universities of Higher Education). National Commission for Human Rights, México, August 2001. Book.

Discriminación (Discrimination). National Commission for Human Rights. México, July 2001. Triptych.

Los Derechos Humanos de la Mujer (The Human Rights of Women). National Commission for Human Rights. Mexico, August 2001. Memoranda.

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