

NEWS LETTER

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FIRST NATIONAL MEETING OF THE LEGISLATIVE POWER AND PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS FOR THE PROTECTION AND DEFENSE OF HUMAN RIGHTS

Representatives of public Human Rights defense institutions from the 32 states, the Mexican National Commission, and federal and state Congress legislators met in the city of Puebla, State of Puebla, from April 27 to 28 this year, for the First National Meeting of the Legislative Power and Public Institutions for the Protection and Defense of Human Rights.

The goal of this meeting was to promote actions and constitutional amendments in the subject of Human Rights, related with: indigenous peoples, victims of crime, migrants, legal instruments at different government levels, communication, penal policies, international treaties and the system of responsibilities for public servants.

Within the topic of indigenous rights, which was debated through 89 papers, the participants proposed, among other points, to establish a new relationship between the indigenous peoples and the State, one which will safeguard their culture and constitutional guarantees, promote harmony and respect of their Human Rights, as well as promote a multi-cultural society of tolerance towards difference.

Attendants agreed on the need to promote a comprehensive indigenous legislation which should include their demands, the principles of Human Rights, freedom of creed, free determination as an exercise of autonomy, election of their authorities, bilingual education, respect for their practices and customs in civil, family and labor matters, without this upsetting individual or collective rights and guaranteeing a balance in the indigenous system of regulations and the current Mexican legislation. Likewise, they expressed the need for the State to allocate resources in education, especially of indigenous women.

Other proposals made in the National Meeting were in favor of: broadening Convention 169 of the International Labor Organization; signing the Bill of the Declaration of Indigenous Peoples; widening the sphere of the American Human Rights Convention, and including the Restrictive Clause in international business agreements so that States comply with Human Rights instruments.

Moreover, the participants proposed to evaluate the potentiality of amending clause B of Article 102 of the Mexican Constitution so that organisms which defend Human Rights provide counseling, sponsorship and defense of victims, or else, to create centers for the attention of victims of crime, at all three levels of the government.

On the subject of migration, where 57 papers were discussed, the defenders of Human Rights and the legislators were in favor of the establishment of a State policy to solve the corresponding problems at a domestic level and reviewing the regulations in the matter. With this they aim to un-penalize illegal migration and abolish the discretionary faculties on the part of migration authorities. They also pointed out the need to promote compliance with international treaties in matters of migration, as well as cooperation and exchange information with the United States and Guatemala so as to guarantee respect for the Human Rights of migrants in the three countries, and to combat illegal traffic of people on both borders.

Lastly, there was consensus in favor of: abolishing the death penalty in Mexico through amendments to the Constitution; regulating and putting into effect the presumption of innocence; creating both courts to execute sentences involving confinement and autonomous institutes for expert appraisals; establishing a new system of justice for minors, which would consider the prospect of reducing the age for being criminally imputable.

At the Closing ceremony of the First National Meeting of the Legislative Power and Public Institutions for the Protection and Defense of Human Rights, the President of the Mexican National Commission for Human Rights, Dr. José Luis Soberanes Fernández, mentioned that the exercise of deliberation and the conclusions reached during the meeting "include a great deal of the aspirations of concerned Mexicans regarding the validity of the essential rights of any person. We must bear in mind --he said-- that the defense of Human Rights is everyone's task, that is, of all the federal and local legislative powers, public agencies, organisms in charge of their defense, and society in general."

This First National Meeting was preceded by four other preparatory regional meetings which were held in the cities of Oaxaca, Toluca, Chihuahua and Durango. The objective of these meetings was to strengthen communications between the Mexican Ombudsman and federal and state legislators.

There were 404 papers presented and 400 participants, among which the heads and representatives of Mexican Human Rights defense organisms, senators, federal and state deputies, professors and researchers, civil servants, independent professionals and members of non governmental organizations.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation No. 9/2001

April 3, 2001

Case: Mr. Rodolfo Benitez Figueroa Authority

Addressed: Governor of the State of Morelos.

