

Volunteer arrested for giving food and water to immigrants along US-Mexico border

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On January 16, US Border Patrol agents in Ajo, Arizona arrested Scott Daniel Warren, a volunteer organizer for the immigrants' rights advocacy organization No More Deaths, which provides food, water and medical assistance to immigrants crossing the treacherous US-Mexico desert borderlands. Warren faces federal charges of harboring two people in the country illegally, which carry a maximum sentence of five years' imprisonment.

Warren's arrest is a blatant act of retribution against No More Deaths by the Trump administration and its border police force. It was made just eight hours after the organization held a press conference to announce a new report that documents US Border Patrol agents' systematic destruction of humanitarian water supplies left for immigrants along the border.

The report was accompanied by video footage, captured between 2010 and 2017, showing officers laughing as they pour out and kick over water bottles in the desert. The video has sparked outrage and been viewed more than 18 million times on Facebook. By arresting Warren, the Trump administration and the Customs and Border Protection agency are seeking to silence public exposure or criticisms of their actions more broadly with the threat of prosecution.

Warren, 35, is a faculty associate professor at Arizona State University in the School of Geographical Sciences and Urban Planning, where he lectures on the humanitarian crisis along the US-Mexico border. In the last two decades, as many as 27,000 people are estimated to have died attempting to travel through Mexico to the US from countries in Central and South America which have been torn apart by wars and dictatorships carried out or supported by the United States government.

The government's own tally as of December 2017, of

7,216 deaths—itsself a catastrophic figure, more than twice the number of people killed in the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks—dramatically understates the real total, as revealed in a recent *USA Today* investigation. Many of those who die in the desert of dehydration, starvation, suffocation or exposure to the heat and cold, are never identified.

After attending a court hearing on January 18, Warren was released without bail and is due to attend video deposition hearings next month. The court is yet to decide on whether these hearings will be made public.

According to the court documents, federal agents had tracked two migrants to a medical clinic run by No More Deaths in Ajo, known as “the Barn,” which they had been monitoring for days. This is in line with a common practice of placing cameras and sensors around medical aid camps set up by advocacy groups and turning them into traps to ensnare immigrants who go to them in desperate need of help.

The complainant statement filed in the court claims: “After finding their way to ‘the Barn,’ Warren met them outside and gave them food and water for approximately three days.” The report alleges that one of the two immigrants, both of whom have now been detained and face deportation, “said that Warren took care of them in ‘the Barn’ by giving them food, water, beds and clean clothes.” In other words, the charges are aimed at criminalizing anyone who provides life-saving assistance to immigrants or undocumented workers who cross the border through the desert.

In comments cited by the *Arizona Republic* on January 22, Warren's attorney Bill Walker said the arrest violated a longstanding understanding between immigrants' rights groups, Border Patrol and the US Attorney's Office, allowing them to provide assistance.

“We don't smuggle them, we don't do anything to

help them enter the United States, we do nothing illegal,” Walker said. “This place that they raided is not in the middle of the desert, it’s not hidden anywhere. It’s in the city of Ajo, and it’s been used for a long time, not to help smuggle migrants, but to give medical care and food and water.”

Warren’s arrest is part of a broader escalation of the Trump administration’s crackdown on immigrants and undocumented workers. Last week, following a series of workplace raids on over 100 7-Eleven convenience stores, Immigrations Customs Enforcement (ICE) officials refused to deny a news report that they are planning a massive dragnet in California to round up 1,500 undocumented workers.

On Friday, border patrol agents boarded a bus in Miami, Florida and demanded that passengers provide documentation of their US residency rights. They arrested one woman, later identified as Beverley, who had allegedly overstayed her tourist visa. She was turned over to ICE for deportation on Monday. A video of the arrest, captured by another passenger on the bus, was viewed more than two million times over the weekend.

One day earlier, ICE agents arrested 14 undocumented workers in a 5 am raid at the Days Inn hotel in Colchester, Vermont, as they were leaving for work.

The agency also appears to have begun a deliberate campaign targeting migrants who publicly speak out against the administration’s policies. On January 11, Ravi Ragbir, the executive director of the interfaith immigrants rights group New Sanctuary Coalition of NYC, who moved to the United States from Trinidad and Tobago decades ago, was detained by ICE when he attended a regular check-in with ICE agents. On December 20, ICE agents in Washington began deportation proceedings against Maru Mora-Villalpango, the founder of a local immigrant rights group.

The systematic sabotaging of water supplies along the US-Mexico border and the efforts to intimidate organizations from providing assistance to immigrants is the outcome of a deliberate, bipartisan strategy of both the Democrats and Republicans. This particularly cruel and criminal effort to deter other immigrants from South and Central America from exercising their democratic right—recognized under international law—to

seek refuge in the US, guarantees that hundreds of men, women and children will continue to die every year.

The Obama administration deported more immigrants than any previous administration and spent hundreds of millions of dollars recruiting hundreds more border agents and militarizing the southern border. This policy, which forces immigrants to cross over ever-more treacherous terrain away from heavily guarded urban areas, was initiated under the Clinton administration in 1994 and has been maintained by every administration since, Democrat and Republican alike.

The Democratic Party bears the principal political responsibility for the Trump administration’s ability to carry out its reactionary anti-immigrant crackdown. The Democrats have worked to systematically sabotage popular opposition to Trump’s right-wing policies, including his attacks on immigrants, massive tax cuts for the corporate elite, and threatening war with North Korea, instead channeling opposition behind the McCarthyite campaign against so-called “Russian influence” in US politics and in support of a more aggressive confrontation for war with nuclear-armed Russia.

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