

A Retrospective

On May 16 and 17, 2011, Mexican American leaders from across the United States gathered in Washington, D.C., to attend the First Annual Mexican American Leadership Initiative (MALI) Conference. With keynote speeches and comments provided by U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton, Mexican Ambassador to the United States Arturo Sarukhan, former U.S. Secretary of Housing and Urban Development Henry Cisneros and many others, the historic event gathered for the first time a critical mass of Mexican American leaders for the purpose of fostering more constructive responses and partnerships between the societies of the U.S. and Mexico.

Entitled *The Challenge of Shared Responsibility*, the First Annual MALI Conference focused on crafting workable solutions to the current drug-related crisis for the benefit of people living on both sides of the border, specifically focusing on ways in which Mexican Americans may facilitate more significant engagement between the United States and Mexico and in doing so help to strengthen Mexican civil society at this critical time. Toward this end, the MALI Conference not only included two roundtables on “US/Mexico Shared Responsibility” and “Civil Society Engagement” but, significantly, it also concluded by public recognition and/or financial awards for five projects targeted at helping at-risk youth and distressed communities.



José Villarreal introducing Sec. Hillary Rodham Clinton

Formal Remarks by U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton



Sec. Hillary Rodham Clinton

On May 16, 2011 over three hundred Mexican American leaders, government officials and Mexican nationals gathered in the historic Benjamin Franklin room on the Eighth Floor of the U.S. State Department to hear an address from U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton marking the launch of the U.S.-Mexico Foundation's Mexican American Leadership Initiative (MALI).

With the principal objective of identifying ways in which Mexican Americans may facilitate more significant engagement between the United States and Mexico, and in doing so help to strengthen Mexican civil society, the MALI Initiative was born. At a moment when government and civil society alike increasingly perceive the need for viable solutions to the current drug-related crisis, acknowledgement of the shared responsibility between the United States and Mexico helps to address both the origins of the crisis as well as potential solutions to it.

U.S.-Mexico Foundation board member José Villarreal introduced Secretary Clinton in a compelling and tender statement. “Many of us have watched from the sidelines, with great sadness, frustration and anger at what is happening in Mexico,” Mr. Villarreal began. “We have looked for explanations. One day we blame our own country’s voracious appetite for drugs and our supply of weaponry to Mexico. Another day we blame the culture of corruption that has been allowed to fester for too long in Mexico. Our efforts today are aimed at putting an end to the blame game and crafting workable solutions for the benefit of people living on both sides of the border.”

After thanking the members of the audience, Secretary Clinton remarked: “When I was thinking about this, I really had so much of a sense that the time was right, that there was an opportunity here. This is the moment for us to step up and figure out ways we can better connect and provide all kinds of support for our friends in Mexico.... There’s a lot of good cross-border work already happening, but we think MALI’s focus on strengthening civil society and institutions and creating opportunities for young people are exactly the right priorities, and we’re very supportive of the ideas that you will be formulating.”

Moderator:

MALI Roundtable on US/Mexico Shared Responsibility



Henry Cisneros
Former Secretary of Housing
and Urban Development

Roundtable Participants:



Blanca Treviño
President and CEO
Softtek



Arturo Sarukhan
Ambassador of Mexico to
the United States



Roberta Jacobson
Principal Dep Ass't Secretary
Western Hemisphere Affairs
U.S. Department of State



Alfredo Corchado
Mexico Bureau Chief
Dallas Morning News

On the morning following Secretary Clinton's remarks, former U.S. Secretary of Housing and Urban Development Henry Cisneros kicked off the discussion as moderator of the MALI Roundtable on US/Mexico Shared Responsibility. "This Initiative represents the most significant coming together of Mexican leaders, both government and civic, with Mexican Americans, both those from older generations as well as from those generations arriving since the 1910 Mexican Revolution," Secretary Cisneros began, followed by an invitation to comment on the meaning of *shared responsibility*.



From left to right: Roberta Jacobson, Alfredo Corchado, Henry Cisneros, Blanca Treviño, and Amb. Arturo Sarukhan

"There is no more important relationship than this one for the future well-being and prosperity of both nations," asserted Mexican Ambassador to the United States Arturo Sarukhan. "Not since the days of NAFTA have we had this kind of strategic vision for the U.S.-Mexico relationship," he continued, echoing Secretary Cisneros.

U.S. Assistant Secretary for Western Hemisphere Affairs Roberta Jacobson then deepened the discussion by stating: "Among those things that we focus on with *shared responsibility*, there are not just the ones that traditionally get headlines – but also those things such as the economy. With regard to where new jobs are going to originate, they're going to come in part from Mexico." Softtek Founder and CEO Blanca Trevino agreed, noting that "Foreign Direct Investment into Mexico rose 30% during he first semester of 2010."



From left to right: Roberta Jacobson, Alfredo Corchado, and Henry Cisneros

Turning their attention to tangible manifestations of *shared responsibility*, Jacobson suggested that in terms of civil society engagement in Mexico, "there is a consciousness that is beginning to exist that really needs to be encouraged." She explained: "You cannot address the crisis with police or prosecutors or judges or military alone. You have to have civil society."