DOMESTIC RELATIONS

International Seminar on Tolerance

From April 17 to 19, 2001, the Mexican National Commission for Human Rights (CNDH), as part of its activities to promote the study, teaching and dissemination of Human Rights in both the domestic and international spheres, carried out an International Seminar on Tolerance. This event was part of the preparations for the World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Forms of Intolerance, convoked by the United Nations General Assembly, which will be held from August 31 to September 7 this year in Durban, South Africa.

At the first workshop, devoted to "Religious Freedom", took part: Gunnar Stalsset, Bishop of Oslo, The Church of Norway and Chairman of the Oslo Consensus NGO; Juan Ignacio Arrieta, professor of Canonical Law in Rome; Faisal El Khatib, member of the Advisory Board for Human Rights in the Kingdom of Morocco; Natan Lerner, professor at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem; David Little, professor at Harvard University, USA, and Rafael Navarro Valls, professor at the Complutense University of Madrid, Spain.

The second workshop, on the subject "Freedom and Religious Tolerance", involved the participation of: Roberto Blancarte, from the College of México; Juan Ángel Hernández Torres, representative of Jehovah Witnesses in México; Raul González Schmal, from the Ibero-American University; Liz Hamui Halabe, representative of the Jewish Community in México; Abner López Pérez, from the Mexican Biblical Society; Carlos Martínez García, from the CNDH; Benjamin Rivera Leos, from the Christian Family Center, and Jenaro Villamil Rodríguez, from Citizen Action for Tolerance.

The speakers at the workshop on the topic of "Tolerance and Sexual Minorities" were: Juan Guillermo Figueroa, from the College of México; Ricardo Hernández Forcada, from Citizen Action for Tolerance; Claudia Hinojosa Corona, from the Human Rights Commission of the Legislative Assembly for the Federal District; Marta Lamas, from the Group for Information and Elected Reproduction, and Luis Perelman Javnozón, from The Open Closet.

The table on "Racism" comprised papers by: Judit Bokser Misses, from the National Autonomous University of México; Alicia Castellanos Guerrero, from the Autonomous Metropolitan University; Melba Pría, from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs; Gilberto Rincón Gallardo, from the Citizen Commission for Studies against Discrimination, and Rodolfo Stavenhagen, from the College of México.

Moreover, there were two magisterial conferences on "New Social View" and "The Limits of Tolerance", which were delivered by journalist Carlos Monsivais and Dr. Juliana González Valenzuela, respectively.

Among the objectives sought with the International Seminar, the most outstanding were:

- Strengthening the universal concept of human dignity.
- Promoting within society a culture of respect for diversity and condemning discrimination.
- Raising conscience on the admissibility of the right of others to be different.
- Promoting the recognition that, even though the ideas of others are not shared, they must be respected.
- Inculcate values directed at the search for tolerance, with the aim of creating the necessary conditions to eliminate racial or religious hatred and eradicate any type of discriminatory feelings.
- Understanding that tolerance is always a changeable situation, one which is exposed to a great deal of debate and friction, the solution of which, in each period, depends not only on people's psychological well-being but also on social development.

Annual Cycle of Conferences and Round Tables: Democratic Transition and Human Rights Protection

The Mexican National Commission for Human Rights in collaboration with the Faculty of Law of the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM), during the month of April held two roundtables.

The first one, on April 6, was on the subject "The Elderly and Public Policies", with the participation of: Dr. Teresa Inchaustegui Romero, professor-researcher at the College of México; Guillermo Farfán Mendoza, M. A., and Dr. María Cristina Gómez de Conceição, Academic Director and professor-researcher, respectively, of the Latin American Faculty of Social Sciences.

The second roundtable, on April 26, was devoted to "Migration: the Southern Border". The speakers were: Francisco Yañez Centeno, official of the Presidential Commission for the Puebla Panamá Plan; Hugo Ángeles Cruz, M. A., professor-researcher at the College of the Southern Border, and Dr. Bertha Imaz Lira, specialist in migration issues at the CNDH

Training Courses

The National Commission for Human Rights, following the spirit promoted by the institution of the Ombudsman to disseminate the study, teaching and diffusion of Human Rights, during the month of April, 2001, undertook 57 activities related to Human Rights.

