

Immigrant children held at Arizona detention center in deplorable conditions

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Hundreds of unaccompanied migrant children from Central America have been transported from southern Texas to a makeshift detention center set up by the US Border Patrol in Nogales, Arizona. The number of children held at the center, mostly from Honduras, Guatemala and El Salvador, was expected to rise to more than 1,000 by the end of the weekend.

The Border Patrol has apprehended more than 48,000 children traveling on their own crossing the border from Mexico into the Rio Grande Valley of Texas this fiscal year. According to an interagency memo from a Border Patrol official, federal officials expect more than 90,000 minors will attempt to cross into the US without their parents by year's end.

Authorities in Texas say they are overwhelmed by the influx of immigrants and have begun shipping them to Arizona. In a related development in recent weeks, hundreds of undocumented immigrants, mostly women and children, have also been flown from Texas to Arizona and dumped at Greyhound Bus stations, without their belongings or other supplies, to fend for themselves.

The children, who are being brought to the Nogales facility in unmarked white passenger buses, have been housed in deplorable conditions. Arizona authorities were working over the weekend to send federal emergency supplies held in Arizona warehouses to the holding center. They expect the facility to be filled nearly to its 1,500 capacity by the beginning of the week.

Tony Banegas, Honduras consul to the US in Arizona, visited the site over the weekend. According to the *Arizona Republic*, he said 764 children were at the center as of Saturday evening, including 236 from El Salvador. Banegas reported that the children were sleeping in plastic containers and hadn't showered for

up to 10 days. The group included pregnant teens and a one year old suffering from diarrhea.

Jimena Diaz, consul general of Guatemala in Phoenix, told the *Arizona Daily Star* that 250 children from Guatemala were among those being held. He said the children were mostly between the ages of 15 and 17, with a few much younger, and were being kept in separate groups divided by age and gender.

According to the office of Arizona Governor Jan Brewer, by late Saturday mattresses, portable showers and restrooms were being brought to the Nogales center. A spokesman for the governor said that conditions at the center were dire, and that federal officials had requested the state immediately begin shipping medical supplies. Vendors are being contracted to provide meals and local charities are collecting provisions.

US Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) has only one facility for children, in Pennsylvania, far away from the Mexican border. ICE is using the Nogales center as a way station, where the children will be vaccinated and given a medical check-up before being transferred, reportedly within a maximum of three days, to shelters at military facilities in Oxnard, California; San Antonio, Texas; and Fort Sill, Oklahoma.

The transfer of the children to Nogales is the latest move by the Obama administration to deal with the tens of thousands of immigrants crossing into the US over the Mexican border, fleeing conditions of poverty and violence in their home countries. In fiscal 2013, US border agents seized 154,453 undocumented migrants in the Rio Grande sector, up from 97,762 the year before.

This influx of immigrants—seeking jobs, better conditions, and to unite with their families—faces increasingly brutal treatment as the undocumented

migrants are rounded up by the border patrol. While many Mexican nationals are simply dumped back across the border, immigrants from Central America must be processed for deportation.

Border Patrol spokesman Andy Adame told the *Christian Science Monitor*, “Because of the recent surge of Central Americans, unaccompanied juveniles, and family groups in south Texas, the border patrol is running out of processing space.”

President Obama last week described the influx as an “urgent humanitarian situation” and called for swift action. In addition to the mass shipment of children to Nogales, over the past month many migrants picked up by the border patrol have been flown to Arizona and left at Greyhound bus stations, without food, water, diapers and other basic necessities and in temperatures reaching 100 Fahrenheit and above.

Since Memorial Day, federal immigration officials have flown hundreds of women and children to Tucson, Arizona, where they were given medical and other tests before being sent by bus to Phoenix and left at the Greyhound station. There they have been instructed to travel by bus to find their relatives at locations around the country, and to report to an immigration center within 15 days of reaching their destination.

Laurie Melrood, who works with migrants in Tucson, told the *Christian Science Monitor* that smugglers, who charge thousands of dollars to ferry immigrants across the border, often tell those coming from Central America that women and children will be able to unite with family members in the US. “But they don’t tell them,” she said, “that they’re in deportation proceedings as soon as they’re captured by the border patrol.”

In a statement late Friday, Arizona Governor Brewer seized on the latest brutal anti-immigrant operation to denounce the White House. “I am disturbed and outraged that President Obama’s administration continues to implement this dangerous and inhumane policy,” she said, “neglecting to answer crucial questions our citizens demand and deserve.”

According to Republican Brewer and her ilk the Obama administration, which has carried out a record 2 million deportations, should accelerate even further the repressive police measures being carried out against those crossing the border. She also said federal officials had told her office that the policy of transferring

immigrants to Arizona “will continue into the foreseeable future.”



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