

Trump administration ends immigration program for Latin American minors

Shelley Connor
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On Tuesday, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) put an end to a program that allowed endangered children from certain Central American countries to travel to the United States to live with a legally residing parent. The termination of the Central American Minors (CAM) program is the latest assault on immigrants by the Trump administration.

Barack Obama instituted the CAM in 2014 as a way to stanch the flow of minors fleeing dangerous situations in Central America. The program allowed parents who legally reside in the United States separate from their children to apply for their children to join them. The program was designed to discourage parents from using human smugglers to bring their children to them. Tens of thousands of children and young adults under the age of 21 attempt to cross the US southern border every year.

Under the terms of the program, children approved for the CAM program were granted parole for two years, during which time they were permitted to travel and stay in the United States and apply for work permits.

According to the State Department, more than 13,000 children have applied to the program since its inception. Over 1,400 were granted parole and traveled to the United States under the program's oversight. Most of them, 1,100, applied from El Salvador, along with 324 children from Honduras and 31 children from Guatemala. Around 1 percent of applicants were denied both refugee status and parole under the CAM program, according to US Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS).

Trump built his presidential campaign upon a platform of nationalism and anti-immigrant sentiment. Barack Obama, the so-called "deporter-in-chief," deported over 3 million immigrants during his tenure,

excluding those who voluntarily left the United States under fear of deportation. The three million figure is more than for any other president in the history of the United States.

Not to be outdone, Trump signed numerous executive orders targeting immigrants and potential immigrants within days of his inauguration. One of those orders triggered a review of the CAM program, leaving the applications of 2,700 conditionally approved children in limbo. With the termination of the CAM program, those 2,700 applications—most of them originating in El Salvador—have been canceled.

The deterioration of social conditions in El Salvador—particularly illustrated by the skyrocketing rates of homicide, gang violence, and judicial corruption—are grounded in the country's 12-year civil war, during which at least 75,000 people lost their lives as the country's right-wing Nationalist Republican Alliance (ARENA) battled the Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front (FMLN). The United Nations Truth Commission, which was formed in 1992 as part of the terms for peace agreements, found that 85 percent of the atrocities had been committed by ARENA. The United States had funded that regime, propping it up and training its most brutal forces on United States soil.

Since coming to power, the FMLN has demonstrated its class basis by appropriating ARENA's old terror tactics. The military has merged with the police, forming extrajudicial death squads that slaughter youth accused of gang membership or activity. Last summer, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein, cited "pervasive violence" as the primary impetus for the accelerating rate of migration—including migration attempts by unaccompanied children.

Al Hussein acknowledged that many of these children fled for the United States out of fear of being killed for rejecting or leaving gang membership. However, he said, “While the government has launched a comprehensive ‘Plan for a Safe El Salvador’ that included accountability and work to rehabilitate former gang members following prison sentences, more recently much harder-line security measures have been put forward.”

He further stated, “Recent allegations of extrajudicial killings by death squads are intolerable and are likely to fuel even greater violence,” and pointed out that the FMLN government has failed to ensure the safety of citizens who have been forced back into El Salvador after attempting to migrate.

The State Department’s interpretation of humanitarian crisis has never been based upon objective definitions. In the 1980s, most refugees from countries like El Salvador were denied asylum because of the United States’ support for right-wing juntas. This policy only shifted in the 1990s after the ouster of the Sandinistas in Nicaragua and the end of the civil wars in El Salvador and Guatemala. Even projects like CAM function more as a way for the US to discourage any migration at all, and to keep strict tabs upon those who are granted asylum or parole. Thousands of children waiting to join their parents thus find themselves caught between the bared teeth of the Trump administration and the chaotic violence rife in their home countries.

The CAM program was a cosmetic answer to a growing human tragedy, instituted by a man who sent countless Central American migrants to their deaths by deporting them back into danger. However, its termination signals a heightened aggression against the working class. It is a brazen declaration that even children will be treated as criminals. The bourgeoisie’s barbarity has rarely displayed itself so nakedly, and workers must acknowledge the fact that nothing short of their independence and international unity can halt it.



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