

CULTURAL REFERENCES AND COLLECTIVE ACTIONS ON MIGRATION

JORNADA ECUATORIANA

University of St. Gallen

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13:00 hrs.

Amb. Emilio Izquierdo

Permanent Representative of Ecuador to the UN Geneva

INTRODUCTION

Thank you Dr. Sánchez for your kind words and for the invitation to be present in this important event on Ecuador.

I began quite recently my duties as ambassador, permanent representative of Ecuador to the UN in Geneva, a city to which I am linked since the beginning of my diplomatic career.

When I was very young, in 1977, I came to Geneva as a member of the delegation of Ecuador to the **Diplomatic Conference on the Reaffirmation and Development of International Humanitarian Law Applicable in Armed Conflicts**. Historical event that has guided my professional life.

Very early in my new diplomatic duties, I received an invitation from the University of San Gallen to participate in this panel, as part of the **Jornada Ecuatoriana**.

With great enthusiasm I took the initiative to call Dr. Ivette Sánchez, without knowing the pleasant surprise that the conversation with her would bring me.

After the formalities of thanking her for the invitation, I mentioned to her that I had two additional topics that have motivated my interest to come: the first, related to two Ecuadorian families from San Gallen: Ledergerber and Konanz; and, the second, my own very especial interest in the work and life of the Swiss writer Robert Walser.

I suppose that, as it happens with the evasive protagonist of *Doctor Pasavento*, a novel by Spanish writer Enrique Vila-Matas, chance here also acted in the development of the story to which I refer today.

I must say that my first reading of that book was in 2006, from a copy lent by the library of the Instituto Cervantes, in Rome, where I lived then.

It happened that two days before the conversation with Yvette I went to PAYOT bookstore, in Geneva, with the uncertain hope of finding a copy of that book, for a careful rereading that

would allow me to prepare an eventual trip to San Gallen, to visit the places of Robert Walser

In fact, sometime before I knew that I would be living in Switzerland, I was planning to make reality this idea, inspired by reading the beautiful book *Walks With Walser*, by the German writer Carl Seelig, which were done precisely in the surroundings so close to St. Gallen.

After being spontaneous in telling her about this experience, she asked me if I knew Enrique Vila-Matas, and immediately told me that she actually was Yvette Sánchez; a character so much present in the novel *Doctor Pasavento*, since the core of this book is precisely Robert Walser.

I was amazed. Only then did I remember that important fact of the book. Over the years I had apparently lost pieces of that information, although the name of Yvette was familiar to me from the first moment.

I told her that I have a deep knowledge of the work of Vila-Matas, and that I have personally met the Spanish writer. I cannot yet understand the game of destiny, or chance, because this story, that I am telling you, would have seem to be taken literally from a work by Vila-Matas.

I am so happy to meet you, Yvette.

Reality and fiction walk hand in hand.

With a somehow complex fiction, Vila-Matas talks to us about various forms of disappearance, which is a metaphor for migration, just to get in the way of the subject on which I must speak to you.

II. SOME EMIGRANTS OF ST. GALLEN TO ECUADOR

Although I would have loved to dedicate my presentation to literary themes, sometimes more entertaining than academic ones, I must pass on to the second part, very hastily; that concerning the Ledergerber and Konanz families, who emigrated to Ecuador about a century ago.

1.-

The Ledergerber family, to which I am familiarly linked, is formed by people who have stood out prominently in the field of business, construction and culture.

The family in Ecuador began with Antonio Ledergerber, born in St. Gallen, who arrived in Guayaquil in 1896 as an employee of the company “Max Muller” – founded by the Swiss businessman also born in St. Gallen-. Ledergerber later worked in the construction of the railway and as auditor of the national beer company.

Among its members, I would like to mention Dr. Paulina Ledergerber. She was an Archeologist specialized in Andean cultures. As a Research Associate at the Smithsonian Institution of

Natural History, she worked very close to the great figure in world archeology, Betty Meggers, in Washington D.C., where she lived for more than thirty years.

Her fields were on archeology of the Ecuadorian southeast, on the interactions between the original Amazonian peoples and the Andes, the ethnoarchaeology of Ecuador, cultural ecology, archaeological theory and methodology, among other themes.

She was a member of Ecuador's National Academy of History and also of the Association of Archaeologists of the Society of American Archeology, the Association of Professional Anthropologists of Washington D.C. and other international professional associations. She edited the South American Formative book: a re-evaluation; and was a curator of some exhibitions.

2.-

Max Konanz, born in St. Gallen, arrives in Guayaquil in 1912, also as an employee of the aforementioned Max Muller's company. Travels extensively throughout the Ecuador of that time, on muleback, on horseback, in small boats, or on foot, through the littoral, the jungle and the mountains. A true adventurer, whose story would be worth several books.

He has been fundamental for the knowledge of the pre-Columbian culture. He created an archaeological museum that was the base of the Central Bank Museum of Ecuador. He is remembered for having guided the scientific work for the classification and conservation of archaeological treasures, represented by the beautiful piece of El Sol de Oro, a clear symbol of the cultural rescue for which he worked so passionately.

