

Rev. Florenzo Maria Rigoni,
Scalabrinian Missionary,
Director of the *Casa del Migrante*, Tapachula, Chiapas, Mexico

ADDRESSING THE HUMAN COSTS OF IRREGULAR MIGRATION

Expressions like: *Mexico is for us a cemetery without crosses... we have to pass through a landmine... our lives are less worth than a mango* are not financial or economic balances and yet are human cries denouncing a threshold between hope and despair. The drama of the irregular migration and its variation known as undocumented is caught and perceived by the common man and through the mass media communication just superficially. I don't condemn some good reports, videos or documentaries: some of them manage to spot the silence, the wounds and the fatigue of this often underworld of migration. Notwithstanding we remain far away from the real depth of want and powerlessness. After 25 years of ministry and serving at the northern and southern borders of Mexico in the Casas del Migrante (till in our days we have welcomed about 420.000 irregular migrants) I remain speechless facing day after day the human bet of this people on the move against the logic of our policies, against the many walls of the economy, the society, the culture, the language. *If I have to starve of hunger or shame in my country, let me die along the way, my head looking forward to a new horizon.* This testimony of a campesino from Honduras entails part of the world of irregular migration, when the migration is no more the decision of a free option but an impelling necessity, that erases the freedom of choice, according to Scalabrini.

At the same time I don't overlook the effect of false expectations and hallucination of the American dream, the El Dorado, as a promised land where the dollars are so easy to earn as to collect fallen leaves in autumn.

According to the framework of this panel I'll remain close to the issue of human costs. Let me quote just a few testimonies:

Our streets have become a daily hospital, the school and the medicines a luxury item, our lives is target of the game of the organized crime... I couldn't sleep, hearing the silent weep of my children. Too many migrants invest today all their possession, a cow, a field, the mortgage of the house, they borrow money just to attempt the long journey northward for a job and a less bitter future. We are

here not dealing just with money or real estate, on the balance they put a dignity, the right to remain rooted on their homeland, on the inheritance of their forefathers...

I was invited one day to take part in a roundtable and the topic was: Mexico between its two borders. I added a third one, the vertical one crossing Mexico from Guatemala to the Rio Bravo, alongside a chain of checkpoints, a ring of corruption and persecution. The Central American migrants have branded the police and Migration officers: *uniformed vultures*. Now, and I say it with deep sadness, a new slang has arisen among “*the would be*” undocumented headed toward the US: *body card*, used especially by women. Their body is turned into a visa, a passport, a bribe. May we call this prostitution? May we blame these people for decay?

The hot issue today in the States and in Mexico is a comprehensive migration reform and I agree. However, Central America and Mexico before accusing the United States of discrimination, of shutting down their borders, have to rethink their own economic policies, the long and rooted tradition of corruption, the waste of capitals in a wrong populism and the firm decision to pass a law on migration, left aloft till today to the discretionary interpretation of each officer. I have to denounce at the same time the wave of rounds up in the States, with all the consequences of disruption in the single person, in its relation to the family and to the future. Don't stone me if I speak of a license of chasing in the States as in Mexico and Central America, where the prey and the targets are possible irregular migrants.

Without a political, sociological, cultural and economical framework defining a regular movement of people and manpower, we will face always a no declared war, or a guerrilla of low intensity through the different routes and tracks of irregular migration. In a no man's land where the law and the conventions have failed to respond to the new challenges of the globalization of the work market, the business of coyotism or human smuggling has flourished. From South Mexico till the northern border with the States the average price for every smuggled migrant are 7,000 dollars. A study conducted by Prof. Casillas shows how the stores of Elektra Corporation (which serves as intermediary of Western Union) have grown exponentially in Central America and Mexico along the route of the irregular migration.

For a campesino or an Indigenous of the Sierra Madre or from Los Altos de Chiapas such a disbursement means a trap of dependence for many years: people become slaves in a free land. Again after 50 years it's time to remind us of the well known sentence of the Swiss philosopher Max

Fischer: *we have called arms and hands and we got men*. Although irregular, migrants are not only working machines, they remain men, vehicles of a piece of history, of a culture, and a vision of the future. What we risk to lose in this appointment with the history is the chance to be with the migration in a watch point called *in between*, i.e. the possibility to see from two different *Weltanschauungen* or worldview, the one of the welcoming country and the other of the coming people.

Another issue, too often misguided by the governments of exporting countries are the remittances of the migrants. If on one hand this represents for some countries a significant branch of the GDP, on the other hand the politic overlook the tremendous costs supported for the migrant from the pregnancy till the age of entering the labor market in terms of health care, scholar system and everything connected to the rear of a citizen. All a series of side effects are linked to the inflated propaganda of the remittances. The risk of inflation in areas hard affected by migration; a toppled demographic pyramid in the same areas, where just women, children and aged people are left. In a mid and long term the risk to convert the development of these areas in a permanent dependence from abroad. Finally we have a silent disintegration of the family and the affective relationships with relatives and the homeland.

I don't blame the migration and its policies as the executioner the family and its traditional values. Since years I affirm that the Mexican and Central American family is wounded and ripped by a long string of factors, like machismo, progressive fall of values under the influx of television as of its telenovelas and soup opera, an aggressive globalization of rural and indigenous areas without a correspondent grow of education and culture.