

At Large Director - Francisco Mireles

Short Bio

(141 words)

Francisco Mireles is a Mexican-American activist, scholar, and founder of the “Casa del Migrante” project in Oaxaca City. Born in the Sierra Juárez region of Oaxaca, he migrated to California at 15 to join his father, a farm worker. While studying economics at Fresno State under the NALEO national-intern program, he co-founded Mictlán, one of the first Oaxacan student organizations on campus. Deported in 2010 after a traffic stop in Madera, he spent three months in immigration detention before returning to Oaxaca. The experience prompted him to earn advanced credentials in migration studies from UABJO, COLEF, CIDE, Universidad Iberoamericana, and UACO.

Today he is mobilizing local NGOs, universities, and philanthropists (including Harp Helú) to build a Casa del Migrante that offers shelter, legal aid, and vocational support to deportees and transiting migrants, especially indigenous-language speakers. Mireles’ work turns personal hardship into systemic assistance for vulnerable migrants.

Full Bio

(411 words)

Francisco Mireles was born in the Sierra Juárez mountains of Oaxaca, Mexico. At the age of fifteen he went to the U.S. to reunite with his father, a farm laborer who had secured legal residency after the 1986 Immigration Reform. Settling in Madera, California, Mireles worked in agriculture while completing high school, where he helped start a migrant organization with fellow Oaxacans. He earned a scholarship to Fresno State through the NALEO national-intern program, graduating with a B.A. in Economics and a minor in Latin American Studies. During his undergraduate years he co-founded Mictlán (1993-94), one of the first Oaxacan student collectives on campus, which fostered cultural activities and alliances with broader Chicano groups; ninety percent of its members later obtained professional degrees.

In 2010 a traffic stop in Madera led to Mireles’ arrest for driving without a license. He spent three months in immigration detention alongside many Oaxacans, an ordeal that highlighted the vulnerability of undocumented workers. After voluntary departure to Tijuana, he returned to Oaxaca, where he faced the challenge of rebuilding a life on a modest income. Determined to improve his prospects, he pursued

further education: a diploma from the Benito Juárez Autonomous University of Oaxaca (UABJO), a specialization at the Colegio de la Frontera Norte (COLEF), a migration diploma from the Center for Economic Education Research (CIDE), and postgraduate studies at Universidad Iberoamericana and the Autonomous Communal University of Oaxaca (UACO), culminating in a master's in communal education.

These academic experiences equipped Mireles with a deep understanding of migration dynamics. Official data indicate that Oaxaca records 15,000–20,000 deportations annually, with half-a-million Oaxacans deported since 2010. Motivated by these figures and his own experience, Mireles is leading the creation of a “Casa del Migrante” in Oaxaca City—a shelter modeled after the successful Casa del Migrante in Tijuana. The facility will provide temporary lodging, clothing, legal assistance, and vocational pathways, especially for indigenous-language speakers, and will partner with local universities (UABJO, COLEF, UNAM) for research and educational programs.

Mireles has built a broad coalition that includes municipal leaders such as councilors Elsa Mejía (Madera) and Iraís López (Calistoga), diaspora activists, and academic collaborators like Raúl Hinojosa (UCLA). Funding efforts target philanthropists such as Harp Helú and international NGOs, leveraging data from the International Organization for Migration that highlights the diverse nationalities passing through Mexico. Through advocacy, research, and community organizing, Francisco Mireles transforms personal hardship into systemic support, aiming to ensure that deportees and transiting migrants in Oaxaca receive dignified care and pathways to sustainable futures.