

Ohtli Award Ceremony
Consul General's Speech
September 28th, 2018

Ladies and Gentlemen,
Authorities from the Government of Texas,
Previous Ohtli Awardees,
Members of the Mexican community,
Dear friends of Mexico,

Muy buenas noches.

It is an honor for me to welcome you all in this *state-of-the-art* public Library. Austinites are very fortunate to have such an amazing facility: a modern and beautiful house of culture for a vibrant and diverse community. I would like to express our sincere gratitude to Director Roosevelt Weeks and his staff, for lending us this beautiful facility for tonight's ceremony. Muchas gracias!

This is the third year that, as Consul General of Mexico in Austin, I have had the privilege of hosting the ceremony of the *Ohtli* Award, an event

that is usually held in the month of September, but that for the reasons explained by Mariana Posada, we are now having in early spring.

By the way, I hope some of you have had the opportunity of visiting us in our new premises. If not, I encourage you to do so. We have now a very dignified Consulate, much more functional and suitable for our needs.

Since we moved in to our new premises, the Consulate has become *una casa de servicio* , a house of service, a tool for community organization, not only for Mexicans, but for the whole community in Austin. We have had already three art-exhibits; a Women's Conference; a Student-College fair; a joint Christmas celebration with the Irish Consulate (a great party where tequila and irish whisky were served generously) and many other events, that have helped us better serve our nationals and promote closer ties between Texas and Mexico.

By moving to these new facilities, I am sure that the Consulate will live up to the high expectations that many of you have of our Diplomatic Mission. After all, nothing less should be expected from the consular office that

represents in the Capital City of Texas the democratic, plural and open country of 120 million people that is your neighbor to the South

In a couple of days we will have elections in Mexico. In one way or another, these elections will have a very significant impact in our country. Let me share with you that as Mexican, and as a Government official, I am very proud of our democracy and our institutions. Regardless of who comes to power, once again, our democratic institutions will have proven to work and to work well. I am confident that the *Instituto Nacional Electoral*, the National Electoral Institute, will ensure that every vote counts, as it is only natural to a democratic and plural country such as Mexico.

We are indeed an open and welcoming nation, just as Austin is an open and welcoming city. We are proud of our history, our culture and specially of our people, many of whom live in the United States. In this country there are 35 million persons who were either born in Mexico or consider themselves to be the descendants of Mexican immigrants. That population constitutes our strongest bond; a bond that goes beyond borders, walls or electoral rhetoric.

It is also our best asset. The vast majority of our Diaspora is hard-working people who contribute daily to the well-being and economic success of this nation. It is clear to me that the Mexican and Mexican-American populations will be powerful agents of change in the years to come, not only here, in the United States, but in Mexico as well.

And although the exodus of Mexicans coming to the United States is over, given that for the last few years the number of Mexicans going back to Mexico has been larger than the number of new Mexican migrants coming North, we all know that the job of our Consulate is far, far from over, at least with regards to our main mandate, which is, to protect the rights and promote the interests of Mexican nationals in our jurisdiction.

Just last Saturday, to mention only one sad example, a dozen Mexican nationals were pulled over while driving in Bastrop County, as a result of a traffic operation conducted by the County Sheriff. They were stopped because of minor traffic violations, such as going over the speed limit, not signaling a change of lane or having a license plate with an expired registration sticker. Those who failed to show a valid Texas driver's license and admitted being foreign born, were arrested. They spent the weekend in

Bastrop County Jail. Two days later, five of them were deported, two more are still detained and another one was released in the understanding that he has to present himself in front of an immigration judge in the next few weeks. Behind each and every one of the 8 undocumented Mexican nationals who had the bad luck of being pulled over by Sheriff officials for traffic violations, there is now a family that has been devastated and lives in uncertainty.

I mention this sad episode not only because it is in the news but because it helps to illustrate why the Mexican government is honoring tonight's recipient of the Ohtli award. At this moment I would like to acknowledge the presence this evening of a large group of very talented attorneys who work permanently and generously with the Consulate. They are not only our friends but also our legal team. For those of you who are not familiar with our standard operating procedures, allow me to describe them quickly, using again the example of the 8 compatriots who were detained in Bastrop.

Every day, our consular officials visit the ICE detention center. This is how we learned what had happened on Saturday night, in the limits of Bastrop and Travis counties. In the detention center we were able to speak

with most of the Mexican migrants who had been detained, we talked about their situation, we contacted their families and, in the case of those whose deportation was imminent, we were able to come back quickly enough so that we were able to deliver whatever belongings their families sent them for the repatriation trip.

In the case of the three who will have a chance to see an immigration judge, we are in contact with them and their families, making sure they have appropriate and timely legal advice & representation. In cases such as the ones that resulted from the Bastrop operation, we rely on the knowledge and expertise of many of the attorneys who are joining us tonight. On a daily basis they work together with our *Departamento de Protección*, the legal Department at the Consulate. Their counselling and practical recommendations, their intrinsic disposition to help and to work for fees that are well below market rates, are fundamental for accomplishing the task of protecting and properly advising our nationals. I want to take this opportunity to express to all of you our gratitude and recognition. Thank you for all your work!

I would also like to make a special mention to the Head of our *Departamento de Protección*, Blanca Gaviño, whose hard work and that of her staff at the Consulate's Legal Department has been crucial to create synergies and collaboration with some of the finest attorneys and legal organizations in town. Blanca has been our Consul for Protection Affairs for almost six years. I am happy to report that her good work has been noticed and, hence, towards the end of the summer she will be transferred to our Embassy in Washington DC. *Gracias Blanca, te vamos a extrañar.*

My friends, if there is someone who has worked hard to create the powerful ecosystem on which the Consulate relies to promote, defend and advocate for the rights of immigrants in Central Texas, that person is Barbara Hines. As an expert in Immigration and Nationality Law, she has fought for the rights of migrants, handling all types of immigrations cases, including removal defense, family and employment-based petitions, naturalization, non-immigrant visas, and federal and appellate cases.

I am not going to talk much about her impressive CV and her outstanding career and professional achievements. It would take all the time we have tonight. Barbara is a true advocate for migrants, not only in Texas,

or in the United States, but everywhere she has been. In *Argentina*, she developed the very first immigrant rights project at the *Centro de Estudios Legales y Sociales*. In San Antonio, she served as first co-director of immigrant's rights project, establishing statewide priorities for litigation, outreach and training. She has been responsible for litigation on behalf of immigrants and refugees throughout Texas, including INS abuse, constitutional violations, human rights and rights of children in deportation proceedings.

In Austin, she has been co-director of the immigration clinic at the University of Texas at Austin School of Law, sharing her knowledge, expertise and passion with students who, after graduation, have strengthened the already powerful network of advocates and attorneys of immigrant rights in Texas.

The *Ohtli* Award is the highest recognition granted by the Mexican government to those who have dedicated most of their lives and professional activity, to "opening pathways" abroad to people of Mexican origin. *Ohtli* Award recipients are people who have made it easier for younger

generations of Mexicans to find better trails in life, better routes, honoring the *náhuatl* word “*Ohtli*”, which means “path”, or “camino”.

I can't think of a better candidate to receive this year's Othti Award that Barbara Hines, who has undoubtedly contributed to paving the way, the road, for many immigrants, to have better lives and achieve their dreams.

Thank you Barbara. Thank you all for being here tonight.