Personnel belonging to the training area of the Mexican National Commission for Human Rights gave 11 courses, six workshops, six workshop courses, seven conferences and one seminar. Likewise, in coordination with the Human Rights State Commission of Oaxaca, the Southeastern Regional University and the UNESCO Chair for Human Rights, conducted the closing ceremony and final evaluation of the "Regional Diploma Course on Human Rights", which addressed professionals of different disciplines.

Likewise, it carried out work meetings with several organizations, among which: the Federal Center for Psycho-Social Rehabilitation; member institutions of the Campaign Committee against Child Mistreatment in Central America and México; the Delegate's Committee for the Disabled; the National Network against Violence towards Women and Young Men; the International Labor Organization; the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees; Amnesty International; the Network All Rights for Everybody; the National Mexican Autonomous Metropolitan, Chapingo, Oaxaca Regional and Ibero-American Universities; the Ministries for Public Safety and National Defense; the Mexican Youth Institute; the Board of the Permanent Campaign on Religious Tolerance, and the Human Rights Commission for the State of Baja California Sur.

Furthermore, the Mexican National Commission headquarters hosted the photographic exhibition "Views of Mexico", with the aim of promoting the rights of children and Human Rights in general.

The subjects of the training activities were varied, the most important being: Education for Peace and Human Rights; Syllabi and Human Rights; the World Health Organization and the Pan-American Health Organization; Children's Rights; the Rights of Childhood; Boys and Girls' Rights and the Responsibility of Society; the protection of Children's Rights; Basic Aspects on Human Rights; Legal Responsibility in the Use of Firearms; the Situation of Children and its Implications on the National Ombudsman's Duty; Domestic Violence and Social Resources; Formation of Human Rights Promoters; Human Rights, Tolerance and Religious Diversity; Introduction to Human Rights and Socially Vulnerable Groups; Values in the School Syllabi, and the Rights of the Elderly.

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

From April 18 to 20, 2001, in representation of the Mexican National Commission, Executive Secretary, Francisco Olguin, took part in the 57 Period of Sessions of the United Nations Human Rights Commission on subject 18B, devoted to National Institutions. Likewise, he attended the meeting of the International Coordinator Committee of National Institutions for the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights.

Those present at the meeting debated the position National Institutions will take during the upcoming World Conference on Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Forms of Intolerance, which will be held in Durban, South Africa from August 31 to September 7, 2001. Moreover, they identified the issues which will be discussed, of which the following are worth mentioning:

- Indigenous peoples, racial and cultural minorities, and religious and linguistic communities.
- The intersection of race and gender. Issues related to traffic and sexual exploitation of women and minors. Religious and cultural practices which threaten the well-being, dignity and self-esteem of the aforementioned.
- Globalization and the perpetuation of patterns of economic inequality and world unbalances.
- Seekers of asylum, refugees, forced migration and internal displacements.
- Compensation and indemnity for victims of slavery, imperialism, colonialism and contemporary forms of racism.
- Prevention and the effectiveness of UNO treaty mechanisms.
- Regional Human Rights systems, among others, those of the Americas, Africa and Europe.
- National Institutions and their mechanisms for protection and promotion.
- Attention to the HIV/AIDS pandemic which is devastating black Africa. Discrimination and the common belief that HIV/AIDS is an African or black disease and its incidence in migration and labor policies, the cost of medication and facilities to develop the former as well as the therapies.

It is worth mentioning that during this last meeting of the International Coordinator Committee of National Institutions for the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights, the Advisory Board for Human Rights in the Kingdom of Morocco and the Mexican National Commission for Human Rights were designated as the President and Vice-president of the International Coordinator Committee, respectively.

PUBLICATIONS

o Gaceta, the National Commission for Human Rights' official monthly publication, No. 127, corresponding to the month of February, 2001.

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