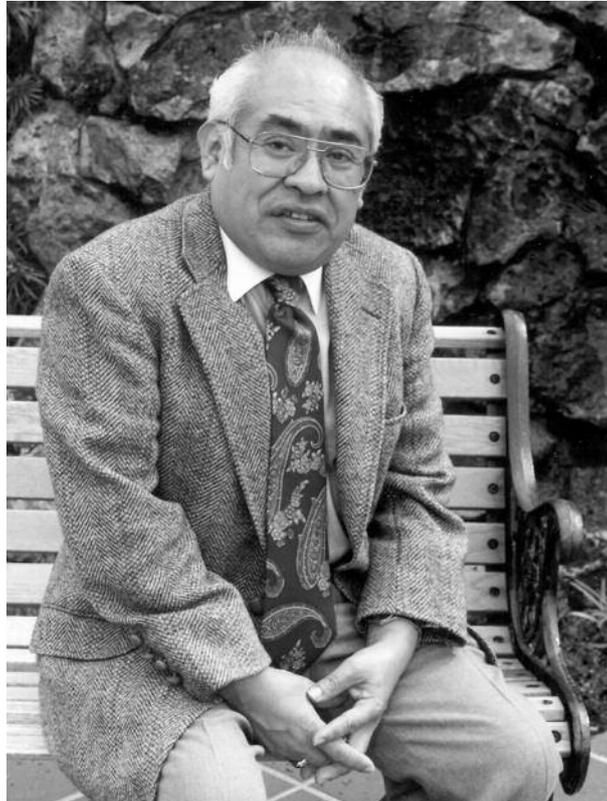


# Interview with Cándido Morales

## Head of the Institute Of Mexicans Abroad



Courtesy of the Institute of Mexicans Abroad

**VOICES OF MEXICO:** What is the current administration's policy about Mexicans in the United States, particularly the most vulnerable, like undocumented immigrants or those who have not yet acquired resident status or U.S. citizenship?

**CÁNDIDO MORALES:** With the creation of the Institute of Mexicans Abroad, the IME, the Mexican government has increased attention to communities outside the country. Of

course, those who most need protection are people who go to the United States without documents; according to the U.S. census, of the approximately 8 million undocumented migrants there, about half are Mexican.

Through its network of consulates, the Mexican government offers these people information about their rights as human beings, as well as their labor rights, and a place to lodge complaints if a boss doesn't pay everything he owes or a sub-contractor commits abuses.

Often the consulate will hire lawyers who know state law to defend these people's rights. For example, when the INS was carrying out raids at airports last year and many of those arrested were Mexican, the consulates mobilized to give them the most protection they could. Sometimes the only thing that could be done was to make sure that they were in good conditions and facilitate their safe return to Mexico because that's what the law stipulates: people without documents have to return. In other cas-

es with special conditions, the government intervened.

**VM:** In your view and with your experience and vision as a migrant, what are the main problems Mexican communities in the United States face and what is being done to deal with them?

**CM:** I think there are several central problems. First on the list is a migratory reform so those 4 million Mexicans can come out of the shadows. Their being undocumented reduces their earnings. Many can't go to clinics to get health care; they have no access

**VM:** What are the most powerful organizations of Mexicans, the organizations of legal immigrants, doing to support the undocumented?

**CM:** There are very organized campaigns that have even reached the White House, the Capitol, and a bill has been written so that a congressman or senator could present it to Congress. There have been national delegations with members from California, Texas, Illinois, New York, that have made alliances to have a greater impact and not take on a partisan mantle—whether Democrat or Republi-

promote community development to have an influence on U.S. politics on a local level, let's say to elect a Hispanic to the city council or for supervisor, let's say at a state level. The California state Congress, both House and Senate, has a 30-member Hispanic Caucus, most of them of Mexican ancestry, and they have influence as a group on the laws passed in the state.

**VM:** And on a federal level?

**CM:** On a federal level less has been achieved, but we do have congresspersons. Until now, there's no one in the Senate, but Rosario Marín will run next year in California. I think that things are in motion and Mexican-American, as well as Mexicans, have political clout: there's the Mexican-American Legal Defense and Educational Fund, MALDEF; the Mexican-American Political Association; and the League of United Latin American Citizens, LULAC. I think that with time, much can be achieved on all levels of U.S. politics. In the economic and social spheres, Mexico and the United States have been working on projects that would facilitate trade between the two nations. These are projects that can create jobs in Mexico so that people don't need to go to the United States as undocumented migrants. One of these is Partnership for Prosperity. I believe there is agreement between the Mexican and U.S. governments to try to promote and facilitate trade, both imports and exports.

