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A SECOND CHANCE ON EARTH

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The magical portrait that García Márquez captures in “Cien años de soledad,” his famous novel about the Latin American experience, ends with a curse on the descendants of the Buendía family: “lineages *condemned to one hundred years of solitude did not have a second chance on earth.*”

It seems like an omen and a portrait from the great writer about the tragic and unfortunate reality that today—and for decades—millions of men and women suffer who, by the force of such dissimilar circumstances, have to leave behind their land, relatives, culture and all their first desires, to emigrate to other corners of the earth, in search of better living conditions, in pursuit of “a second chance on earth.” So the immigration phenomenon has become one of the greatest and most painful tragedies facing humanity in our times.

For decades, we have witnessed great migratory waves in the world, and especially in Latin America, that migrate to the United States in North America. These are the same decades during which we have been discussing truncated, incomplete, postponed, manipulated, and indefinite migratory reforms, etc.

The last immigration amnesty (and not reform) in the United States (IRCA) took place during the Reagan administration in 1986. Almost four decades after that event, immigration reform has remained an issue of electoral and partisan manipulation during successive governments and an unattainable dream for millions of men and women who, in this Nation, champions of democracy and human rights, are forced to live in limbo, ostracism, in the shadows, and subjected, by their condition of being undocumented, to all kinds of persecution, exploitation, and personal, family, labor, and social abuses.

Years, then decades pass, elections take place and governments come to and turn over power. During all of this, immigration reform remains an obligatory subject of political debates and media “show” for galleries, with very different visions on the subject, according to the interests of the most diverse exhibitors: for some, for example, immigrants steal job opportunities that belong to those born here; for others: immigrants perform the tasks and jobs that those born here do not. For some, immigrants are a burden and a social ballast for the United States; for others: immigrants are a new and renewing force that brings the best of themselves and to whom the Nation owes much of its prosperity and progress.

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But between these never-ending discussions, political cynicism to the swing of partisan interests, politicians, and voters and decisions that never get made, millions of men and women, the elderly, young people, and children are suffering. They yearn for immigration reform that allows them—at last—to emerge into the light of day and enjoy respect, the totality of their human and citizen rights, and all kinds of social opportunities.

To the United States' internal migratory drama, we must add the enormous displacement of migrants of all origins and backgrounds, due to the most varied causes that are lived in their countries of origin and in international spheres and who roam all over the planet, who look for a place to live as people, families, citizens of the world: Latin Americans fleeing to the United States, Africans fleeing to Europe, and human beings from all over seeking to reach our Nation.

The migratory phenomenon has created an unsustainable situation and its solution cannot be postponed, a solution that must be governmental, legal, comprehensive, and definitive. These solutions cannot consist of walls or temporary and partial agreements that are subject to the taste or displeasure of the leaders of the day and that do not radically solve the problems.

The difficulties continue: governors of Texas and Arizona send migrants to New York or Washington and the negligence, inhumanity, and lack of governmental and political criteria to solve this immense human drama are exposed. They already reject the tinkering, opportunism, carelessness, and brazenness with which the politicians and legislators of the day proceed regarding the migration issue.

I am not advocating open or closed borders here. It is not for me to make political decisions. But I am tired like so many in this country, of the endless postponement, indecision, apathy, and contempt of politicians, legislators, and leaders concerning migrants. I advocate for a prompt and definitive solution, for the unworthy situation and the lives of the millions of undocumented people who reside here, work, and build families and the nation.

The current situation of the undocumented in the United States is inhumane, inadmissible, and unrepresentable. It makes us a hypocritical nation in front of the world because of our inconsistencies between democracy and human and civil rights that we claim to defend and the abuses and outrages that are committed here against millions of “undocumented” human beings.

The solution requires the cooperation and agreements of all society, the entire country, and of the nations and governments from which the migrant majorities come. The resolution, although not easy, is urgent and cannot be postponed because the time has come when we all have “a second chance on earth.”



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Mario J. Paredes is CEO of SOMOS Community Care, a network of 2,500 independent physicians—most of them primary care providers—serving close to a million of New York City’s most vulnerable Medicaid patients.