Concept Note - Government of the United States

Work flow and meeting structures of the RCM and RCGM

October 28, 2011

For 15 years the RCM has been a highly effective forum in which countries in the Americas have had an opportunity to openly debate and discuss complex migration issues in a collegial, non-politicized environment. We can be justly proud of our accomplishments. As with any organization, however, it is helpful for member states to periodically review processes, mechanisms, and procedures in order to enhance efficiency and bring about the best possible outcomes - especially as migration patterns in the region become ever more complex.

Several recent meetings of the RCM have focused on the wish of RCM members to have more narrowly focused discussions and better follow-up on issues raised in the RCM. In Tapachula last year, Mexico launched an initiative to strengthen RCM processes in a number of important respects. This initiative led to the May 2011 meeting in Santa Fe, Mexico on the future of the RCM, which generated “precise and concrete recommendations to expedite the Conference procedures,” including well-defined and well-conceived procedures on mechanisms for decision-making, which RCM member countries have since supported. Also as a result of the Santa Fe meeting, at the XVI RCM in La Romana in June 2011, Canada proposed, and RCM member countries adopted, a “Proposal for structuring discussion and activity reporting in the RCM,” which addressed another organizational need – that of grouping subjects into thematic areas that will help better identify gaps and organize meeting agendas and facilitate discussion.

The United States now wishes to build on these exemplary efforts by proposing a review of the organizational structure of RCM-RCGM meetings, and the relationships between the two, with the goal of achieving greater efficiency. We propose to have a preliminary discussion at the RCGM in November, gather initial reactions there, and then develop a more comprehensive proposal to present to Vice-Ministers at the 2012 RCM in Panama. The following issues are not intended as firm proposals at this point, but as examples of areas for which many RCM member countries have noted improvement is desirable. There may well be additional items that other member countries wish to add.

* Agenda:
* Many important issues tend to appear on the RCGM agenda but not on that of the RCM itself. Given the increasing complexity of issues under discussion, we believe our work would be strengthened if there were more discussion in the Vice-Ministers’ meetings, as it is the Vice Ministers who can provide the direction and oversight that is necessary to ensure RCM efforts are appropriately focused and implemented.
* It would be helpful if the draft agenda prepared by the Technical Secretariat (TS) included annotations on agenda items noting the background and purpose of those items (information updates, new proposals, invitations, etc.) as well as a brief general commentary.
* Timing of distribution of agendas and papers: There should be a firm timetable for the Technical Secretariat’s advance dissemination of agendas, proposals, reports and background papers prior to each meeting of the RCGM and RCM, in order that members have sufficient time to prioritize issues and prepare for discussions. A tentative agenda and draft RCM declaration for the closed-door meeting of Vice Ministers should also be distributed in advance.
* Note-taking: The Chair should have primary responsibility for taking detailed notes of issues raised and decisions throughout RCGM/RCM proceedings and for summarizing each agenda item in a short paragraph. The Technical Secretariat (TS) should support the Chair in this process. These notes would serve as a historical record and supplement or verify the Chair’s notes if need be.
* Time Management of meetings: The Chair, with TS Support, should ensure that the meetings start on time and that agenda items are discussed within the assigned times.
* Drafting: Drafting sessions should not go on until the very late evening hours. Late night drafting sessions often delay the start of the following day, and fatigue on the part of drafting team members detracts from the quality of discussions. Drafting of Conclusions and Recommendations should be done as agenda items are taken up in the RCGM meetings, and not all at once after the close of RCGM proceedings. Similarly, drafting of Vice-Ministerial Declarations and Decisions should begin only after decisions are made, and should not commence before Vice-Ministers have even debated the issues.

The Chair and TS should coordinate on conceiving and managing systems in which note-takers make note of decisions as they are made; drafting committee hours are understood in advance (and do not continue until late into the night); drafting team members have full and accurate information; translation is available; all drafting team participants have an opportunity to provide input; and drafting team members comply with deadlines.