**VM:** What are the links that the IME has established with the main organizations of Mexicans in the United States like La Raza, MALDEF and others?

The U. S. has demanded that the border be more secure and has increased measures to keep people out. As a result, sometimes human rights are violated.

to public housing. So, those four million Mexicans would like the U.S. and Mexican governments to make a migratory agreement. Unfortunately, since September 11, 2001, the United States has postponed the issue. I believe that what the Mexican government is doing is to increasingly emphasize it—sometimes through the Ministry of Foreign Relations, sometimes through the Ministry of the Interior, sometimes through Congress—to persuade the U.S. government that it cannot be postponed. Inside the United States, particularly in the Senate and the House of Representatives, there are those who would like the matter to be dealt with immediately because millions of people are living with undocumented status; and not only Mexicans: there are Asians, Europeans, South Americans, Canadians; people from all parts of the world.

can—but as mixed groups. Once again, President Bush's official position has been, "Let's talk about this another time."

**VM:** What measures has the Mexican government designed to support the political, social and economic development of our compatriots on the other side of the border? What programs of mutual aid have been set up among Mexicans on both sides of the border, of the migrants with their communities of origin?

**CM:** The Mexican government has fostered community development inside the United States at several levels. Many groups of compatriots have organized and the consulates have participated. It has also been the case that other organizations of Mexican Americans or even of Anglo-Americans

**CM:** Well, when the IME Advisory Council was created it was with the very appropriate vision of including U.S. national organizations that exercised the most protection and were oriented to benefit Mexicans and Mexican Americans; 10 seats on the council were reserved for them. The list includes the Association of Farm Worker Opportunity Programs, the Hispanic National Bar Association, the Hispanic Scholarship Fund and the oldest organization, LULAC. Also included are MALDEF, the National Council of La Raza, the New Alliance for America, the U.S. Hispanic Chamber of Commerce and the United Farm Workers of America, founded by César Chávez. These organizations contribute their views to enrich the deliberations of the Advisory Council. Clearly, each brings its own vision. For example, there are the farm workers—a job so many people do—and educators, bilingual educators, professionals, businessmen. We have a broad gamut of talent.

**VM:** What is the new structure that President Vicente Fox stipulated for attending to the needs of Mexicans abroad. What are the National Council for Mexican Communities Abroad, the Institute of Mexicans Abroad (IME) and the IME Advisory Council?

**CM:** Last August 6 President Fox announced the creation of the National Council for Mexican Communities Abroad, whose aim is to increase government attention to these groups living abroad. Previously what existed was the President's Program for Mexican Communities and the Ministry of Foreign Relations' Program for Mexican Communities Abroad. The president wanted to join these two efforts

together to form the Institute of Mexicans Abroad. The IME is the body that executes the policies of the National Council, which is made up of the Ministries of Foreign Relations; the Interior; Finance; Social Development; Agriculture, Animal Husbandry, Fishing and Food; Public Education; Health; Labor; Tourism; and the Environment and Natural Resources. These institutions all have programs that one way or another affect communities outside Mexico as well as the migrants' home communities in Mexico. The president has instructed these cabinet ministers to jointly deal with matters

U.S. authorities—municipal, state and national—  
should accept consular registration for U.S. security reasons  
and to give Mexicans certain guarantees.

pertaining to Mexican communities, migrants, and he himself presides over this National Council. That's why I think this is of the highest priority for the government of Mexico.

