

Obama orders deportation of Honduran child migrants

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22 July 2014

On Monday, July 14, the Obama administration ordered the deportation of 21 children and 17 women on a flight back to San Pedro Sula, Honduras. The children, the youngest only 18 months old, along with the women on that flight were handed a sentence of misery, if not death.

Last Friday, July 18, a second deportation to San Pedro Sula took place. This flight included 33 children and 26 women. The treatment of these people as “illegal” speaks volumes about the inhumane nature of the current anti-immigrant campaign spearheaded by the White House.

The misnamed HUMANE Act, backed by Obama, is primarily responsible for the dismal future awaiting these children. What awaits them on return to Honduras is a thoroughly dysfunctional society tormented by violent gangs and conditions of super-exploitation, the very conditions from which they escaped in the first place. In the town to which they were sent back, 187 of every 100,000 people are killed yearly, the highest murder rate in the world. The police have been implicated in countless death-squad-style extrajudicial killings.

“Satan himself lives here in San Pedro. People here kill people like they’re nothing more than chicken,” a local mortician told the *Guardian* recently.

Living conditions in Honduras are among the poorest in Central America, with a gross national income (GNI nominal, Atlas) per capita of \$2,120, about one-25th that of the US.

More than half the country’s entire population lives in poverty, with two thirds of children living in poor condition and 8 percent underweight. Unemployment reaches 30 percent. About 1.5 million people, or 18 percent of the entire population, have no access to drinking water. In rural areas, water deprivation reaches 23 percent.

Approximately 80 percent of the population has no access to medical care. HIV/AIDS has become an urgent issue, with 33,000 estimated as infected or having

developed AIDS symptoms. Many women have contracted the virus through rape.

The exact number of women killed yearly is unknown, given the fear of retaliation on their families. It is known that in 2010-2011, in the immediate aftermath of the US-backed coup in July 2009 that ousted President Manuel Zelaya, at least 1,000 lost their lives to murder, according to the National Commission for Human Rights.

The country is infamous for child exploitation and few if any restrictions on child labor. As of 2010, one sixth of country’s children were employed. They are engaged in hazardous agricultural activities (sugarcane production, melon and coffee fields) and commercial sexual exploitation. They are also engaged in dangerous fish diving, which presents high risks of drowning.

Other documented dangerous activities include construction, mining and quarrying, carrying heavy loads, being exposed to toxic elements and extreme weather. In addition, many work as domestic servants for long and strenuous hours, without sufficient food or shelter and often subject to physical and sexual abuse.

Honduras is both a base and transit route for child trafficking. Many are trafficked from rural areas to urban and tourist locations for the purpose of commercial sexual exploitation. Evidence shows that girls from neighboring countries are also forced into sexual servitude in Honduras. In 2010, 11 percent of children were married by the age of 15.

The two biggest cities, Tegucigalpa and San Pedro Sula, see a high rate of street children, with many as young as 12 years of age. Many join Mara Salvatrucha (MS-13) gangs.

MS-13 developed among Central-American-born inmates in California prisons in the 1980s. In 1996, President Bill Clinton signed a law called the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act, or IIRAIRA, which represented a sharp turn by the US

ruling class and political establishment toward anti-immigrant and undemocratic measures.

Under the new law, minor offenses would make immigrants eligible for deportation, differing from previous regulations, under which only a five-year minimum sentence would trigger deportation. Moreover, “secret evidence” could now be used against aliens if that evidence was classified but relevant to the specific immigration case.

As a result of this legislation, a sizeable number of criminal elements were sent back into Honduran society. Under socioeconomic conditions of poverty and abuse, as well as the lack of any rehabilitation programs, crime flourished. A large number of extrajudicial executions and disappearances at this point involved children.

The response of Honduran governments has been the application of a number of undemocratic measures that complement the country’s already draconian Criminal Code. In particular, Article 332 has been subject to criticism from the Child Rights International Network (CRIN).

According to a statement by CRIN in 2009, “The Committee is concerned at the frequent use of arrest on suspicion by members of the security forces, including mass round-ups based on appearance alone and with no warrant from a competent authority. It notes with concern the broad wording of new article 332 of the Criminal Code, which establishes the offence of ‘unlawful association,’ on the basis of which large numbers of juveniles have reportedly been detained, along with human rights activists and homosexuals (articles 9 and 26 of the Covenant).”

The international child sponsorship group Humanium reports, “Many children are beaten up during or after arrest. Some are tortured before being killed. The police are often involved but again, few investigations are undertaken to identify or punish those responsible. It is generally believed that rival gangs of children are responsible for these killings. Some organizations, however, deny this. They believe that these killings are committed with the collusion of the government in order to ‘clean up the streets.’”

Honduras has been the target of US imperialist policies for decades. In perhaps one of the darkest and most violent pages in the history of the 20th century, the role of the CIA in Honduras created violent conditions.

From 1979 to 1985, the US drastically increased its military aid to Honduras as part of a strategy aimed at supporting the Contra guerrillas fighting the Sandinista

government in Nicaragua, perceived by Washington as a threat to capitalist interests.

John Negroponte, notorious for his decades-long work at the intersection of the US government and its intelligence apparatus, was appointed as US ambassador to Honduras during this period. He presided over CIA-orchestrated military operations aimed against political dissidents, trade unions and militant groups like the Cinchoneros Popular Liberation Movement. The operations consisted of a CIA-backed campaign of extrajudicial assassinations. Intelligence Battalion 3-16 was a Honduran army unit trained and supported by the CIA to carry out horrific murders and torture of suspected political opponents.

In 1995, the Baltimore Sun exposed a vast amount of evidence pointing to the highly criminal character of the operation and the prominent role of the CIA in training and conducting “anti-guerrilla tactics.” Torture, assassinations and disappearances claimed the lives of thousands of Hondurans.

These methods are not an aberration, but regular and increasing features of US imperialist foreign policy. In the Middle East, the dismantling of entire societies, as in Iraq and Afghanistan, has been perpetrated through the use of similar means—from the horrors of Abu Ghraib to the crimes against the population in Fallujah and the rendition and torture of prisoners. It is no surprise that Negroponte was appointed ambassador to Iraq, overseeing the systematic destruction of that country in 2004-2005.

Obama’s deportations underline the criminal character of his immigration policies and will have devastating consequences for the lives of thousands of people, many of them children.



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