

# Warehousing of Central American children in Arizona continues

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The transfers of hundreds of mostly Central American immigrant children from Texas to a converted warehouse in the Arizona border city of Nogales continued June 9 and 10, bringing the number ever closer to the makeshift facility's 1,500 capacity.

Exact numbers, however, are unknown due to immigration authorities providing few details about the flights bringing them there. Estimates range from 700 to 1,000 transported to the way station, so far. The children are mostly between the ages of 15 and 17, including pregnant teens, but some, including a one-year-old, are younger.

The children were apprehended attempting to cross into the US through the Rio Grande Valley in southern Texas. Most of them had been left in their home countries, primarily Honduras, Guatemala and El Salvador, by parents who left to seek work in the United States. As violence and poverty intensify in their home countries, the numbers of these so-called unaccompanied alien children have swelled, reaching 48,000 so far this year and expected to top 90,000 by year's end.

The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) is prohibited from immediately deporting immigrants if they are not from bordering Canada or Mexico. Since the children come from Central America, they must be processed by DHS for deportation.

With US Customs and Border Protection (CBP) detention centers in Texas filled to capacity, last week the DHS began flying and busing the children to Nogales, where they were housed in the makeshift way station under deplorable conditions: plastic cots under aluminum foil blankets, no showers and no fresh food. Since then, some supplies—including mattresses and medical supplies—from federal warehouses have arrived at the holding center.

Coinciding with the transport of the children, the US Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agency has

been flying undocumented families—mostly women and children—to Greyhound bus stations in Arizona, New York and Maryland, where they are left on their own, usually without their belongings or other supplies.

These developments reflect the fact that Texas is replacing Arizona as the leader in undocumented border crossings. The *Christian Science Monitor* reported June 7, "In fiscal 2013, agents in the Rio Grande sector caught 154,453 migrants, up from 97,762 the previous year. In Arizona's Tucson sector, which long felt the brunt of illegal immigration on the US-Mexico border, agents recorded 125,942 arrests last year, says Andy Adame, a Border Patrol spokesman."

After the children have been vaccinated and medically checked, federal authorities plan to send them to military bases in Fort Sill, Oklahoma, Ventura, California or San Antonio, Texas. According to CBP spokesman Victor Brabble, their custody situation will be dealt with on a "case-by-case basis."

The news of the transports of the children brought denunciations from Arizona's Republican governor, Jan Brewer, an anti-immigrant demagogue who signed the infamous Arizona SB 1070, a law making it "a state crime for illegal immigrants to not have an alien registration document," and requiring police "to question people about their immigration status if there is reason." The law prohibits people from hiring undocumented immigrants for day labor or from knowingly transporting or sheltering them.

Brewer, who advocates increased militarization of the border, postured ludicrously as moved by compassion for the child immigrants, declaring herself "disturbed and outraged" and lambasting "this dangerous and inhumane policy." The empathy faded quickly as she added, "Not only does the federal government have no plan to stop this disgraceful policy, it also has no plans to deal with the endless waves of illegal aliens once they are released

here.”

Underscoring Brewer’s reactionary response, her spokesman Andrew Wilder suggested that “if President Obama would put in half the effort to securing our borders that they have put into this operation we would not be in this situation.”

Brewer and Wilder both neglected to mention that under Obama, deportations have reached record numbers and the militarization of the border has grown massively. They also did not mention Obama’s support of the Border Security, Economic Opportunity and Immigration Act of 2013, which includes a number of draconian provisions—including aerial drones, E-Verify and electronic monitoring—that can be used against the working class as well as against immigrants. The Republicans have opposed the bill as not being harsh enough.

Republicans also charge that the administration’s deferred deportation program, which allows children who entered the US illegally before 2007 to stay in the US under certain strictly limited conditions, has encouraged the children to come. The Republicans hope to make political capital this election year by depicting Obama as “soft on illegals.”

The Obama administration predictably accused the Republicans of obstructionism. White House spokesman Josh Earnest told reporters, “For whatever reasons, there are some who oppose this compromise and will cite a wide range of things to suggest why they think that immigration [reform] shouldn’t get done.”

In defense of the administration, some Democrats, such as Senate Appropriations Committee chairwoman Barbara Mikulski of Maryland, have resorted to one of the most overused words in the party’s vocabulary. “This is a humanitarian crisis and it requires a humanitarian response,” she told Reuters.

Administration spokespeople have pointed to the pervasive violence plaguing the three Central American countries as the reason for the spike in children crossing the border. An unnamed senior administration official was quoted by *The Hill*: “Honduras has the highest murder rate in the world. Guatemala and El Salvador are fourth and fifth.” However, the official did not address the conditions that give rise to the violence, or the role of US imperialism in enforcing those conditions. The Republicans are equally silent on this aspect of the issue.

In the case of Honduras, the Obama administration—and both parties of Congress—tacitly supported the 2009 coup that overthrew Manuel Zelaya, a bourgeois politician

whose mild reformism was viciously opposed by the nation’s oligarchs and by Washington. The administration was quick to assume normal relations with the regime and to support the sham elections that brought Porfirio Lobo to power. Death squad murders, torture and repression have been accompanied by austerity measures, unemployment and poverty since then.

Following the 1954 CIA coup ousting elected president Jacobo Arbenz, the history of Guatemala has been one of mass murders—of entire villages in several cases—and brutal suppression of any opposition to the corrupt oligarchy’s rule. Hundreds of thousands have been murdered, disappeared, tortured and imprisoned in the ensuing years. Last year, former dictator José Efraín Ríos Montt’s 80-year sentence for genocide and crimes against humanity during the 1980s was overturned. The oligarchy, which serves the interests of corporate capital, remains firmly entrenched.

In El Salvador, the right-wing government and the Farabundo Martí National Liberation Movement (FMLN) signed a peace accord in 1992 after a 12-year war that saw numerous massacres and other atrocities. Following its victory in the 2009 presidential election, the FMLN has instituted austerity and privatization measures, plunging working class living standards even lower than before. President Mauricio Funes has retained the amnesty of death squad members.

In all three countries, the fingerprints of US imperialism—which supplies, finances and trains the repressive apparatus—are evident. And in all three countries, criminal gangs prey upon workers and the poor, and carry out gruesome acts of violence against those who refuse to comply. They also commit such acts against young people who are unwilling to join their ranks.

From these horrendous conditions—which enjoy White House support and bipartisan consensus in Congress—desperate Central American workers and their children brave exploitative smugglers, desert heat and official persecution to escape.



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