

Mexico Recognizes Indigenous 'Identity' with Birth Certificates



Mexico City, January 28 (RHC-teleSUR) -- Mexico delivered birth certificates to over 7,000 indigenous people on Wednesday as part of a campaign to increase access to official documents in under-served areas.

Secretary of the Interior Miguel Angel Osorio Chong said that when he signed the law enshrining the right of indigenous peoples to a Mexican birth certificate, he “gave them their identities,” which would “change their lives” because “they will know who they are, that they exist, that they have rights, obligations and above all, that they feel Mexican—Mexican as we are all, proudly.”

Between 4 million and 12 million Mexicans are currently unregistered with the state, most from small, poor communities that have few public services and where people cannot afford the fee that some states charge for the document.

Without an identity card, people can be denied the right to education, health care, legal protection, a vote and even a job, as well as the ability to legally travel abroad. They are also more vulnerable to organized crime, and many end up migrating, becoming “doubly-undocumented” immigrants abroad.

The national registry granted free birth certificates to Mexicans residing in the United States in September, but it is still far from providing those certificates to all who need them. One year after the

campaign launched in 2014, the registry had only delivered 120 certificates; poorer states like Chiapas, where Osorio Chong visited Wednesday, have as few as 43 percent of their population registered. Mexico's capital, by contrast, has a 98 percent registration rate.

Latin America and the Caribbean have one of the lowest registration rates in the world, with an estimated one out of five babies that are born lacking a birth certificate.

Various non-profits have worked in Mexico to ensure the "right to an identity." In 2010 the Be Foundation Derecho a la Identidad submitted a proposal to enshrine the right in law. The document is now free to all, but the registration process depends on state policy, while records are created by the municipality and stored by the central state. The latest initiative targeting the indigenous population comes with 50 new registration units with personnel that speak local languages. Eventually, officials say they hope to produce birth certificates in all indigenous languages, as well as braille.

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