



MIGRANT MASSACRE AND REPRESSION OF MIGRANT CARAVAN SPOTLIGHT MORTAL DANGERS FOR ASYLUM SEEKERS HEADING NORTH

January 28, 2021, Brooklyn NY -- On the occasion of the two-year anniversary of the Trump administration's implementation of the notorious Migrant Protection Protocols (MPP), or Remain in Mexico, and on the eve of additional immigration measures to be announced by the Biden administration, [Witness at the Border](#) issues the following statement:

We recognize the Biden administration's dedication to dismantling the tragic legacies of the former administration's anti-immigrant agenda—the criminalization of migrants, denial of asylum, indefinite detention, family separation, and expulsion of migrant families and children—all governed by the paradigm of “prevention through deterrence.” However, additional immediate remedial measures are needed to end the vicious cycle of forced migration.

We urgently call for:

- **An end to arbitrary expulsions under the questionable Title 42 CDC order;**
- **The swift and humane processing of asylum claims by migrants who were forced into exile in Mexico by MPP;**
- **The total halt of the profit-motivated detention system;**
- **The termination of the Prompt Asylum Case Review (PACR) and ill-named Humanitarian Asylum Review Program (HARP); and that**
- **Effective steps be taken to address the root causes and humanitarian dimensions of forced migration from Central America and beyond.**

This week [a bloody massacre](#) carried out by gangs fighting for territorial control of both drug trafficking and human smuggling along the border in Tamaulipas, Mexico resulted in 19 migrant deaths. This came just days after a caravan of 9,000 desperate migrants—many of them women and children—were violently repressed by the Guatemalan army.

At least 18 of the massacre victims were from Guatemala, 13 from Guatemala's poorest indigenous Maya Mam communities, the same groups targeted for genocide by US-backed military governments during the country's brutal Cold War era civil war. Since then, their poverty has only deepened due to US policies related to the drug war, free trade, and environmental exploitation as well as climate change. Guatemalans have represented the single greatest number of migrant families and children fleeing to the US each year since 2016. They were the largest group held in the [notorious Tornillo, Texas youth detention camp](#), and include many

cases of deaths in the custody of the US Border Patrol, including several Guatemalan indigenous children and youth.

Migrant caravans provide safety in numbers. When, like the most recent caravan, they are broken up, the dispersed become more vulnerable to gangs and the corrupt government officials with whom they work. Gang members and complicit authorities are the greatest beneficiaries of [U.S. policies](#), such as those espoused by the Trump administration, that promote the criminalization of migrants, the militarization of borders, and the denial of asylum. Intensified cooperation between U.S, Mexican, and Central American authorities to contain migration, rather than to seriously address its structural origins, only exacerbates these abuses.

The recent massacre underlines the dangers confronted by migrants in transit from Central America through Mexico, who flee the ravages of the drug war, climate-related devastation, and state-sponsored human rights violations in pursuit of a better life. Migrants have been among the groups most affected by the US-supported militarization of Mexico's drug war, which has led to more than 300,000 dead and 70,000 disappeared since 2006. This includes tens of thousands of missing migrants who have been increasingly identified in mass graves throughout Mexican territory, such as [San Fernando](#) and Cadereyta in 2010 and 2011, respectively. Independent international jurists and scholars describe the persistent terror and persecution against migrants in the region, which includes recurrent "crimes against humanity," such as large scale forced disappearances and mass killings, as an ongoing "[migrant genocide](#)."

Meanwhile, trapped in some of the most dangerous places on earth by MPP, tens of thousands of asylum seekers forced to remain in Mexico live in precarious, inhumane conditions—some of them for years—in improvised refugee camps in Matamoros and elsewhere along the border. They are in constant danger of rampant sexual violence, kidnapping, and extortion, as they are preyed upon by gangs like those responsible for the latest massacre of 19 migrants, the fifth massacre targeting migrants in Mexico since 2010.

We call on the Biden administration to adopt effective measures against these horrors by directly addressing the structural origins driving decades of forced migration. Four billion dollars in targeted development aid is a first step, but if it is funneled through the same corrupt channels that have perpetrated, and benefited from, both the drug wars and the violation of innocents, the same vicious cycle will continue. Additional remedial measures directly benefiting Central America's poorest communities must be enacted without delay. We will stand with them, in defense of their right to a dignified life and their right to migrate whenever structural conditions make that impossible.

The [Witness at the Border](#) Team:

Karla Barber, Camilo Perez Bustillo, Thomas Cartwright, Lee Goodman, Joshua Rubin, Margaret Seiler, Julie Swift, Sarah Towle

Organizations That Endorsed This Statement

Al Otro Lado
Aldea - The People's Justice Center
Auburn Seminary
Bay Area Health and Legal Partnership for Immigrant Families (BAHLI)
BORDER ANGELS
Casa de Paz
Center for Gender & Refugee Studies, UC Hastings College of the Law
Clerics of St. Viator (Viatorians)
Congregation Beth Elohim Refugee Task Force
Congregation Hakafa, Glencoe, IL
Congregation of Sisters of IHM, Scranton
Congregation of Sisters of St. Agnes
Daughters of Wisdom
Decent Humanity
Dominican Sisters ~ Grand Rapids (MI)
Dominican Sisters of Sinsinawa
Don't Separate Families
Dutchess County Progressive Action Alliance
Erie Benedictines for Peace
Faithful Friends/Amigos Fieles
Franciscan Action Network
Freedom for Immigrants
Fuerza Mundial - Continuum
Granite State Organizing Project
Grannies Respond/Abuelas Responden
Grannies Respond/Abuelas Responden Hudson Valley
Holy Spirit Missionary Sisters, USA-JPIC
Hope Border Institute (El Paso)
IHM Sisters Justice, Peace and Sustainability Office
Indivisible Sacramento
Instituto de Geografía para la paz AC (IGP/Geopaz, Mexico)
International Tribunal of Conscience of Peoples in Movement (Mexico)
Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation (JPIC)
JPIC Committee of USA/Haiti Province of Religious of Jesus and Mary
Justice and Peace Sisters of St. Francis
Justice Committee, Sister of St. Joseph of Carondelet Albany Province
Law Office, Margaret Boyce-Furey
Leadership Conference of Women Religious
Leadership Team of the Felician Sisters of North America
National Association of Social Workers - Texas Chapter
Never Again Action New Hampshire
New Hampshire Immigrant Solidarity Network

New Sanctuary Coalition
NH Conference United Church of Christ Immigrant and Refugee Support Group
National Lawyers' Guild (NLG) Mesoamerica Subcommittee
NorCal Resist
Northern Illinois Justice for Our Neighbors
NYCD16 Indivisible
OHSU (Oregon Health & Science University)
Pax Christi USA
Peaceful Communities
Project Lifeline
Race, Racism and the Law
Racine Dominican Sisters and Associates
Refugee Support Network
Reunite Migrant Families
Seidlitz Education
Sisters of Mercy of the Americas Justice Team
Sisters and Brothers of Immigrants (SBI)
Sisters of Bon Secours, USA
Sisters of Charity of New York
Sisters of IHM
Sisters of St. Joseph of NW PA
Sisters of St. Joseph, Brentwood NY Office of Justice, Peace, Integrity of Creation
Sisters of the Humility of Mary
Sisters of the Presentation, Dubuque, IA
Solidarity Lowell
South Bay People Power
Southern California Immigration Project
St. Mary of the Hills Church SNL Circle of Support
Student Clinic for Immigrant Justice
What's Next?
Xochipilli Chicano/Latino Men's Circle
Yonkers Sanctuary Movement