

Oral Submission to the House of Commons Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration
regarding Global Forced Migration

Submitted by Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) Canada
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Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) is a ministry of Anabaptist churches responding to basic human needs and working for peace and justice. While our work began in 1920 in assistance to refugees fleeing the former Soviet Union, today MCC works worldwide. Last year alone, MCC supported over 300,000 people on the move. MCC welcomes this opportunity share our experiences and recommendations around global forced migration.

Committee members may be more familiar with MCC's work on refugee resettlement, as MCC helped to resettle one third of Canada's Blended Visa Office Referred (BVOR) refugees in 2017. Resettlement work in Canada and, Canada's role as a leader in encouraging resettlement globally, is of vital importance. MCC consistently hears from partners internationally, however, that addressing the root causes of forced migration must also be part of a durable solution.

While MCC works on the theme of migration worldwide, MCC's most coordinated regional work around migration currently takes place in Latin America, where I recently worked. I will share several migration push factors, the response of partner organizations, and then several recommendations to the Canadian government.

MCC partners with local organizations in Central America, Mexico and Colombia, who keep us informed of migration trends as they unfold.

We are hearing reports that migration in the region is forced by hostile environments that are seedbeds for violence. These include: severe socio-economic inequality; illicit economies coupled with corruption and weak/unresponsive institutions; and rising levels of militarization.

Latin America is the most unequal region in the world (0.79 Gini). More than half of the region's productive land is held by the top one percent of the largest farms. This is coupled with a growing economic dependence on extractivism: agro-industries; mineral resources; and hydrocarbons. This has led to a decrease in local food production and access to safe water, factors which encourage migration, especially when combined with threats of violence over control of land and development. While Colombia holds the record for the highest numbers of IDPs in the world, at 7 million, internal displacement is increasing in Central America and in Mexico.

This inequality destabilizes the region by contributing to the growth of illegal economies. Even when organized crime is not a direct driver of violence, it may indirectly impact violence by corrupting state institutions and reducing access to security and justice mechanisms, along with health and education. High unemployment and exclusion drive youth gang membership, leading to increased urban violence. In turn migration itself fuels instability: in border regions, the illegal economy around migration has become more profitable than drug trafficking.

Increased militarization to combat organized crime, combined with state institutions unresponsive to human rights violations, exacerbates violence. Increased security policies have led to extrajudicial killings and a crack down on non—violent protest. Latin America is the most dangerous place in the world to be a human rights and/or environmental defender. Militarized borders and routes, especially around Mexico's borders, contribute to increasing migrant deaths

and disappearances, as migrants and asylum seekers take lesser known routes to avoid official detection and end up in the hands of cartels or extreme desert conditions.

Foreign development and economic interventions may inadvertently cause harm in these complex scenarios. Throughout the region, however, MCC works with local partner organizations who seek to address this complexity. I will share a small sampling of this diverse and creative work.

In Colombia, partner Sembrandopaz accompanies over 40 displaced and returned farming communities in a reconciliation and human rights project. Sembrandopaz specifically works to bring youth from divided communities together through sport for leadership development and non-violent conflict resolution. In a parallel process, community leaders have formed a reparations and advocacy process to collectively work to stay on their land and develop alternative economic projects.

Anti-corruption work in Honduras, lead by the Association for a More Just Society, uses evidence-based trackers to monitor government contracts and spending in education and health. Through their work, they have seen an increase in the number of days children spend in the classroom.

Voces Mesoamericanas in southern Mexico, is part of a network of organizations, including in Central America, that monitors border violence. This network also documents internal displacement and can provide early warning signs of areas where conflict may be likely to break out and where migration flows may increase.

In response to these contextual dynamics and migration push factors, MCC offers the following recommendations to the Canadian government, not only for Latin America, but in all areas where forced migration is taking place:

1. Increased investments in conflict prevention
2. A do no harm lens.
3. Partnerships with diverse actors.
4. Continued leadership in global agreements

We encourage increased investments in conflict prevention initiatives, especially local peacebuilding and mediation initiatives across sectors and faiths. When mapping drivers of conflict, it is also crucial to identify the strengths and capacities that already exist at a local level and can be leveraged to build sustainable peace.

We also encourage the government to integrate a conflict sensitivity lens (i.e. “do no harm”) across all programming to ensure actions do not inadvertently exacerbate conflict dynamics or socio-economic inequalities. Canada should focus on resourcing non-military means of addressing insecurity around the globe. MCC encourages Canada to increase diplomatic efforts around conflict prevention and strengthen non-violent alternatives to use of force.

MCC encourages Canada to engage in partnerships with diverse actors, with a particular focus on supporting grassroots partners, enhancing local solidarity networks, and promoting mechanisms for cooperation between actors on different levels. Especially in situations of protracted internal displacement, provide more opportunities for funding, recognizing the important role that local organizations play in meeting the needs of IDPs.

MCC encourages greater cooperation and work between the IRCC and Global Affairs to build both department's capacities for responding creatively to the full array of complex international issues facing our world today. We encourage Canada to also show leadership on the implementation of the Global Compact on Migration and the Global Compact on Refugees, bringing in a root causes and prevention lens to these global agreements.