**VM:** How was the Advisory Council set up? Who is a member? How often does it meet?

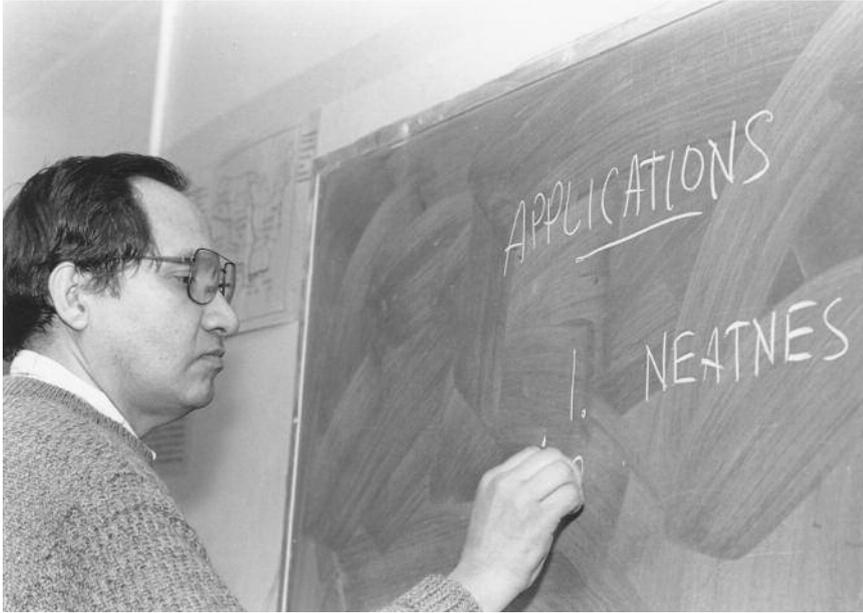
**CM:** The Advisory Council is made up of four groups. One hundred of its members are migrants living in the United States who were elected by their own communities through consular networks. We have 45 consulates in the United States, from Seattle, Washington, to Orlando, Florida, and San Diego, California. Each one was assigned a certain number of advisors in proportion to the Mexican population in their area. In addition to these 100 advisors, there are the 10 organizations

I already mentioned, like MALDEF, LULAC and the National Council of La Raza. The states that send migrants to the United States are also represented. The ones that send the most are Zacatecas, Guanajuato, Jalisco, Michoacán, Guerrero, Oaxaca, Puebla, but in the end, we decided to invite all the states in Mexico. Up until now 15 have officially confirmed their participation, and the others are in the process of naming a representative. We also added 10 special advisors, people with great experience in education, business or community development. Today, then, we have 135 advisors and the council

will continue to grow as the other states send their representatives. The Ministry of Foreign Relations also reserves the right to add other communities from outside the United States because we received some complaints from Mexicans in Europe who also wanted to be represented. Canada is another of the countries that could be added to the council. The entire Advisory Council will meet in Mexico City twice a year.

**VM:** Yes, Canada now has important programs for temporary migration.

**CM:** That is correct. That is why I believe that we should find the way to include them. This Advisory Council met for the first time March 20 and 21 here in Mexico City. The president made the welcoming speech and the council created six commissions:



Cándido Morales

We can say that the conservative tendency is today turning around to favor bilingual and free education for undocumented migrants.

Community Organization, Health and Culture; Economic Issues; Education; Border Issues; Legal Issues; and Political Issues. All of these commissions are meeting in the United States to follow up the problems they identified as priorities at their first meeting, and eventually they will come to conclusions that they will recommend to the IME itself.

**VM:** Speaking of the IME itself, what kind of infrastructure and resources does it have? Does it have offices abroad? What are its plans and programs for this year?

**CM:** The institute has 29 employees at the Ministry of Foreign Relations in Mexico, and in the consulates, we have another 86 distributed in different parts of the United States. The consulates that attend to the largest pop-

ulations, like Los Angeles, Chicago and Dallas, have larger IME staffs. We would like to have at least one IME person at each consulate. Up until now the programs have been in the sphere of assistance for community development for compatriots who want to form their clubs. The Education Ministry, among other things, has been distributing free books to school children who do not speak English and need to get their education in Spanish until they learn it. Other programs include what we have called "Mexican Days," in which we invite people from the judicial branch in the United States to understand Mexican laws and the Mexican judicial system so that if our compatriots have run-ins with the U.S. court system they can benefit from that knowledge. The idea is that U.S. judges not be as severe; they don't know how we Mexicans think, what we are

like, what our customs are, which are all different from the philosophy and way of thinking in the United States.

**VM:** With regard to education, what have you done or what are you planning to do to deal with the nativist, anti-immigrant current, with its corollaries of the English Only movement and Proposition 187?

**CM:** Well, the consulates have monitored these propositions and have allied with previously existing organizations in the United States, be they of Mexicans, Mexican Americans or Anglos who favor bilingual education to help children, even if they are undocumented. And they report their achievements and also their failures to us. In general, we can say that the conservative tendency is today turning around to favor bilingual and free education for undocumented migrants. Some states are more racist, but I believe that the established communities have been able to create a sufficiently active political presence to show that they are not going to allow these kinds of laws to come into effect in that part of the United States. I believe they have made some headway both through the consulates and through the Mexican and Mexican-American organizations, naturally with the help of many liberal people who believe in justice.