At the end of his life he devoted himself to agriculture and cheese production. He became a pioneer of the best labor practices in favor of his workers.

3.-

In that way, Ecuador has received Europeans, being the most famous: Humboldt, La Condamine, Darwin -although they were not migrants as such. but very important visitors who left a transcendental mark of their passage through the territory of the current Ecuador, that has shaped the history of the country-. Many other migrants, such as the Swiss, have been a fundamental factor for the economic and social development of Ecuador.

Ecuador is a country of migrants. Ecuadorians have emigrated traditionally to the United States, as well as to several European countries, such as Spain and Italy, among others, including Switzerland, where Ecuadorians are concentrated mainly in Lausanne.

III- LEADERSHIP OF ECUADOR IN THE REGIONAL AND WORLD TREATMENT OF THE MIGRATORY THEME

1.-

This leads me to the consideration of the leadership recently exercised by Ecuador, regionally and globally, to collectively address the current migratory and humanitarian crisis.

Human Mobility has been a priority matter in Ecuador's national and international agenda, which is reflected in our Constitution, laws, and policies. Ecuador has a firm commitment to the protection of the rights of all people in human mobility and therefore we welcome all people without discrimination and without considering any human being illegal because of their migratory status.

In a global context of increasing forced displacement, Ecuador offers an example of comprehensive protection for all people on the move, assuming not only its international responsibilities but also enacting the rights recognized in the Ecuadorian Constitution, which has allowed all people in Ecuador to have access to education, health, and other public services, regardless of their migratory status, in line with the application of the principles of non-discrimination and equal treatment before the law.

Since the 1990s to the present day, Ecuador has faced complex migratory processes that have required the adaptation of all the institutions and public policies. In 1999, a considerable number of Ecuadorians emigrated to North America and Europe, mainly as a result of the economic crisis that the country faced at that time.

However, during the same period, a significant number of people of other nationalities chose Ecuador as a destination country in search of new opportunities, in particular citizens of Colombia that needed international protection. Ecuador is host to over 66,000 refugees, 95 percent of whom are Colombians. This is the largest refugee population in Latin America.

Nowadays Ecuador is a country of origin, transit, destination, return and refuge for people in human mobility. In this context, Ecuador has built a legal and institutional framework appropriate to the particularities of protection of rights of all people on the move. As a consequence, a Human Mobility Law was adopted in 2017 and resulted to be one of the most advanced laws and policies on human mobility in the world today.

This law represents a major step in the protection of all people in human mobility, including migrants, refugees, asylum seekers, stateless persons, victims of trafficking and human smuggling, as well as their families. However, we recognize that the work is arduous and that many issues of the agenda continue to be a challenge.

2.-

As you all know, new crises have emerged, and Latin America is not an exception. The ongoing political, human rights and socio-economic developments in Venezuela have led to the outflow of more than 3.7 million Venezuelans into neighboring countries and beyond. The exodus of Venezuelan nationals is already the largest in the modern history of Latin America and the Caribbean and involves both refugees and migrants. As of early 2019, more than 230,000 Venezuelans were estimated to be sheltering in Ecuador, many of whom needed food, health and nutrition assistance.

In an economically difficult context, Ecuador has shown great solidarity and has deployed its best efforts to protect, regularize and assist the Venezuelan nationals and allocates its own resources to meet their needs, even for those who are only in transit, with full respect for their human rights, which is for us a priority.

Additionally, Ecuador has established immediate solutions to support Venezuelan citizens. These measures have materialized in the issuance of 101,404 visas to regularize their immigration status and in the admission to processing of 2,500 refugee applications.

Several Countries of the region have shown tremendous solidarity and are keeping their borders open but are increasingly overstretched. With these numbers of people now outside Venezuela, a non-political and humanitarian approach is essential to ensure regional coherence in the protection response.

In that regard, let me share with you, that Ecuador is leading a regional approach, known as, **“the Quito Process”**, to scale up the response and harmonize policies that host countries are implementing to respond to the migrants and refugees from Venezuela.

“The Quito Process”, promoted by several countries in the region, such as Argentina, Colombia, Chile, Perú, among others, constitutes a path of hope, of understanding and of common construction. It represents a road map to foster the reception, protection, and inclusion of refugees and migrants in the host countries.

Within the frame of the **“the Quito Process”**, Ecuador has organized three regional meetings. In September 2018, several countries first met in Quito, Ecuador, to exchange information and best practices regarding the crisis of Venezuelan refugees and migrants in the region.

The meeting led to the adoption of the **Declaration of Quito on Human Mobility of Venezuelan Citizens in the Region (“Quito I”)**, which laid the foundations for a more coordinated response. After a subsequent meeting on November 2018 (**“Quito II”**), was adopted a regional **Plan of Action**. Among other things, signatories to the plan committed to facilitating the social and economic integration of Venezuelans into host Countries. Importantly, this included meaningful improvements in the process of granting legal status to Venezuelans in their respective countries.