With that need in mind, Ambassador Sarukhan emphasized, "This is why the MALI and the USMF play such a critical role, because of the bonds of co-stakeholdership between Americans and Mexicans."

MALI Roundtable on Civil Society Engagement

Moderator:

The MALI Roundtable on Civil Society Engagement, led by Former White House Deputy Chief of Staff Maria Echaveste, centered around concrete civil society initiatives in Mexico.

Martha Smith, USMF Board Member and Fundemex Executive President, provided a snapshot of the current civil society landscape in Mexico, noting that unlike the United States, there are “only 120 grant-giving foundations in Mexico.” One possible explanation for the discrepancy between the size of the not-for-profit sectors in the U.S. and Mexico (also reflected in the relatively low total



From left to right: Mónica Tapia, Maria Echaveste, and Carlo Arze

number of government-registered civil society organizations: 8,000) is the fact that legal incorporation of a non-profit in Mexico is a long and arduous process. “Our Regulations Handbook on how to legally incorporate has become a bestseller,” noted Mónica Tapia, speaking in her capacity as Executive Director of Alternativas y Capacidades A.C., who then went on to remark that “advocacy for policy reform in that sector is also very underdeveloped.”

Carlo Arze of the International Youth Foundation commented that although there are many people in Mexico doing good work, civil society organizations are operating in isolation. “They are very fragmented, very disarticulated,” Arze said. “It’s not a question of whether they are there, it’s the fact that they’re not synergized, not working in coordination. Everyone’s doing a bit and a piece, but there needs to be some work to help unite them.”

Echaveste pondered the connection between lack of education and historically low rates of civic engagement, reminding the audience that “under fifty percent of Mexicans have a high school diploma” and adding that the statistic has not changed in thirty-five years. It might come as little surprise, then, that according to Mónica Tapia, “common people are really disempowered.” On a positive note, however, Arze highlighted that one consequence of the crisis is that “there has been a change in the mindset that the government should be the one to fix everything.” In other words, communities and individuals are growing in their sense of empowerment and desire for engagement, but they need additional support as they seek to address shared challenges.



From left to right: Martha Smith, Mónica Tapia, Maria Echaveste, Carlo Arze, and Isabel Cruz



Maria Echaveste
Former White House
Deputy Chief of Staff

Roundtable Participants:



Carlo Arze
Program Director
International
Youth Foundation



Mónica Tapia
Board Member
Coalición Ciudadana
por la Educación



Martha Smith
Executive President
Fundemex



Isabel Cruz
Director General,
Asoc. Mex. de Uniones de
Crédito del Sector Social

MALI Civil Society Awards 2011

The Mexican American Civil Society Awards were established in 2011 as part of the U.S.-Mexico Foundation's effort to strengthen the role of organized civil society and civic participation in Mexico.

On May 17, 2011, MALI awarded the following three Mexican-based nonprofit organizations for their contributions to innovative social development focusing on systemic change and measurable results in one or more of the following categories: education, civic engagement, youth, and promotion of community cohesion:



CASA Promoción Juvenil, AC
Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua.



Fundación Infancia, AC
Mexico City



Juanacatlán Renace
Juanacatlán, Jalisco

On May 17, 2011, MALI awarded two organizations working in Mexico or doing work on both sides of the border for their contributions to strengthening organized civil society in Mexico and/or transnational connections with civil society in the United States.



Asociación Mexicana de Uniones
de Crédito del Sector Social



Federación Zacatecana, A.C.

The U.S.-Mexico Foundation and the Mexican American Leadership Initiative

The U.S.-Mexico Foundation (USMF) expands opportunity for the people of Mexico through effective philanthropy and binational partnerships. The Foundation focuses on improving the relationship between the U.S. and Mexico and on promoting broad social transformation in Mexico through strategic grant-making in the areas of education, health, economic development, and civic engagement, with a particular emphasis on youth. Formally launched in February 2009, the USMF was originally created by the North American Development Bank as initially envisioned under NAFTA, along with the active support of the Consejo Coordinador Empresarial (the National Business Council of Mexico).

The Mexican American Leadership Initiative seeks to promote ways in which Mexican Americans may facilitate more significant engagement between the United States and Mexico, in order to face more effectively the challenges shared by these two countries. As a vital program of the U.S.-Mexico Foundation, the MALI was founded in 2010 and is based on the belief that Americans of Mexican heritage are in a unique position to encourage proactive engagement with Mexico by U.S. society -- its leaders, its institutions, and its citizens.

The MALI is led by a Council comprised of Mexican American leaders from across the United States and shares the U.S.-Mexico Foundation's fundamental objective of helping to strengthen Mexican civil society. Toward this end, the MALI mobilizes support for projects and organizations in Mexico targeted at helping at-risk youth and supporting distressed communities, in particular. In advancing its programs, the MALI is strengthened by the encouragement of numerous U.S. and Mexican officials, including U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton, who continues to champion the importance of diaspora philanthropic partnerships.

Sponsors of the MALI First Annual Conference