**VM:** What do you, as an immigrant, think of the new structure you just described and of the fact that the IME's director is a migrant, and its council has more than 100 members of Mexican origin who reside in the United States?

**CM:** I think that the designers of this new structure had a very positive idea

when they took into account the requests to the president and former presidents of many Mexicans and Mexican Americans living in the United States—for example, from organizations like LULAC, MADELF and La Raza—, which for years now have wanted to be recognized by the Mexican government. The government understood that the three elements were necessary: the National Council, representing the Mexican government, the Advisory Council, with 110 members who live in the United States and, lastly, the representation of the Mexican states that send workers to the other side of the border. The fact that the president decided that a migrant should be the director of the institute shows without a doubt the importance he gives to the communities living outside Mexico. For me, it is a privilege to be the first to hold this post. I think there's a new point of view. I lived in the United States for 44 years. For 30 of those years, I worked for an organization that administered U.S. government programs to help farm workers, the poor, and so I think that that experience can contribute to the design of programs in Mexico or the U.S. For me, it is not only a privilege, but a great responsibility, and I accept that. It is a responsibility not only to be the director of the IME, but also to be accountable to the Advisory Council, because we want to take into account all the recommendations that the council makes to the Mexican government. It would be useless to invite people to be simply titular members of the IME Council and not take into account their points of view, their proposals. The council is not a legislative body; that has already been thoroughly explained to them. It isn't a group that can legislate for Mex-



Cándido Morales

Another boon for communities in Mexico is the “Three-for-One” program whereby Mexican clubs in the U. S. have done fund raising for community projects.

ico, but we do want to take its recommendations very seriously.

**VM:** A large number of Mexicans in the U.S. now have dual nationality, but not the right to vote in Mexican elections. They don't want to be considered Mexican migrants, but Mexicans with all their political rights. What do you, as a migrant, think of that?

**CM:** I think there is a group of people who at a distance are very interested in Mexican politics. They have come to Mexico City and met with the different parties and presented their proposed bills. They have met with the current administration asking that the law allow them to run as candidates in Mexican elections. They are very disappointed when they are told that since they have dual nationality they cannot be candidates. But I think that the Senate

and the Chamber of Deputies should have taken into account that to prosper in the United States you have to take out U.S. citizenship, but that we still love Mexico and we want to participate here, too. There's another part of the same community that is taking part in U.S. politics. They are of Mexican descent; some of them were born in Mexico and became naturalized citizens and are now politicians in the Congress or the state Congresses in California or Texas. We don't all think alike, but I think that the road should remain open on both sides of the border for political participation.

**VM:** You were one of the first to receive the recently created consular registration. Has it worked as expected to protect our compatriots in the United States?

A lot of work has been done through  
a program called “Migrant Education,” targeting the children  
of parents who go from harvest to harvest.

**CM:** Well, the Mexican government promoted this new campaign for the consular high security registration so that our fellow countrymen could identify themselves in the United States, because if you don't have an ID, you can have problems, especially since 9/11. Through efforts by the consulates, little by little, the registration has been more accepted. In addition to being an ID, it allows you to open bank accounts to keep your money in or to send money to your family in Mexico through the banks. I think what nobody expected was for there to be opposition to the registration; that has been bad for our compatriots. There is a congressman in the House of Representatives and some at the state level who say that the document should not be given official status because it is issued by a government other than that of the United States. Nevertheless, Mexico and other countries maintain that it is a practice permitted under the Vienna Convention and that Mexico has been doing it for more than 100 years. It is simply a registration. I read that in Nava, California, the city council approved accepting consular registration. However, this has to come about city by city. Other cities are waiting to see what happens. But I think it's preferable that the police in the U.S. know that a driver is named Rubén Martínez Jiménez and that he's a Mexican citizen, to them not knowing where he's from. My opinion is that the U.S. authorities—municipal, state and national—should accept consular registration for U.S.

security reasons and to give Mexicans who have no other way of identifying themselves certain guarantees.

**VM:** Speaking of national security, how has the tightening up of borders since 9/11 affected issues like migrants' human rights and what are we doing about it?

**CM:** The United States has demanded that the border be more secure and has increased measures to keep people out. As a result, sometimes people's human rights are violated. For example, the United States maintains that if the police stop someone and they have no way to identify themselves, the officers can detain them until they do. This is against the law. In all countries it is illegal to detain people if they haven't committed a crime. But these kinds of measures hurt our compatriots who have no ID. What Mexico is doing is explaining this to U.S. and Mexican society, explaining that these kinds of actions are unjust, that these actions by the U.S. government should be stopped and that the fundamental rights of any human being from any country should be respected.

