

Obama administration steps up attacks on undocumented immigrants

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The Obama administration announced plans Friday to accelerate detentions and deportations of undocumented workers, primarily from Central America.

The announcement is a cruel response to a flood of immigrants in recent months, many of them children. The influx of under-age immigrants has become a human rights crisis. Since the beginning of this year, 11,500 children have been arrested from Guatemala, 13,300 from Honduras, and 11,600 from Mexico, entering by themselves across the US Mexico border. It is estimated that between 60,000 and 74,000 children will be detained this year.

More judges will be appointed to expedite deportation hearings. In addition to creating new detention centers, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) is also expanding the use of electronic ankle bracelets to monitor those released—in part to cut down on the number of children who do not show up for deportation hearings.

The White House Friday blamed the increase in immigration on rumors that families with young children are being offered entry permits to stay in the US. By quickly arresting and expelling those who come to the country out of desperation, the administration hopes that it will prevent others from making the attempt.

Cecilia Muñoz, director of the White House Domestic Policy Council, denounced “misinformation that is being deliberately planted by criminal organizations, by smuggling networks, about what people can expect if they come to the United States.”

Also on Friday, Vice President Joe Biden travelled to Central America, where he announced \$255 million in financial assistance to several states, mainly to expand policing and establish programs to “repatriate”

immigrants deported from the United States.

With unrivaled cynicism, Biden said that the growth of immigration was caused by “poverty, insecurity and the lack of the rule of law” in El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras. Yet the disastrous social conditions in these countries are a direct product of US policy over decades. The American ruling class has treated Central America as source of cheap labor in its “backyard,” sponsoring military coups whenever it deemed it necessary to defend its interests.

The new measures are a continuation of the Obama administration’s policy of mass deportation. Since Obama took office in 2009, more than two million undocumented workers and family members have been deported—a record for any president.

Earlier this month, DHS Secretary Jeh Johnson said that the child immigrants from Central America were “priorities for removal.” He added, “Those who cross our borders today illegally, including children, are not eligible for an earned path to citizenship.”

Human rights organizations have pointed out the squalor and callousness with which these children are treated in detention centers, where they are poorly fed and forced to live in unsanitary conditions.

Immigrants that are detained by the border patrol report harsh and humiliating treatment. Some are kept in heavily air-conditioned cells without even a mat to lie on. Detainees are denied basic hygiene products, such as soap, toothbrushes, even sanitary napkins. Detainees with serious and chronic medical conditions are denied treatment.

A report from the American Civil Liberties Union and other organizations earlier this month documented beatings, sexual assaults, inadequate food and other brutal conditions prevalent in DHS detention centers.

Last year the legal aid group Americans for

Immigrant Justice (ALJ) filed a federal tort claim on behalf of eight individuals subjected to egregious violation, including the confiscation of medications. The ALJ website described cases of diabetics denied their own insulin and of other immigrants kept under overcrowded and unsanitary conditions.

The desperate conditions facing immigrants from Central America has produced a squabble between Democrats and Republicans, with the two parties vying over various policies centered on deporting immigrants and increasing policing.

Republicans Friday denounced Obama's policy of deferring deportation of children brought into the US before 2007, while the administration insisted that this program does not apply to any of the tens of thousands of children in border detention centers. House Speaker John Boehner called for deploying National Guard troops to Texas.

The Obama administration for its part is utilizing the crisis facing immigrants to promote its reactionary "comprehensive immigration reform" plan, which has bipartisan support. The proposals would be focused on beefing up security on the borders and speeding up deportations of undocumented workers, while also establishing an onerous and punitive "pathway" to citizenship for a small number of those already in the US.



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