On April 2019, the third meeting took place in order to follow up on what was agreed on the **Declaration and the Plan of Action** of the Quito Process on the Human Mobility of Venezuelan Nationals in the Region. This meeting was an opportunity for States to take stock of the developments and reaffirmed their commitment to a collective strategy for responding to Venezuelan displacement in a way that promotes human rights, humanitarian principles, cooperation, security, and dignity for all. It was adopted a **Joint Declaration** as a renewed commitment to their past pledges.

So far **“the Quito Process”** has served as an important platform for discussion and debate, but also as a place to mobilize support, strategy, and alignment. A regional response has gradually been put in place to better manage the situation of migrants and refugees from Venezuela who need housing, who want to work, and who often do not have proper documentation.

3.-

Ecuadorian legislation and policies on migration have been well recognized by a wide range of stakeholders around the world. As a leading voice on migration in the Latin American region,

Ecuador's long-standing engagement in international Fora has led the country to be the Chair of the **Global Forum for Migration and Development (GFMD)**, in 2019.

The **Global Forum** was created upon the proposal of UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan in September 2006 at the UN General Assembly Dialogue on International Migration and Development. The Forum's main purpose over the years has been to advance understanding and cooperation on the interplay between migration and development.

The **GFMD** is a voluntary, inter-governmental, non-binding and informal consultative process open to all Members States and Observers of the United Nations. For twelve years now, the Forum has provided a transparent and inclusive space for all concerned stakeholders to debate issues and policy questions, share lessons learned from good or bad policies and practices and build support networks comprised of governments, international organizations, civil society business, and local authorities.

From January 1, the Government of Ecuador has assumed the 2019 Chairmanship of the **Global Forum on Migration and Development** with the overarching theme "Sustainable approaches to human mobility: Upholding rights, strengthening state agency, and advancing development through partnerships and collective action."

The year 2019 is a pivotal year for the global governance of migration as it marks the first year of the implementation of the Global Compact for Migration, and Ecuador as the Chair of the Forum will organize in November the **Twelfth GFMD Summit in Quito**, based on the following three main priorities:

- 1. Joint responses to mixed migration flow**
- 2. Migration narratives and communication**
- 3. Addressing human mobility as part of urban and rural development strategies**

In relation to our first priority, we need to consider that, in recent years, crises in different parts of the world have prompted large movements of people, often traveling under conditions of great vulnerability. In that regard, the Chairmanship considers that managing large mixed migration flows requires partnerships and collective actions, focused on protecting the human rights of people in situation of human mobility.

Coordinated actions will help us to avoid trapping migrants and refugees in situations of prolonged limbo and to stop creating an environment in which smuggling and trafficking operations thrive. Additionally, through collective actions, states will be able to provide inclusive solutions that generate benefits for newcomers and locals alike.

Our second priority: "Migration Narratives and Communication" relates to the misinformation and misperceptions about migration and migrants. In this regard, governments have a responsibility to explain and communicate their policies to the public, yet in an increasingly diverse and polarizing media environment, they compete for influence in shaping narratives on migration.

Under this second thematic priority, the 2019 **GFMD** aims to discuss government experiences, practices and lessons learned when it comes to communicating about migration, migration policies and their interconnection with sustainable development in countries of origin and destinations, both with the wider public and with migrants and migrant communities.

In relation to our third priority on addressing human mobility as part of urban and rural development strategies, it is important to bear in mind that in July 2019, the High-Level Political Forum (HLPF) on Sustainable Development, will be reviewing SDG 10 which aims to “reduce inequality within and among countries”, including through targets calling for well-managed migration policies and a reduction in remittance transfer costs.

In this sense, governments should pay close attention to the way migration interacts with existing inequities and territorial dynamics; for instance, whether and how it contributes or counter-balances the concentration of people and resources in certain areas of a country or region.

Cities and urban areas will be a central locus for realizing sustainable development aspirations in this century. As they are rapidly absorbing a growing share of the world population, including a majority of migrants and refugees, cities must manage growing demands on their infrastructure and services, while reducing their carbon footprint, and facilitating the living together of diverse communities. Meanwhile, emigration and the inflow of remittances are transforming rural economies in some parts of the world, while migrant workers help keep agricultural production afloat in others.

To conclude, let me recall that human mobility is a global phenomenon, that cannot be stopped, but it must be well managed. It is essential to respond to the needs of migrants who face situations of vulnerability, those who have been exposed to cruelty and exploitation, or those who have been smuggled or who are victims of human trafficking. In the absence of clear solutions, such as more pathways for regular migration, or actions against discrimination and the negative narrative against migrants, we could face unsustainable migration patterns.

All efforts to tackle human mobility should focus on upholding rights, reducing vulnerabilities and addressing the needs of communities. We believe that it is possible to find approaches that are favorable to the countries of origin, transit, and arrival, so their national capacities are not overburdened. Maximizing the positive effects of migration is possible and requires sustainable solutions based on shared responsibility, collective action, and cooperation.

Thank you