**VM:** What has the IME and the ministry strategy been with regard to Mexican-American lobbying and its relation to the interests of Mexico as a nation? That is, how have both interests been reconciled, since they can be contradictory in areas, for example, like migration and trade?

**CM:** I think that the IME, the Ministry of Foreign Relations and the staffs of the consulates have tried to reconcile the differences that come up sometimes. For example, with regard to the migratory reform. I think that most Mexicans and Mexican Americans want one, because four million people are involved. However, there is another, minority, group—among them some Mexicans and Mexican Americans—who already have U.S. residency and think that the doors should be shut to migration. They are a minority, but there are people who think this way. That's why I believe that it falls to us to persuade them of the humanitarian nature of an accord that would allow people to go to work in the United States in an orderly fashion so that the four million undocumented migrants could do the paperwork for their permanent residency so that they could work and progress, because they are already contributing to the U.S. economy with their efforts, with their talent. And they are also contributing to Mexico's economy with the remittances they send their children. They are also in schools, academically developing all their potential. So, I think we have to continue to campaign to overcome the differences that sometimes come up.

**VM:** What is the real penetration of the institute's programs? How well have they been accepted? What impact and results have they already had?

**CM:** Well, the institute itself is new. But the Program of Mexican Communities Abroad, in its 10 or 12 years of existence, has had a very positive impact in the communities, particularly with its educational and health programs. A lot of work has been done through a pro-

gram called “Migrant Education,” targeting the children of parents who go from harvest to harvest or who are recent arrivals. The Ministry of Education sends books and sometimes teachers. There is even an exchange program for teachers who travel from the United States to Mexico to get training in how to better serve Mexican children who are living and studying in the United States. The other projects that have been well received are in health, the arts and some sports activities. So, the program overall has been well received. Of course, like all programs, it could be improved, but in general it has been welcomed wherever we have been able to take it in the U.S.

**VM:** What are the institute’s and the ministry’s plans to ensure migrants maintain links to their history and culture?

**CM:** Well, this is done through exchanges, events, and sometimes we send artisans, not just the IME, but sometimes state delegations. For example, last year the governor of Oaxaca took the Guelagueta Festival to Los Angeles and presided over it himself. Other states also take their culture, their music, their songs. Another example is that people from Zacatecas are going to have a convention in Dallas, and they will be taking artists to it. Inside the United States, there is already a movement to enrich our culture. In Los Angeles, for example, mariachis have been spreading at several levels, so much so that UCLA has music classes for mariachis. So, the culture is there and we support and foster these kinds of artistic and cultural activities.

**VM:** What kind of strategy is there for making sure that social and economic



Candido Morales

links (for example, remittances and developing communities of origin) between migrants and their hometowns are effective and promote well-being on both sides of the border for our compatriots?

**CM:** The IME wants to pay quite a lot of attention to remittances because, up until now, even though the cost of sending money from the U.S. to Mexico has declined, the percentage being charged is still exorbitant. So, we believe that if we foster competition among the different companies, the cost will go down. Another boon for communities here in Mexico is the “Three-for-One” program whereby Mexican clubs in the United States have done fund raising for hometown community projects, and the state, federal, and sometimes even the municipal governments, each match the amount they have collected, thus increasing the benefit to the communities. I was reading in Internet that in Los Angeles, the Federation of Zacatecas Clubs wants to launch a new, very similar project, but now with the idea of creating jobs in Zacatecas to reduce the number of

people who want to go work in the United States. I think that this is the direction that the other groups of compatriots from other states will follow, and the IME is willing to collaborate in this effort.

**VM:** Lastly, *Voices of Mexico* is distributed in the United States and a high proportion of its readers are Mexican American. Is there anything you would like to add for them?

**CM:** I would like to say to my Mexican-American friends and compatriots that Mexico’s culture is very rich, whether it be literature, music, anthropology or our customs, and if they have the opportunity to read the magazines they receive, to visit Mexico, I would recommend that they do. It has many beautiful things to enjoy. If they want beaches, there are lots of beaches, too, but culturally, almost every state has a historical, cultural contribution to benefit the whole community, but especially Mexicans and Mexican Americans who live in the United States, because they can relate to the Mexican culture; it is a very meaningful experience. **MM**